

Diet and Exercise

But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

– Hebrews 5:14 –

There is a correlation between the body and the spirit. As the body needs nutrition and exercise in order to maintain health and vigor, so does the soul of man. If we eat nothing but junk food and lounge about with little physical effort in the form of work or exercise, the arteries will clog, the muscles will atrophy, and our physical health will decay. Similarly, it is necessary for believers to eschew other forms of spiritual entrees (heretical teaching, humanistic philosophy, psychology, etc.), ensuring our sustenance comes solely from the Word of God. As such, it is vital that we train ourselves in the spiritual discipline of Bible study, lest we fall prey to the many doctrines of devils that are increasingly in vogue in these evil days.

There are many excellent ways to feast on the Word of God and exercise ourselves therein. Every believer is responsible before our Master to find what works and put it into consistent practice. Outlined below are some practical thoughts regarding daily spiritual diet and exercise in the Scriptures...

1. **Reading.** Regimented daily reading of the Scriptures is necessary to continuously familiarize ourselves with the Word of God. This book is like none other. It needs read over and over. Reading the Bible through is important as well. Five chapters daily is a healthy and balanced approach – two Old Testament chapters (starting from Genesis and reading steadily through Malachi), and two New Testament chapters (starting from Matthew and reading through Revelation), plus one Proverb (the chapter corresponding to the date on the calendar). Daily reading should not be skipped unless significant study on a single passage is all that time permits that day.
2. **Study.** This is “pulling over and parking” on certain passages. Stopping to meditate. Comparing scripture with scripture. Running down center column references. Additionally, there are many great Bible helps out there to assist us in our studies. Concordances, Bible dictionaries, Bible handbooks, or even online Bible study tools are useful. Commentaries are frequently helpful, but can also be dangerous (if the author has a bad theological bent) – utilize with caution. Above all things, let the Spirit guide in study, as He is the Author and holds the only proper interpretation of every text. Consult Him above all.
3. **Memorization.** It is vital to memorize scripture. There are portions of the Bible that must be committed to memory purposefully, and then periodically rehearsed, so that they don’t slip away. If reading and study are consistent, memorization will become much easier, even passive in many cases. This practice will pay enormous spiritual dividends.

Let us apply ourselves afresh and tenaciously to the meat of God’s Word. It will undoubtedly make us fit and formidable obstacles to thwart hell’s advances in these strange times. --- D. Murcek

Longing for righteousness

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.

In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Jeremiah 23:6

As Jesus sat on the mount and taught His disciples, He began His Sermon on the Mount with the ever-familiar beatitudes. Each description of blessedness packs a mountain of truth within a simple statement. Yet, though thus packaged, many of these basic truths were not new revelations, but in fact reached back and brought forward important aspects of God's truth to these Israelites from their sacred Old Testament scriptures. Later in the sermon Jesus would imply this connection as He explained: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil" (Matthew 5:17). His points throughout the sermon brought home the true intent of the law that the Jews had left in the dust, as they were in futility going about to establish their own righteousness (Romans 10:3).

In relation to the fourth beatitude, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6), our text exhibits this expectation in Jeremiah's prophecy of the characteristic of Christ's reign. Although Judah and Israel had both been disobedient and judged by God in Jeremiah's day, he looked far forward unto the righteous kingdom, ruled by a righteous LORD, who would be the only source of righteousness for His people. Isaiah also looked forward to the same, saying "Surely, shall one say, in the LORD have I righteousness and strength ... In the LORD shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory" (Isaiah 45:24-25). As Thayer describes the New Testament word for righteousness as the "state of him who is as he ought to be, ... the condition acceptable to God," so David describes the only way this could be: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile" (Psalm 32:1-2).

As these prophets exhibited the longing for righteousness and the looking for its bestowment, Jesus pronounced the blessing in the longing and its fulfilment. He then went on to purchase the means for imputing righteousness to all who would believe. "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (II Corinthians 5:21). This same imputation also imparts the power for practical righteousness through the filling of His Holy Spirit, that we might join the apostle in the rhetorical question, "How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (Romans 6:2)

Windows Open

Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.

– Daniel 6:10 –

There is perhaps no better time to demonstrate more certainly what a person believes than when the execution of conviction carries risk of personal loss. It is easy to believe God when things are going well, when our foes are few, or when the culture aligns with our creed. It is quite a different matter to stand up for Christ when doing so is counter-current.

Daniel saw vast changes in the political winds during his decades-long tenure in Babylon. His heritage brought him to this foreign land, but his faith sustained him here, while his conviction shook the place. As a boy, he held to his beliefs and refused the king's idolatrous meat. As a man, he hazarded his life before Nebuchadnezzar's throne to interpret the king's enigmatic dreams. He had survived the fall of the Babylonian empire to the Medes and Persians, and had even advanced to a position of authority in that burgeoning dynasty. But some changes in leadership brought him into disfavor with his pagan peers, precisely because of his unyielding resolution to serve his God. His mono-theistic devotion did not fit with the changing political environs, and it stood as a notable obstacle to the power-grabbing sycophancy of the new ruling class. Daniel had to be dealt with, and what better way to do so than to outlaw his faith?

Yet all of this was of little consequence to Daniel. In season or out of season, he was Jehovah's servant. Under the background of a law forbidding prayer, punishable by gruesome and torturous death, he continued to make his supplication to His God three times daily, just like always – windows open. How different is this spirit from the modern tones of compromise! How easy would it have been to go underground? Daniel could still be faithful in private, avoiding "needlessly" offending these people, right? They surely don't comprehend his devotion, so why flaunt it? God certainly would understand, wouldn't he? No doubt Daniel rebuffed some of these hellish whispers in the uncompromising, consistent exercise of his faith.

Our faith is rapidly becoming unfashionable, if not forthrightly loathsome, within the increasingly decadent crucible of Western culture. We must be impervious to the political and cultural climate. God is on His throne and His Word is true whether the powers that be and the socio-architects and influencers acknowledge so or not. Christ is not looking for us to yield to public pressure, but to obey His voice. Let us uncompromisingly live our faith out loud, even and perhaps especially when it is unpopular. Such "windows open" consistency of witness will yield peace within, give Hell a headache, and glorify our God. --- D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

I Have Spoken

1 Timothy 4:1: Now the Spirit speaketh expressly

The Bible is not a book of ambiguity. To use an old axiom: God says what He means and means what He says! This comforts the believer in that we are assured that the Lord has charted a clear course of direction amid a morally fluid world of ideas. In this present evil climate, we have an immovable anchor, for the Creator of heaven and earth hath spoken, and that brings an end to all debate. "Thus saith the Lord" is the absolute standard predicated on the eternal invariableness of "the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment".

The Greeks and Romans could not trust their own gods to tell them the truth. Dolos (Roman name: Mendacious) is the spirit of trickery. He is also a master at cunning deception, craftiness, and treachery. Interestingly, the Greek New Testament employs the word dolos in 1 Peter 2:22: to describe the guileless nature of the Savior who did "no sin, neither was guile (dolos) found in his mouth". When the Lord speaks, He speaks plainly. When an army captain gives the order to charge, he must not do so hesitatingly or indecisively. If he is to lead in battle it must be ordered with authority. 1 Corinthians 14:8: "For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?"

It is the solemn duty of the minister of the gospel to distribute the words of God so as to make the meaning clear. Since the Spirit speaketh expressly, those who represent Him should do likewise. Nehemiah 8:8: "So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading." That is not to say that all of the sacred writings are easily received since there are "some things hard to be understood", nevertheless we have the advantage of the indwelling Spirit "but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie". "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things." With such advantages, we can order our lives with certainty and speak the word with total assurance to the edification of those who receive the instructions of God.

Have a blessed day,

Pastor

Faith cometh by hearing; and hearing by the word of God Romans 10:17

Me, My, and I

The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?

Daniel 4:30

There is a bit of Nebuchadnezzar in every one of us! This is true because the Adamic nature that was in him is also in us. The progenitors of the human race were made in the image of God. Possessing an eternal soul and spirit and endowed with a free will which they exercised for self-glorification, they plunged the world into corruption. With the false hope of being like God, they failed the test of obedience and passed on self-nature to all of mankind. A cursory look at history will record the amazing accomplishments of man, yet are overshadowed by the selfishness and sins of man. The Biblical accounts of Nimrod, Pharaoh, and Nebuchadnezzar are just a few of the many rulers that elevated themselves instead of God. From Caesar to Napoleon, the secular world has aspiring people who seek to elevate themselves by kingdom-building.

King Nebuchadnezzar's words in today's text were the proudful words that would precede his fall from his throne of self. Though he was the king, the building of wonderous Babylon required the skill of architects and the labor of thousands. The king would have a divinely appointed lesson so that he might understand that there is only One King worthy of all majesty. As Nebuchadnezzar walked in pride he was abased by the only true power, the King of Heaven.

Hopefully, as we read this account, we can see how it can be applied in a modern context. The problem that Nebuchadnezzar had is also in us. We certainly don't have the vast empire that he did, but we do have the kingdom of self. Unfortunately, when we are converted the "Me, My, and I" part of us is not eradicated. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit will convict and guide us, but our selfishness tenaciously holds on, and will often rear its ugly head. When we walk in the light and have fellowship with the Lord, we can become more aware of the "Me, My, and I" that exist in our Christian walk. Do we still want to do things our way and in our wisdom instead of yielding to the Spirit's guidance? Are we motivated by recognition instead of pleasing the One who sees us in secret? Do we accept credit for some accomplishment without thanking and praising the God that enabled us? Are we hesitant to esteem others better than ourselves? Do we live as if our life belongs to us, forgetting that we have been bought with a price and that we are not our own? Though we have many external enemies, the greatest threat to our Christian walk is the temptation to sit on the throne of our hearts. By God's grace, we must often remind ourselves that pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

Today, as we take time to look in the mirror of God's word may it reveal the flaws of "Me, My, and I" so that we become more aware when self is energizing our service. When the king of Babylon was humbled, he praised, extolled, and honored the King of Heaven. May we always do the same.

J. Ekis

Participant or spectator?

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Acts 2:42

In this familiar passage, we observe the practices of the fledgling church in Jerusalem described in distinct aspects: doctrine and fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers. As part of His church these centuries later, it remains wise for us to consider this model and our part in fulfilling its continuation. Key to understanding the application is the meaning of the word here rendered “fellowship,” especially as it is grammatically connected to doctrine. Forms of this Greek work “koinonia” may be found translated with different English words, as its contextual use reflects various facets of the depth of its meaning. Thus, we see it also rendered “communion,” “communicate,” “distribution,” “contribution,” etc. Vincent describes its meaning as “a relation between individuals which involves a common interest and a mutual, active participation in that interest and in each other.” In some instances, “it signifies the giving of alms, but always with an emphasis upon the principle of Christian fellowship which underlies the gift.” Thus, with respect to our text, the church’s continuation in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship does not describe only a visit to hear some teaching, but entails a full participation, exchange, and sharing of a common love of God’s truth.

In contrast, a modern application of the term “fellowship” can fall far short of the intended New Testament meaning. In a culture that has pursued entertainment and amusement as chief ends, a visit to the ballpark or the concert can be viewed as fellowship. They go only to watch the performance, with the possible by-products of follow-up critiques of the quality of the performance, or its ability to entertain, often in comparison to others. They are simply spectators, not participants, in the activity. Such an estimation of fellowship can have, and has had, a dangerous impact in the realm of faith. When the teaching and preaching of God’s truth is viewed only as entertainment, and the church at large views themselves as spectators rather than participants, they can leave the experience unaffected, thwarting its intended purpose. They may make remarks that reflect the degree to which they were entertained, or even moved to some degree of emotion. But the end result is bereft of any intention to truly participate in the process of edification, of themselves or others. They are happy to let the leader perform, adding nothing to the activity for the moment or for the future. As a result, there is no impact in the world. How about you; are you a participant, or a spectator?

Not One Thing

And, behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof.

– Joshua 23:14 –

Disappointment is integral to our fallen human experience. Every anticipation we hold with regard to terrestrial pleasure and enjoyment is either short-lived, partially attained, or wholly fallacious. There is nothing under the sun that can satisfy our deepest yearnings. Commercially, marketing builds our expectation to unrealistic levels. Nothing that money can buy does what the advertising said it will do. Relationally, promises made are rarely kept these days. Even when someone is true to their word (as we all should be), there is an intrinsic understanding amongst men that humans really don't possess the power or capacity to entirely ensure outcomes.

Because of this, we have an annoying tendency to forget just how good our God is to His dear children. Our sour, fallen nature may breed varying levels of cynicism of all things human, but it does not negate Jehovah's transcendent beneficence. What our Lord has said, He will do, and what He has pledged will come to pass. He is neither slack concerning His promises, nor frugal with His blessings. On the contrary, He takes great delight therein. He is not bound by any frailty or incapacity. He knows the end from the beginning. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills and the winds and waves obey His voice. It is as astonishing as it is humbling that our welfare is His volitional goal. Christ purchased us with His blood, and He continuously seeks to bestow blessing upon blessing on His beloved bride.

Furthermore, there is a totality to God's fulfilment of His promises that cannot be compared to anything known in the universe. Not one thing of what He has spoken concerning us will fail. Not a single promise will be unfulfilled. It will all come to pass. He that began this good work in us will see it to completion. He will (personally) wipe our tears away. We shall see Him as He is. His Spirit witnesses with our Spirit that we are the children of God. And if children, then heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ. (What does that even begin to mean?!)

Oh, the depth of His love for us! Oh, the things He has in store for us! Oh, the wonders of His grace! Only eternity will permit us to understand, and only forever will allow us to praise Him as we ought.

--- D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Fanfare for the Common Man

But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are. I Corinthians 1:27-28

Aaron Copland composed the triumphant percussion and brass piece "Fanfare For The Common Man" to rally Americans after the nation's entry into World War II. Copland was influenced by a speech from US Vice President Henry A. Wallace, who stated at the Free World Association in New York City: "I say that the century on which we are entering, the century which will come out of this war, can be and must be the century of the common man." 416,800 American servicemen lost their lives to defeat the thrice-evil Axis alliance of Germany, Italy, and Japan. "If anyone deserved a fanfare", Copland thought, "it was the common man, who was doing all the dirty work in the war and the army." 16 million common men were culled from the ranks of their everyday mundane occupations to "save the world".

The Bible is replete with references to people who were just common folk, "persona non grata", and yet who accomplished mighty exploits for the kingdom of God. Jacob had no prospects, being the younger son of Isaac, and yet rose to become the progenitor of Israel. Joseph rose from the dungeons of Egypt to become the savior of the world. Moses, though an inarticulate shepherd, became the emancipator of an enslaved people. Ruth, though an outcast Moabite widow, found mercy in the fields of Boaz and her honored place in the genealogy of Jesus. From the unlikely barren womb of his mother, Samson (whose strength lies not in his bulging biceps but in his secret Nazarite vow) rises to be a champion in the beleaguered camp of Dan. David was the least of his brethren and yet ascends to the throne of Israel. Esther was a poor Jewish orphan before she became the queen of Persia. Nehemiah, the king's cupbearer, became the governor of the revived city of God. Mary was a "handmaiden of low estate", and yet all generations "call her blessed". The apostles were but "ignorant and unlearned" fishermen and yet they spoke and wrote with eloquence and irresistible power.

Now let us add to that noble number of those very ordinary people, all of us who deign to take up the words of God and light the darkness that encompasses us. Surely if God should so use those listed above, might it not be found unusual to find him employing the likes of us? Not unusual, but very likely does the Lord take the common man who has no physical or intellectual prowess but who "wholly leans on Jesus' name". Thus does God confound the wise and the mighty. And thus does all glory and honor rightly redound to Him who alone is worthy of all acclaim.

It is revealed in that last great book that the angels play upon trumpets. Perhaps there will be a fanfare upon the entrance of every saint who enters "in through the gates into the city" as they have fought a good fight and finished their course and kept the faith and are crowned and exalted as "kings and priests unto God". What a triumphant moment when the hosts of unworthy recipients of divine love are raised to be joint heirs of the kingdom of Christ! "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory." I Samuel 2:8

Pastor

Faith cometh by hearing; and hearing by the word of God Romans 10:17

Effectual speech

I also could speak as ye do: if your soul were in my soul's stead, I could heap up words against you, and shake mine head at you. But I would strengthen you with my mouth, and the moving of my lips should assuage your grief.
Job 16:4-5

As Job's three "friends" continued to condemn him for general wrongs that they supposed of him, they drove him to further despair and complaint, as he continued to seek specific explanation for his calamities, and they provided none. After Eliphaz began the second round of assumptions, accusing Job of wickedness and self-condemnation, Job's label for them as "miserable comforters" was fitting. In his grief, Job utters in our text his expectation of his friends, as what he believes he would do if their roles were reversed. In such a case, his description of the needed help is connected to the mouth and lips, yea, the words from the comforter that ought to strengthen the soul and assuage the grief.

Unfortunately, Job's friends had been derailed by their reaction to his initial complaint of his calamities, for which he knew no explanation, and they focused on his correction rather than his need for strengthening. Perhaps from his perspective he could now understand what they should have been doing to truly help him; but from theirs, which had evidently not known such extreme grief, they were clueless.

There is a grand lesson to be learned from this disconnect. Often the circumstances of others may be so out of the reach of our understanding, we are better to offer sympathy and encouragement rather than some assumed remedy. None in the account of Job initially had the advantage of knowing the cause revealed to us in the first two chapters of this book. Therefore, their assumptions run rampant only caused more grief. It would be better to remain silent than to assume we know the remedy. Yet Job's words here pull us to a higher cause – to seek the power of words that will strengthen the downcast and assuage their grief. For this we should pray, and seek the means for the answer, which can come from none other than the supreme Comforter who uses the word of God to accomplish both. May the blessed Holy Spirit of God fill our hearts, minds, and mouths with the word that can strengthen and assuage.

No Inequities There

Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him:

Ecclesiastes 8:12

This side of eternity life has its inequities. Often, the loud and bold intimidate the meek and timid, the strong dominate the weak, the rich oppress the poor, and the famous receive preferential treatment that the commoner will never see. Favoritism can surpass merit when an opportunity for promotion arises. Often, politicians frame laws or secure contracts overlooking their constituents' welfare while fattening their wallets with gifts from contractors. Inequities have and will continue to exist until the Lord makes all the crooked things straight.

Throughout history, evil men have prospered. History books record the exploits of evil dictators who have wreaked havoc on mankind while pursuing their insatiable lust for fame and power. The Biblical record also has its share of wicked men who have prospered at the expense of others. Pharaoh enjoyed the luxuries of his empire at the cost of subjugating the Hebrews. King Ahab acquired Naboth's vineyard through Jezebel's deceitful plan. Publicans grew rich by exacting a higher tax than what Rome required so they could retain the excess. But the most significant inequity occurred when the notable prisoner Barabbas was exchanged for the sinless Son of God.

One thing that helps us to understand the prosperity of the wicked is that their time eventually comes to an end. Our perspective on Earth is affected by our relationship with time. When evil men seem to prosper while the upright struggle the question is sometimes asked: Where is God in all of this? Sometimes, because righteous people are afflicted with incurable diseases and the wicked enjoy good health, God is accused of being unfair. We must never forget, He that inhabits eternity rules from an eternal perspective and eternity takes precedence over the temporary. With Him, a thousand years are as a day, and a day is as a thousand years. Many of God's promises are not for the present but for the future. When we repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, we receive eternal life, and that eternal life begins here at that moment of salvation and then transitions us from this temporary world into the glories of heaven for all eternity. God-fearing people may experience severe trials which try their faith to the extreme of human tolerance. Hebrews 11 describes some of the unfair trials that confronted the early believers. Some were subjected to trials of cruel mocking, scourging, bonds, stoning, imprisonment, and horrible temptations. Faith taught them to hold on to God's promises while trusting that He is faithful who has promised. Today's verse reminds us that it will be well with them that fear God in the end.

When we have been the recipient of some unfair situation, instead of complaining let us be quick to remember and be thankful for the One who suffered the ultimate injustice so that we might receive the ultimate mercy. For now, inequities will continue, but in the end, it will always be well with those who fear God. J. Ekis

Of Hope and Trees

Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life.
– Proverbs 13:12 –

Trees are awesome and magnificent things. A tiny seed finds good ground, germinates, and takes root. Water and sunlight combine to make of that little kernel a tall and mighty stature with multiple off-shoots, offering a home and playground for squirrels and chipmunks and birds of all kinds, while also providing for any sentient life, be they wild animal or human being, shade and covert from the heat of day. The multitude of towering trees we see today have been decades if not centuries in the making. But make no mistake – each one of these august works of creation began from something barely visible.

Our text today tells us that hope is like a tree. For the believer, hope springs from the promises of God. We know what He has said, and trust that He will perform it. But while we await His movement, the heart quivers and shivers in our natural, fallen, and sickened state of anxiety and doubt. We pray according to His will, or at least we try to do so. As the desire tarries, we return to the throne of grace, re-examine our motives, and strain to align ourselves with Heaven's perspective. And then, like Elijah, we see it – the first tiny cloud that indicates the showers are about to come. We know that He has heard us, and that the answer is on the way. Then, over a period of time, we find that He has not only answered us, but done exceedingly abundantly above all that we could have asked or thought. The thing for which we prayed was but the seed! How could we have possibly foreseen that the Master would take it and turn it into such a sustaining, multi-tiered blessing. Oh, why – why – did we ever doubt Him?

What are you asking for today, dear reader? What hope deferred is making your heart sick? Resolve to believe Him. Your patient trust will be rewarded beyond your wildest imagination. Your good God is already taking care of your request. Your tears are creating a fertile soil. The first sprig will jut up soon, and time and eternity will prove that your Master was in every detail, working all things together for your good to you that love God, and are called according to his purpose. The answer will be a magnificent tree of life with shoots and branches of blessing that you never would have anticipated. Hold fast. Your godly desire is coming from your loving Lord. --- D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Apotheosis

And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. Acts 12:22:

I am certain that most of us look at ourselves as being rather insignificant. We tend to assess our impact upon the world around us as being imperceptible, if not entirely inconsequential. Our perspective is skewed by the perverse way in which lives are evaluated in our modern culture. We have fabricated a fallacious definition of greatness and have devalued any life that falls short of that false standard.

Although Alexander "the Great" was not the first human to receive divine honors, his self-deification set an example for Hellenistic kings, Roman emperors, and other rulers including our own. Visible through the oculus of the dome in the rotunda of the United States Capitol Building one may gaze 180 feet above and behold The Apotheosis of Washington. This art work unabashedly portrays George Washington presiding as chief above six pagan deities. It is a vain, if not blasphemous, attempt to elevate a man in honor of the greatness of his achievements. It is impossible to determine how Washington would have reacted to the fresco since it was painted in 1865, but far too many political saviors become intoxicated with power and are loath to forbid such public adulation. Outwardly they may demur but inwardly they relish the effusive worship.

Our text describes the reaction of the commoners who, by exalting King Agrippa, vicariously transformed their own mundaneness. Often there is a kinetic energy that is conveyed through the megalomaniac to his adoring acolytes. That old serpentine lie "ye shall be as gods" is a beguiling temptation.

In light of this the Bible repeatedly asserts that the Lord has no patience with lesser gods. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me", be it silver, stone, plaster or flesh and blood. How comforting to know the the Good Shepherd "putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers."

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

Faith cometh by hearing: and hearing by the word of God Romans 10:17

Choose Carefully

And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, ...

Genesis 13:10

We have choices to make every day of our lives—most choices concern preferences with little or no consequences. Deciding what vegetable to select at a buffet, or choosing what outfit to wear have little or no significance, while other decisions can have both temporary and eternally catastrophic results. Some choices require little or no thought, while others should only be made after careful and prayerful consideration.

Today's text is the account of Abraham allowing his nephew Lot to have the first choice of the land of Jordan for his growing flocks and herds. Lot saw that the plains of Jordan were well watered and would provide the necessary needs for his livestock. Lot impulsively overlooked consequences that would eventually devastate his life. Also, on the plain of Jordan were the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah which had a notorious reputation. The scriptures tell us that the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD. For whatever reason, Lot was either ignorant of this, or most likely thought it would not impact him. In the account, we find that Lot's wife and his daughters were drastically influenced by the evil culture. 2 Peter 2:8 states concerning Lot's plight in that city, *for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds.* A better choice for Lot would have been to take the portion of land that might have a little less advantage for the well-being of his herd and a more wholesome environment for his family.

This text, as well as all the scriptures, are written for our learning. It teaches us that prayerful consideration should be involved in the significant decisions of life. We do not possess divine wisdom, but we do have access to the ONE who does. We also can make better choices if we take the time to look at all the peripheral circumstances and resulting consequences of our potential choices. Marriage, careers, and home buying are usually the biggest choices in life. An attractive potential spouse, a high-paying job, and a new and larger house are all decisions that can be detrimental if other considerations are overlooked. Should the physical appeal be the sole requirement for marriage? Does the high-income job have hours that will allow for family time? Is the dream house in a conducive location for family activities and well-being? For Christians, choosing the right church is of utmost importance. Correct doctrine based on staying true to God's word provides the opportunity for strengthening spiritual growth. A church may have a great facility and a wide range of programs, but if it lacks doctrinal purity, it will be powered by human energy and not the Holy Spirit.

When we are presented with an important decision, may God grant us the wisdom to discern the influence of our carnal knowledge, so that we may instead allow the Holy Spirit to direct our choice. When we do not lean to our own understanding, but acknowledge the Lord's greater wisdom and will, we then can trust that He will direct our path.

J. Ekis

Mercy and justice

And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.

Exodus 34:6-7

In considering the subjects of mercy and justice, we may be apt to discuss justice first, following up with mercy as a “remedy” for justice. Yet in our text, in response to Moses’ request of God to show him His glory, the LORD God announced His glory to Moses beginning with His attributes of mercy, grace, longsuffering, and forgiveness. These attributes are followed with those reflecting justice and judgment. Our LORD is exquisitely complete in all facets of His attributes.

In the fifth beatitude Jesus announced, “blessed are the merciful.” The word used there emphasizes the outward demonstration of mercy, for example, showing kindness or benevolence. Commenting on this, Albert Barnes states: “Nowhere do we imitate God more than in showing mercy. In nothing does God delight more than in the exercise of mercy,” citing today’s text among others. Yet, A. W. Pink qualifies that this is a holy mercy, “in contrast with that foolish sentimentality which flouts the requirements of justice, and which inclines many to sympathize with those in deserved misery,” citing Saul’s sparing of Agag as the negative example.

James says that “mercy rejoiceth against judgment” (James 2:13), yet our LORD is completely consistent in His exercise of each. Far from contradicting justice, mercy complements justice. The apostle Paul anticipates the question from our limited human minds of how God can be both merciful and just, when he addresses the only way of salvation in Romans 3:23-26. “To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Romans 3:26). The grace and mercy of God that provided Himself in Christ as the propitiation (v. 25), or “mercy seat,” for our sins satisfied His justice in paying the human sin debt. Thus, He remains the merciful and just One, fulfilling the timeless and prophetic word, “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other” (Psalm 85:10). For His mercy endureth forever!

Three Temperatures

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

– Revelation 3:15-16 –

When once we wandered the kingdom of darkness, obeying the dictates of prince of the power of the air, our hearts were dark – blackened with sin, disillusionment, and self-absorption. We slurped up whatever enjoyments we could find along the banks of this world's meandering streams of amusements and lapped like dogs at the shallow dishes of muddy waters of pleasure the devil sparingly placed before us along our benighted path. But when we came to ourselves, we knew something was not right. Our hearts were dull and dead and cold – colder than the howling, tempestuous winds of Hades that surrounded us. It was in this pathetic state that our Savior found us and spoke life and joy and peace to our frigid souls, raising us in newness of life, and delivering us forever from the icy clutches of our mortal enemy.

As new creatures, we became white hot in our zeal for our risen Lord. Life was now all about Him! What could we present our beloved Lord for His divine redemption of our unworthy souls? Our thoughts, our words, and our actions – our everything – we freely offered to Him out of a renewed heart that was filled with gratitude and a deep, abiding love for Him Who washed us from our sins in His own blood. After all, everything was His to begin with. What had we that we had not received? And so, we incessantly witnessed of His love for us and for all men. We re-budgeted our finances, ensuring He received the first-fruits, and then some. We devoured His Word to know Him more. We ran with anticipation to the assembly of the saints, expecting Him to be in the midst of the meeting. In all of our zeal, we were not only strengthened in our inner man, but became active agents in the building of His Kingdom and the advancing of His eternal cause. Our passion for Him fueled His work, and made Hell recoil. It is and always will be His design.

Fast forward to today. Let us take our temperature. Are we still on fire for the Master, or have the winds of time and the scars of spiritual battle tempered our zeal? Are we cold, hot, or lukewarm? If cold, let us run as fast as we can to Him and be warmed and resurrected by our mighty Christ. Burning zeal will reciprocate the love that redeemed us from destruction and drive us to passionately walk by faith and live for the glory of our God. But lukewarm? To recall our once known lostness, and yet to be less than ardent about the Savior who took us from the dunghill and set our feet upon a rock? Oh, what a miserable state, and what a repugnance to the risen Christ! Lord, ignite us. Set us ablaze for You today, and may our flame burn evermore intensely, until You call us home. --- D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

¶ The LORD shall increase you more and more, you and your children.

Ye are blessed of the LORD which made heaven and earth.

Psalms 115:14-15

The Maker of heaven and earth has an inexhaustible repository of blessings from which to endow his people. The redeemed are the beneficiaries of this endless supply. It is not enough to say that the Lord gives us "abundantly" but "exceeding abundantly above"-not just more but "more and more". Who among us has not found the case to be true, that the Lord has given to us "good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over".

Some many years ago I recall reading a fanciful account of Joseph's granaries during the seven years of plenty in Egypt. The silos burgeoning with substance provided a paradisaal lodging for a field mouse and his family who luxuriated in the wholesome and endless food supply. Never would he again have to forage to provide for his family, scurrying hither and yon to gather a crumb here or a crust there, ever leery of traps and poisons laid for his demise. Now he nestled securely in unlimited allowance.

And such is the felicitous case for those whose names are recorded in heaven. The promise is for the immediate and for the future. Proverbs 4:18: But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. For when can it ever be seen "the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread".

Note as well that the promise is for us and for our children! What a gracious addendum is this-a generational promise. Happy should be the child born to faithful Christian parents. There is in our promise the perpetuation of God's goodness. And lest we limit the increase to the mere temporal, please consider that the Lord has every intention to shower our heritage with spiritual gifts. Philippians 1:9: And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment;

How truly marvelous are His ways toward His own:

Ye are blessed of the Lord which made heaven and earth.

Have a blessed day .

Pastor



Faith cometh by hearing: and hearing by the word of God Romans 10:17

Remembering the Past and Relishing the Present

For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.

Romans 5:10

The Bible records the extremes that can occur in earthly life. In the negative sense, there are the accounts of Adam, who was the pinnacle of God's creation and became a sinner and alienated himself from paradise. Esau was the firstborn and would have inherited a title and position from his wealthy father but lost that position to his younger brother. The Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, who lived in opulence, would one day lose his mind and live like an animal for a season. For several years, Judas Iscariot benefitted from living and walking with the Lord Jesus only to be separated from Him for eternity. On the positive side, there is Joseph who was forsaken and sold into slavery by his brothers and later became their savior from starvation and death. Moses was born into slavery but became a prince of Egypt. Esther was one of the captives of Israel and eventually became the Queen of her captive nation. The shepherd boy David, the youngest in his family, rose to be a general and a king. Peter, a lowly fisherman, became a prominent figure in turning the world upside down with the message of a crucified and risen Jesus.

Today's text among others describes what we were before our conversion to Christ. Blind, unrighteous, aliens, enemies, servants, and children of the devil define our lot in life. Being an enemy of God is the most unenviable position. God is a force that cannot be avoided or overcome. He is all-powerful, all-knowing, and ever-present. We cannot run from Him nor hide from His all-seeing eyes. So instead of trying to fight against or resist Him, it is best to surrender to Him and acknowledge He is Lord of all. Unlike earthly kings, He will not subjugate us to a lifetime of bondage but will rather forgive and adopt us into His family. Because of the atoning death of God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, we can be reconciled to having a right relationship with Him. *God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (II Corinthians 4:6)*

The heavenly position we now hold in Christ is so far removed from where we were before our conversion. We are not exempted from trials or tribulations, but our current situation as believers is certainly superior to where we were before our spiritual adoption. Because He removed our sins as far away as the East is from the West, we can now be contentedly at peace. When the pressures of life arise and seem to consume us, it is good for us to remember where we used to be before we found the Savior, and then remember we now are in Him. Not only have we been reconciled, but we can also joy in God through the Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have NOW received the atonement.

J. Ekis

Benefit of righteousness

*Is it any pleasure to the Almighty, that thou art righteous? Or is it gain to him, that thou makest thy ways perfect?
Job 22:3*

There are many misconceptions in human thinking about God and man's relation to Him. The causes of these are evidently many and varied. Yet among them is the false notion that God is like man. Although in this discourse Eliphaz continues to attribute to Job things not applicable to Job's situation, nonetheless he, with the others, often states principles that are generally correct, as in our text. Therefore, we may apply the stated principle that sets right man's thinking toward God.

There are times when people assume that their good deeds somehow benefit God. This can be based on the wrong assumption that God operates as humans do. People may do good towards others in ways that benefit the recipients, but then wrongfully assume that they can also do the same for God. However, as Eliphaz rightly asserts with these two rhetorical questions, man's efforts toward righteousness may be profitable to himself (see verse 2 before this), but they add nothing to the person of the perfectly righteous Lord of creation. There is nothing that mankind can do that can add anything to Him, since He is the ultimate all in all. Psalm 50 alludes to this truth in the context of the offerings of Israel (Psalm 50:8-15), while it also warns the wicked that God is not "such an one as thyself" (Psalm 50:21).

The benefactor of a person's righteousness is that person. This is true in both aspects of righteousness – positional and practical. All righteousness comes from God. When he makes us positionally righteous by His grace, when saves us through our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, that righteousness comes from Christ (II Corinthians 5:18-21). When that salvation works out from the lives of those who are saved, "it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). Let us be always reminded that the righteousness He bestows is all to our benefit and all to His glory.

Irreconcilable Differences

An unjust man is an abomination to the just: and he that is upright in the way is abomination to the wicked.

– Proverbs 29:27 –

As wickedness in our society increases, I often find myself longing for former days when the culture had some modicum of decency. But if I stop to think about it for a moment, there are actually some great advantages to the moral decline and cesspool of degradation that is becoming the ideological norm of modern Western culture and thought. Think about it. If you are a believer, it is becoming impossible to wear any camouflage. While Christians were never intended to fit in with this world, the fact that the gospel was at one point a foundational component to our culture made it a bit more comfortable to straddle the line between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness. But that covert is all but gone. Through the vehicles of media, academia, “science”, and psychology, the devil is now laying claim to the hearts of men at such an alarming rate, and filling their thoughts with so many diverse and sundry delusions, that the line between belief and rebellion is becoming unrelentingly stark. Similar to the days of Noah, those that have found grace in the eyes of the Lord will stand out as preachers of righteousness, if by nothing else than our refusal to take part in the militant corruption surrounding us. There are no more pale pastels. Bold colors now define the condition of the inward man, making one’s spiritual allegiance a matter of public domain.

This is actually a good thing. God’s people should be served well by hell’s unveiling of itself. There is not, and never was, any common ground between the gospel and the world, between good and evil, between light and darkness. The comfortable compromise that was the hallmark of the Laodicean church age is rapidly dissipating. The world is crucified to us, and we unto the world. We are beginning to understand why the things our God calls abominable are just that. The havoc that sin makes in a soul given over to evil is on display a thousand times over in the deeply compromised lives of our generation’s lost people. And as we live for Christ and shine as lights in this world, praying that honest hearts will ask us for the reason of the hope that is within us, we must nonetheless welcome the reality that we are the filth of the world and the offscouring of all things to the societal engineers and cultural architects of our time.

But no matter, because that puts us in great company. As the apostles turned the world upside down, so it is now our turn. The same Holy Ghost that Paul and Peter accessed is our Guide today. Let us embrace these irreconcilable differences with the world, the flesh, and the devil, and be burning and shining lights in the midst of this darkness. For soon, our Lord will come to catch us away to a place where there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie; but only they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life (Rev. 21:27). Until then, let us consistently point others to that wonderful place.

--- D. Murcek