

Avoiding Traps

A prudent man foreseeth evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on and are punished. Proverbs 22:3

The animal kingdom has many beautiful and curious creatures. Some can be brought into our homes and domesticated, others because of their size or potential danger should only be observed from a position of safety. An interesting statistic concerning one of the more dangerous members of the reptile family is that most people who are bitten by venomous snakes are bitten after they have seen the snake. In other words, they allow themselves to get too close when observing the snake. This statistic is consistent with certain biblical truths.

The wisdom we can glean from today's text is applicable in many situations of everyday life. Spiritually speaking, there are many potential traps the devil sets for us so that he might diverge our path from following Christ. In this verse, to be prudent means to be spiritually cunning as to the many potential dangers there are along our heaven-ward journey. A state of vigilance and the ability to see traps from a safe distance helps us to circumvent the danger and continue on through the strait gate. King David's great sin with Bathsheba is a glaring illustration of one who ignored the distant warning and chose the wrong path which brought much heartache to his life. If we look beyond all the false promises that temptation offers and instead draw from the Lord's strength to reject our sinful curiosity before sin's temptation gets too close to harm us, then we will continue our journey unimpeded. Each time we do this we gain spiritual strength and wisdom to foresee and avoid the next snare before us. Satan knows our areas of vulnerability and seeks to exploit them by attracting our attention from a distance in hope of drawing us closer to the trap he has set. It is easier to resist the pull of temptation while still at a distance than it is to allow ourselves to get closer to its potentially overwhelming power.

Prayer: Dear Lord, please guide my steps this day to fulfill your will in my life. Please give me the wisdom to recognize any trap the devil has set, that I might hide myself in the safety of your presence. In Jesus Name, Amen. - JDE

Slackness

And the whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled together at Shiloh, and set up the tabernacle of the congregation there. And the land was subdued before them.

And there remained among the children of Israel seven tribes, which had not yet received their inheritance. And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, How long are ye slack to go to possess the land, which the LORD God of your fathers hath given you?

Joshua 18:1-3

After years of battling the godless peoples of the land of Canaan, the Israelites under Joshua's leadership had generally conquered the land and subdued their enemies, according to God's promise and with His direction and enablement. Joshua had done all that he had been commanded to lead God's people to victory. The land was now theirs as a nation. Yet the detailed assignment and possession of the individual parcels for each tribe was still incomplete. These remaining tribes were involved in and aware of the victory, but Joshua rebukes their slackness in appropriating the victory to their own accounts.

Following the type, as the epistle to the Hebrews describes, Canaan land to Israel represents spiritual rest to the Christian people of God. In the same way that God had given the land to Israel, so in Christ He has given the greater fulfillment of abundant life in the Spirit to the follower of Christ. Jesus finished the conquest against sin and spiritual death in His death and resurrection. The power of His resurrection not only gives us the promise of an eternal home in His glory, but also the power to know Him in our daily walk. We should not be slack to possess the land of abundant spiritual living that the Lord God of our fathers has given us. So the apostle says, if we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. He is the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, who has made us free from the law of sin and death that once captivated us when outside His promise. Let us not, as the seven tribes, simply say, "there's the land, it's ours," and stop there. Let us instead possess the land of promise daily, as we lay hold on our eternal life that God will work in us both to will and do His good pleasure.

- MAG

Magnified word

I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.

Psalms 138:2

Although here and in a multitude of references in the Old Testament, especially in Psalms, we see the desire to praise the name of the Lord, in this place David adds the curious statement that “thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.” When we consider not only how often the name of the Lord is praised, but also the many facets and variations of the name of the Lord, it prompts wonder about the point of this statement. In what way is God’s word magnified above His name? After all, His name is holy, powerful, to be blessed, and not to be used in vain or blasphemed, to state just a few examples. We are also given many different compound names of the Lord in our Old Testament that reveal to us the facets of His character and power. Yet, above His name, His word is magnified. This statement is made here in conjunction with David praising God’s name for His lovingkindness and His truth. His word reveals His truth. His name identifies Him in His relationship to us, so that we bow in awe. Then His word of truth reveals even more about His nature, as well as God’s will and plan to bring His holiness and goodness to our souls. The magnification of His word above His name does not reduce the glory of His name, but reflects the added depth of knowledge that His word gives us. Before the fall, Adam walked with God in the garden. He had the supreme privilege of not only knowing the Lord by name, but knowing Him intimately, and sharing the overwhelming goodness of God within himself. What an overwhelming loss to man did the fall bring. Yet, through His word, and Christ the living Word as God became man, He offers reconciliation to us that can restore the relationship of paradise that Adam lost. Let us therefore praise His name and seek His truth to be magnified in us through His word.

- MAG

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

The Lord Heard

Malachi 3:16: ¶Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name.

This remarkable declaration reminds us that the everlasting Maker of heaven and earth takes special note of our holy conversations. One is tempted to think that He would have more important matters to tend to then to bend His ear and listen in on out trivial conversations. But the text cannot lie. So delightful is His reaction that He summons the recording angel to devote a page in the book of remembrance to our divine discourse. And unlike Ahasuerus, who at first, failed to reward Mordecai for his life-saving warning, we can rest assured that the omniscient Arbiter of perfect justice shall reward those who even but think upon His name.

We are reminded that the Lord is listening. He listens to our prayers. He listens to our complaints. He listens to our gossip. He listens to every idle word that proceeds out our mouths. But most intriguingly, He listens to those sacred exchanges when we include Him in our daily dialogue with friends, workmates and neighbors. I imagine that there is a dutiful recording cherub who acts as the angelic amanuensis carefully inscribing every syllable of words that will have eternal endurance.

In the midst of Job's fiery trials, his faith stood the test and his request was entered into the book of remembrance: "Oh that my words were now written! oh that they were printed in a book! That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever! For I know that my redeemer liveth" Job 19:23-24.

Our words, though far less eloquent, are not less important to our Savior. Let us then find ourselves engaged in heavenly colloquy that exalts that Name which is "above all names". And in so doing insure that we shall one day hear those words reiterated in the halls of glory.

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

Conscience Exercised

And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.
– Acts 24:16 –

My heart broke again this past week with the news of a prominent Christian leader who has apparently engaged in indefensible immoral conduct. Sadly, there have been at least five of these similar headlines thus far this year. As followers of Christ, we must pray for the fallen professed believer. We should then turn our attention inward, adhering to Paul's inspired advice in 1 Corinthians 10:12, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." And finally, let us meditate upon and resolutely enact the only sure antidote to personally falling in our walk with the Master – exercising ourselves to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and men.

Paul uttered the words of our text while making his defense before the Roman governor Felix. Note that the case against him was so pathetically weak precisely because of the way he lived the Christian life. *By his willful, continuous obedience to the Holy Ghost, Paul inoculated himself against both internal and any justifiable external condemnation.*

The conscience is a benevolent gift from God to every member of Adam's race. While estranged from God, it serves as a witness against our actions and torments us with the fact that we are not right with our Maker. After we are converted to Christ, the conscience becomes the resident Holy Ghost's unique tool. If we quench or grieve Him, it will still serve in its condemnatory capacity. But the divine design of sanctification is such that as the Spirit empowers us to yield to Him rather than our sinful nature, the conscience becomes more of a proactive authority, reminding us what we ought to *do* rather than simply condemning us for what we have done wrong.

Our conscience can only be void of offense toward God and men if we exercise ourselves to that end. Exercise is active, not passive. Just as we choose to get off of the couch and exercise our bodies for gain, so must we choose to continuously exercise our hearts to obey the promptings of the Holy Ghost within. That which He forbids, we must eschew. That which He moves us to do, we must execute. When He prompts us to speak, we must find voice. When He moves us to go, we dare not stay. When He requires our stillness, we must not act. Obedience to Him in all matters, small and great, becomes the vehicle of our witness as well as the advancement of our sanctification and the sustaining of our peace. If we constantly engage in this exercise, our time will be occupied, our conscience will be clear, and we will enjoy unbroken fellowship with and usefulness to our Master.

A new day is at hand. Let us resolutely exercise ourselves again to have a conscience void of offense toward God and men.

The Right Answer

Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God.

Matthew 16:16

Everyone likes to have the right answer. From our school years with the quizzes and tests to driver's exams or even trivial games we play. A person can miss some questions on a test and still receive a passing grade, but our Lord posed a question to the disciples that we also must be able to answer correctly in order to obtain heaven. All the other answers to questions in life, whether of great importance or just simple answers to nonessential things, pale in insignificance to this question, because the answer has eternal consequences.

Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? That is the question of questions for which we *must* have the correct answer. Just as there was a variety of opinions of who Jesus was in His day; those same opinions exist in our day. Some may answer that He was a prophet, and He was; but He was also much more. He was and is sometimes addressed as Rabbi, and His teachings have transcended and impacted all of life through the ages, but He was more than just a teacher. Many flock to Him in need of healing, and the miracles that He performed make Him stand apart from all the founders of the world's religions, and yet miracles were not His reason for walking this earth. When Jesus turned the question to His disciples and inquired saying *but whom say ye that I am*, Peter responded with the correct answer. The statement *Thou art the Christ the son of the living God* reveals our Lord's nature and His purpose for coming. Jesus surpasses all others because of His divine nature; He was the Son of God, God in the flesh. He also was and is the Christ, the "Anointed One". Deuteronomy says *God would raise a prophet from men like unto Him who shall speak God's words*. Jesus taught that the way to God was through Him alone, and with the words *it is finished* He completed the payment for our sins, and three days later He rose victoriously from the grave. And now because He lives, we can also live forever.

If we have embraced the truth of the answer to that question, we have the opportunity to live in the realization of who Jesus is, and walk in the light as He is in the light, and have fellowship one with another.

JDE

Life Abundant

The thief cometh not but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy; I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

– John 10:10 –

Our conversion testimony is a wonderful thing. It commemorates the grand and unique work of salvation the Holy Ghost wrought in the heart of an individual lost child of the devil. The fact that He does that work so many times over in as many unique ways as to populate the halls of heaven with a multitude that no man can number is an attestation to the limitless grace and mercy of our God.

Yet our conversion to Christ is just the beginning. The fact is that the magnificent work of salvation from eternal condemnation and hell fire is but one component of our Lord's plan for each of us. The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, the gift of the Lord Jesus to the hearts of His beloved, is the promised seal of our purchased redemption and the means by which He continues working His will in and through us.

In our text, Jesus clearly and categorically states that life in Him is *abundant*. That means *overflowing, incessantly productive, unendingly full*. The eternal life which we possess through the new birth is in stark contrast to the natural life received from our parents. The natural life, owned by the arch-thief, is filled with moments of gratification that dissipate into nothing, creating a never-ending search for meaning and fulfillment that leads to destruction. Eternal life, on the other hand, is ever increasing. Setbacks and stumbling aside, the Giver of this life promised it would be abundant, flowing, springing, and everlasting. Great works of grace within the heart produce continuous acts of faith in the life. These will manifest themselves in many ways, from sewing the seed in the hearts of men, to harvesting works of evangelism, to words fitly spoken to him that is weary, to worshipful times alone with God, to simple moments of trust in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. But make no mistake – this eternal life is always actively growing in the heart of the child of God, from the point of re-birth to moment of graduating to glory. Though the outward man perishes, the inward man is renewed day by day.

Many professing Christians speak longingly of the fire-filled days that immediately followed their conversion experience, or nostalgically recall great acts of faith done in the Lord's name in earlier times. There is no harm in this, *unless it is the evidence that we have quenched the work of the Spirit in our lives and our life in Christ feels less abounding than it once did*. Eternal life is abundant – the Master Himself said so. The things before us are greater than the things behind. Let us make certain that our hearts are in right relation to our Savior. A new day is at hand. Let us live it abundantly in and through His marvelous grace!

-- DCM

Smitten with kindness

Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head: for yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities.
Psalm 141:5

It is not often that we find people inviting someone to smite them, let alone counting it as kindness. The metaphor here is immediately clarified as a reference to reproof. After requesting in the previous verse for the Lord to keep him from evil things in his heart or wicked works in his walk, David recognizes that the answer to such a prayer can often come through the potentially painful agency of a righteous friend. He further compares such reproof to an excellent oil upon his head. In his culture, this was an extremely refreshing experience in the hot, arid climate of the Middle East. The similar comparison is made in Psalm 133, where unity of the brethren is also seen as a refreshment. This truth also passed on to David's son Solomon, where in Proverbs 27 he declares that the wounds of a friend are faithful, in connection with open rebuke.

When was the last time you thanked someone for reproof or even rebuke? (It is left to the reader to research the difference.) This concept has become extremely foreign in our current age of selfishness. The culture has been saturated with the false assumption that progress can be had without pain. Yet Jesus even used the metaphor of the vinedresser improving the vine by pruning the unproductive branches as a lesson for spiritual growth. When we grasp the concept put forward here, we recognize the kindness of one who would risk relationship for our sake to help us correct a flaw in our character or behavior. I once heard a man tell another that he loved him too much to specify the remedy for an offence. That was not love; it was cowardice at best, if not hatred at worst. And yet it reflects the wrong attitude of a culture unwilling to deal honestly and kindly. To learn to reprove in love is a necessary but monumental task, possible only through the tutelage of the word and Spirit of God. However, perhaps the greater need, which could aid the former, is to learn to recognize the value of reproof when it comes. Then, instead of reacting in selfishness to our own detriment, we would respond in thankfulness to our own benefit, and to the glory of God.

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

A Sacred Trust

1 Thessalonians 2:4: But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is a most sacred trust for therein lies the key of knowledge. God has entrusted to us the most powerful element in His entire creation and has commissioned us to broadcast it to the ends of the earth. He has promised to endue us with His Spirit so that we might rightly divide its precious words. He has "fitted our lips" to utter its unfathomable teachings. And we dare not diminish its trenchant truth to win the favor of any mortal be it king, relative, or neighbor, for we have been granted permission from the "the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords" to disseminate His good news without amendment or private interpretation.

When writing a will one must be careful in the choosing of a trustee. "The trustee acts as the legal owner of trust assets, and is responsible for handling any of the assets held in trust, tax filings for the trust, and distributing the assets according to the terms of the trust." This role involves duties that are legally required. It is at the discretion of the testator to direct his assets as he wills. He may impose any conditions so as to insure that his final directives are executed but in the end he must have absolute confidence in the trustee's fidelity to act in deference to the expressed will.

If earthly possessions require such careful scrutiny, should not the execution of the Divine Will be of even greater concern. We must be humbled by the enormity of the trust that God has bestowed upon us. Placed under our supervision are the Words of Eternal Life! Words that the Father intends for us to freely distribute to needy hearts. We dare not be derelict in our duty. The siren call to blunt the two-edged sword and accommodate the capricious modernists is an ever present temptation which must be assiduously avoided. Let us be valiant for the truth in the face of men pleasers and so win the approbation of our God who shall soon try our hearts and judge our trusteeship.

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

The Inscrutable, Knowable God

Lo, these are parts of his ways: but how little a portion is heard of him? but the thunder of his power who can understand?

– Job 26:14 –

Skeptics love to mock the Bible. They ignorantly assert that it is filled with contradictions. What their foolish hearts and pride-intoxicated intellects refuse to see and cannot ascertain is the dichotomous nature of the Scriptures. The Bible is a sharp two-edged sword. For every facet of truth, there is an equal and opposite aspect to the verity. And the Word of God is such precisely because of the God of the Word. As we accumulate our knowledge of the inspired utterance of the Holy Ghost regarding the character and working of the Godhead, we find that every characteristic of the divine nature owns a counter-balancing attribute that leaves us in awe of the august Creator of all things.

The God of the Bible – the God of our salvation – is inscrutable. This means it is impossible to define or search out His essence. He is transcendent to His creation – possessing a complete “otherness”, making Him incomparable to anything created. All of this is difficult to grasp, but when rightly received, the Bible makes it abundantly clear that God is (and must be) incomprehensible.

The inscrutable nature of God is not only proclaimed in our text from Job but also well-substantiated throughout the Scriptures. The psalmist tells us in inspired worship that God’s greatness is unsearchable (Psalm 145:3). Isaiah reminds us that God’s ways and thoughts are infinitely higher than our own (Isaiah 55:9). And after explaining but a minute portion of His plan for mankind, both Jew and Gentile, the Apostle Paul surrenders his intellect and exultantly exclaims, “Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” (Romans 11:33).

But the marvelous and sublime paradox is that this incomprehensible, transcendent, inscrutable God has *made Himself known and ever more knowable to mankind*. Isaiah encourages men to seek God, and plainly declares that He can be found (Isaiah 55:6). Jeremiah tells us that the righteous and redeemed can glory in the fact that “he knoweth and understandeth” God (Jeremiah 9:24). Proverbs reminds us that understanding stems from the knowledge of the Holy [One] (Proverbs 30:3). And Paul summarizes the Christian experience as a ceaseless quest to “know Him [more], and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings...” (Philippians 3:10).

These are not contradictions, but contradistinctions. In His absolute essence, man can never comprehend the inscrutable Sovereign of the universe. Yet in relation to His loving pursuit to restore man to his intended position, that Sovereign has condescended to make Himself not only searchable, but knowable through Jesus Christ. He is not only incomprehensible, but in Christ is both available and apprehensible to sinners. And God is more than transcendent, proving at Calvary that He is desirous of intimate and ongoing fellowship with each individual member of Adam’s fallen race.

Let us rejoice again today in the remarkable chasm bridged by our Redeemer and stand in awe of our inscrutable yet knowable God!

The Maid and the Captain

Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man, but he was a leper.

2Kings 5:1

There are different ways to study the Bible. One way is to apply the scriptures to our everyday life by contrasting the people from Biblical accounts. Moses and Pharaoh, David and Goliath, Elijah and Ahab are just a few.

In today's text we read of the great captain of the Syrian army Naaman and the little unnamed captive maid. Naaman is described as being a *captain of the host of the King of Syria, a great man with his master, honourable, victorious, and a mighty man of valour*. With all of these accolades and accomplishments you would think one would be satisfied, but he had one nagging problem... he was a leper. His leprosy would rob him of health, close companionship, satisfaction of accomplishments, and eventually life itself. Verse 2 of Chapter 5 tells us of someone who appears to be at the opposite end of life's social spectrum - a little maid who waited on Naaman's wife and was among the captives of Israel living in a strange land, but she knows the God of Israel and His prophet Elisha. Though her prospects in this life would seem to be very dim, the fact that she knew Jehovah provided her with an enduring hope for the future.

In today's world there are many people like Naaman - successful, possessing wealth and position, but their ability to enjoy all of life's pleasures is diminished when their lives are affected with the leprosy of sin. One cannot fully enjoy all the comforts of this life with the absence of a relationship with God, and the knowledge that their life will be shortened, as well as their uncertainty of eternal life. On the other hand, people of faith, like the little maid who waited on Naaman's wife, have a confidence that there is a God who is involved in the affairs of His children and He has the power to remedy their problems.

This account reveals that there is hope for all men for we see that Naaman's life is eventually impacted by the God of Israel. As for the little maid, though unnamed in this account, her name is known in heaven. Today, no matter what our circumstances, we can rejoice if our names are written there as well.

J. Ekis

Three Little Words

But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.

Matthew 14:30

Words are powerful. We use them to convey information or to express ourselves. Wars can start and also cease because of words. They have the power to produce fear and worry, or they can deliver calm in troublesome times. Their power is not in how many or how loud they are, but in their content and sincerity. In today's text, the apostle Peter's three words change his external and internal circumstances.

Lord save me! These words were uttered by Peter in his desperation. As he began to sink in the troubled waters, he knew it was beyond his earthly power to save himself. Peter temporarily takes his focus off of the Lord causing him to sink. Fearing for his life, he then directs his eyes and words to the Lord. His prayer was not eloquent or pretentious, nor did he premeditate what to say; but it was a prayer born of urgency and sincerity. In response to his request the Lord Jesus reaches out his delivering hand and places Peter back in the safety of the boat.

We might not have said those exact three words, but by calling upon the name of the Lord for salvation, we found forgiveness of sins and adoption into God's family. As we continue on following God's plan for our lives, we will find that there many other times we will need to say those same three words. They are always effective, not just for salvation, but when the need is great. When we are assaulted by the devil's fiery darts of temptation, we will need to call out to the Lord for help. Enemies of the gospel will sometimes surround us, but by calling out to the ONE who walks on the sea, we can find help in the time of need. And in those time of trial when we sense we are losing our focus, we must not delay and find ourselves sinking further, but instead quickly say; Lord save me.

Though we certainly will never walk on water like Peter briefly did, we will all have times when we will need to say these three little words.

J. Ekis

Feigned Repentance

Yet ye have forsaken me, and served other gods: wherefore I will deliver you no more. Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation.

And the children of Israel said unto the LORD, We have sinned: do thou unto us whatsoever seemeth good unto thee; deliver us only, we pray thee, this day.
Judges 10:13-15

In this chapter we find the Israelites once again rebelling against God, serving idols, and as a result of God's judgment distressed by their enemies. After many of these cycles, and God sending judges to deliver them, this time the Lord's response changes. We are not told by what means He sent His response, but we would assume that, as in chapter six, a prophet brought the message of a seeming end to God's mercy. Their instruction, if we may paraphrase, is to be consistent in their worship. Since they had chosen the worship of Baal instead of Jehovah, then to Baal they should go for deliverance. How revealing it is that those who choose to worship the idols of this world somehow know when troubles come that those idols cannot deliver them. They are happy to worship the idols when they bring them fleshly pleasures, and yet the judgments that accompany idolatry remind the human conscience that only the living God is real and can deliver. Still the response of Israel in this text, "deliver us only," sadly reveals that their desire was only for the deliverance of God, instead of for the God of deliverance. They were even willing to confess that they had sinned, yet this does not constitute repentance. Much later in the nation's history God describes the similar situation through Jeremiah (3:10): "Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly." However, in both instances they were not willing to heed the loving and honestly abrupt warning from God.

While mankind may mouth words of confession and desire for deliverance, the Lord knows the motives of the heart. There actually is no end to God's mercy, for it endures forever; however, there are conditions, especially honesty of heart before Him. We cannot feign repentance before God; He searches the heart and tries the reins. At least the father of the possessed son had the honesty to cry out, "help thou mine unbelief!" So when we come to the place where we recognize that a worldly idol is vying for or has misdirected our attention, let us flee with unfeigned repentance to seek the God of deliverance, to not only be delivered from the consequence, but from the very idol itself. For we have His promise that sin shall not have dominion over us, when we are living under His covenant of grace. Even to Judah, He promised through Jeremiah (29:13) that "ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart."

Mark Gray

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

A Perfect Heart Corrupted

Then spake Solomon... Let your heart therefore be perfect with the LORD our God, to walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments, as at this day. I Kings 8:12,61

For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father. I Kings 11:4

David once posed the rhetorical question "How are the mighty fallen?". His son could have furnished the answer! How many are they that have begun well only to fall by some besetting sin. Solomon is a case study in apostasy. Less than three chapters trace the steps of a man of God first standing at the zenith of his power, attributing his successes to his obedient walk of righteousness, to, at the last, the dissolution of that same man plunging to the nadir of despair and shame. Solomon would have been wise indeed to have heeded his own advice.

Paul lamented that the Galatians who had begun well were somehow spirited off into legalism. "Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth? Galatians 5:7 " Sadly, we all have felt that demonic tug at the heart to deny our Lord and return to a life that brought nothing but misery and mortification. The devil is relentless in his reenlistment campaign. In 1758, as a 22 year old pastor, Robert Robinson penned these lines:

Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it
Prone to leave the God I love
Here's my heart, oh, take and seal it
Seal it for Thy courts above

The Bible is a unique volume in that it records the noble achievements as well as the abysmal failures of all of its heroes. This is done for our welfare. We have the privileged advantage to learn from their missteps. " Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. I Corinthians 10:11" So then let us follow the sage advice of the first verse and thus avert the tragedy of the second.

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

Loving the Lord

I love the LORD, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications.

– Psalm 116:1 –

Psalm 116 is an inspired outpouring of a grateful heart and a public proclamation of a deep devotion to a God who is both near and interactive in the life of the psalmist. A careful meditation on its nineteen verses will reveal that the author has multiple reasons for exultantly articulating his heartfelt love for his God including the Lord's attentiveness, His deliverance, His grace, His mercy, His preservation, His help, His bountiful care, His benefits, and His salvation. Indeed, God is good and never leaves His beloved overwhelmed in their troubles.

Only the Bible presents mankind with a God such as the one adored in Psalm 116. There is no other religion on earth that can or ever could boast a deity that inspires love from its devotees or that demonstrably and personally interacts with its individual adherents. Search and you will find that all non-Christian religions pay their homage to nothing more than egotistical, maniacal, or austere "gods" that are hopelessly contradictory in themselves and helplessly aloof from the troubles of mankind. But our God, the living God, is not only magnificently consistent in His holy character, but also wonderfully gracious and incessantly active in His wooing of and working with every individual of fallen humanity. Yes – we love Him, because He first loved us.

Our God who offered His Son on Calvary, our Christ who redeemed us there, and His Spirit who indwells our hearts, continues to lovingly engage and work with each of us in order to meet out His eternal purpose in our uniquely individual lives. In the truest sense of the old hymn, "He walks with us and talks with us along life's narrow way." The Lord provides our every need. The Lord hears and answers our prayers. The Lord comforts our broken hearts. The Lord remembers us. The Lord never leaves nor forsakes us. The Lord does exceedingly abundantly above all that we could ask or think. Indeed, the Maker of the universe is also the Rock of our salvation and the Lifter of our heads. He is our portion. Our cup runneth over. (Replace "our" and "us" with "my" and "me" in the preceding thoughts and it all remains equally as true.)

The finished work of our redemption and the continuing work of our sanctification should cause us to have our hearts ever and always in such a state as to readily and publicly proclaim "I love the Lord because...". Let us continue to compile the wonderfully unending list of reasons of our love for Him and may we find opportunity to rehearse them with someone today!

-- D. Murcek

Abominable

Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD; though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished.

– Proverbs 16:5 –

Those who possess even a cursory understanding of the Bible may immediately associate the word abomination with the dietary ordinances and the moral laws categorically enumerated in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Or perhaps it will be recalled as the word frequently used to both describe and decry the idolatrous practices of the nation of Israel in the books of the Kings, the Chronicles, and the Prophets. The word abomination may also elicit recollections of Daniel's prophecy of the abomination that makes desolate in the house of God, referenced by our Lord Jesus Himself. Or the word abomination may be immediately associated with the great whore in the book of the Revelation, "Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the Earth."

An abomination is something that causes disgust. Since the Bible is God's word to men, the word abomination is typically used in such fashion as to relay to us *that which disgusts God*. The problem is that we are prone to self-righteousness and therefore often erroneously categorize only egregious sin as abominable. A thorough review of the book of Proverbs, however, will show us no less than twenty times over *that many "every day" things accepted as normative by men and often justified by believers actually disgust our Lord*. These include our wicked thoughts, proud appearances, lying, gossiping, false balances, pretentious worship, and respect of persons, to name but a few. And Jesus reminded us in Luke 16:15 that that which is highly esteemed among men is *abomination* in the sight of God.

The source of all that disgusts the God of heaven is captured in Proverbs 16:5. The *pride of the human heart* is our birthday present from Adam and the spring from which all action that God finds abominable spouts. Pride is a lifelong parasite disguised as our dearest ally. It survives our conversion to Christ and is ever seeking to regain control. It tells us what we want to hear. It coddles us when convicted. It endlessly tries to convince us that who we once thought we were is who we should still be striving to be. It pretends to welcome advice, but in reality, it hates the man of God, the Word of God, and all godly counsel. It excuses our mistakes and applauds our self-justification. In short, it believes us to be our own god, and ever reminds us that we should act accordingly.

We can be eternally grateful for the resident Holy Ghost who counters and subdues this potentate-turned-pest of the breast. Yet let us also and ever be mindful that pride is very present with us until we go to glory, and that our God finds that pride *disgusting*. With His help and motivated by love for our Lord, let us mortify our pride today at every opportunity to do so!

-- D. Murcek

Satisfied

*As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I will be satisfied when I awake,
with thy likeness.*

Psalms 17:15

The Davidic psalms are a collection of David's writings on his relationship with God through his many and varied experiences of life. Some are filled with the highest expressions of praise; others record his sorrow and remorse from his disobedience.

The seventeenth Psalm is a prayer of David. The occasion of this prayer is probably from the time when David was fleeing, hiding, and trying to evade the vengefully jealous King Saul. The Psalm begins with him justifying himself that he had done nothing to warrant the wrath of Saul. Because of his trust and faith, David pleads for God to hear and answer, and that through His lovingkindness David might receive the Lord's guidance and finally be delivered.

For today's devotion our focus is on verse fifteen at the conclusion of the Psalm. After being surrounded by wicked men whose only concern seemed to be what they could reap in this earthly life, David exclaims where he stands. As for him, his desire was to behold the Lord's face in righteousness. Two Psalms earlier, David states that one who walks uprightly, and worketh righteousness in his heart is the one who shall abide in the Lord's tabernacle and stand in His holy hill. By retiring from all the distractions and pressures of this life, David would isolate himself before the Lord. It is there in that Holy Presence that all the confusion and troubles of this life disappear, and he could hear that Divine Voice reassuring him that all is well. David was determined to stay in that holy meeting place until he was stripped of himself and replaced with the likeness of his God. Later in the New Testament, the apostle John states a similar truth by saying that we will be like Him when we see Him as He is. David's ultimate satisfaction in this life was derived from having the likeness of Jehovah on his life.

The same should be true for us today. Others may chase that elusive hope by trying to find satisfaction in their own merits and the things of this life; but as for us, let's behold His face and awake with His likeness.

J.Ekis

Simple faith

Then Manoah intreated the LORD, and said, O my Lord, let the man of God which thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born.

Judges 13:8

The eleventh chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews lists a number of people in the Old Testament that exemplified faith that pleased God. We could compare these and observe that they each exercised faith in different circumstances and in some cases to different degrees. This man Manoah is not mentioned in that chapter. However, his example of faith described here gave way to the birth of a son, Samson, who would also be a delivering judge of the Israelites. When we examine the life of Samson in the book of Judges, it can make us wonder if the faith associated with his exploits against the Philistines that gives him a place in the Hebrews 11 catalog is his own, or that of his parents. In this chapter, the miraculous birth of Samson is predicted by the angel of the Lord to Manoah's barren wife when she is alone. When she comes to tell Manoah the news of the encounter, he could have responded differently. After so long a time, he could have already settled on remaining childless and being satisfied, much like others we meet in scripture. In that case, he might have relegated his wife's story to imagination due to distress. Instead, he chooses to believe both his wife and the Lord, simply as a matter of fact. He didn't, like mighty Gideon a few chapters back, submit any tests about the word of the Lord. Instead, he sets right out to find out his responsibility to fulfill the word that God has pronounced. His prayer is not to have further revelation for added confirmation, but for his own ability to obey and fulfill the revealed word of God. He believed the word of God, as delivered by the angel to his wife, and his simple faith wanted to know more about how to obey. What an example for us, with the privilege of having God's complete revealed word, to allow faith to complete a spirit of obedience and desire to fulfill that word.

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Divine Irony

He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.

Luke 1:52

How often is the case that the Lord, in His superior wisdom, bypasses the rich and famous and bestows His benefactions on the least of humanity. In this case the young virgin of Nazareth puts forth this canticle of praise for the marvelously "great things" her God had done. He could have chosen any one of many courtiers found at the Herodian palaces, but intentionally ignores status to exalt penury. Centuries earlier Isaiah predicted the upheaval of the status quo when he penned these words: "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low."

Profane history affords us a plethora of examples of the adage coined by Baron Acton "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men". This has never escaped the eye of the Almighty who promises to rectify the matter when His kingdom shall appear and the promised egalitarian government of the King of Kings is installed for ever and ever.

For that moment Mary revels in the anticipation of an immediate remedy to the unjust oppression her people had endured for centuries. As we know her hope would be deferred. The mighty do not succumb without a struggle. The "kings of the earth" and the rulers of Israel took "counsel together against the Lord" and slew the "Prince of life" and in so doing postponed the exaltation that Mary had prophesied.

As it would be, the Lord had others of low degree that he intended to incorporate in that exaltation. Heaven and earth shall pass away but the hope of His word shall come to its fulfillment. His Holy Spirit is even now assembling those of low degree out of every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

Conformity and Transformation

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

– Romans 12:2 –

I have always enjoyed an inward chuckle at self-proclaimed societal “non-conformists”. In my days as an undergrad at the University of Pittsburgh, I observed so many people outwardly expressing their individuality. The ironic part to me was that they all tended to look and act like each other!

The truth is, none of us want to feel isolated or alone. To some degree or another – whether wittingly or not – we all tend to conform to groups. The peer pressure we felt as adolescents never really goes away, it simply grows more subtle and ostensibly justifiable. Unfortunately, this innate tendency is fraught with pitfalls. As we conform to any group or ideal, it is likely that we are, in whole or in part, conforming to the world.

When fully received and rightly understood, the gospel liberates us from the felt need to “fit in” anywhere in this fallen world. The target of our conforming tendency is no longer a group or an ideal, but a risen Redeemer. To be like Christ is now the pressing daily goal. And since we know that the world hated Him, we are persuaded it has no resident fondness for us. Thus, our minds begin a process of renewal that continues throughout the remaining days of our pilgrimage. Our thinking undergoes a radical change – a transformation. We can no longer view the world the same way we once did. Any fulfillment we thought it offered has been exposed as corrupt or fallacious altogether. To borrow A.W. Tozer’s verbiage, it is no longer a playground, but a battlefield.

Note, however, that our text is an exhortation to *believers*. It suggests that even post-conversion, we can slip back into our propensity of group think and identification. *We must therefore actively and continuously submit ourselves to the transformative power of the gospel and the influence of the Holy Ghost in order to break the cycle.* This is accomplished only via the good and godly disciplines of Bible reading and study, prayer, church attendance, Christian fellowship, and active Christian service. All of these are requisite to maintaining the fullness of the transformation and the freshness of the renewed mind. When in this state, the Spirit will be free to use us in proving to a fallen world what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

-- D. Murcek

Jehovah Tsidkenu

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

Jehovah Tsidkenu, which translates *The Lord Our Righteousness*, is one of the seven compound names of God in the Old Testament. The prophet Jeremiah warned the wayward nation Israel of the coming invasion by the Babylonians and the resulting seventy years of captivity for God's people. A foreboding atmosphere overshadowed God's chosen people as they contemplated a seemingly hopeless future. The prophet sheds light in the dark situation by reminding Israel that a day was coming when a righteous King would come to bring prosperity by executing judgment and justice. The King who would save Judah and cause Israel to dwell safely is then revealed as Jehovah Tsidkenu, The Lord our Righteousness. The nation had miserably failed with their disobedience to God's ways, but looked for a better future when Messiah would come to deliver them from their oppressors and establish His kingdom.

Many of the events of the Old Testament are a foreshadowing of similar spiritual truths that apply to our lives today. Like Israel, we were following a path of disobedience that eventually would lead to some form of captivity. Like the invading Babylonian armies, Satan came to surround, assault, and carry us away to dwell in unforeseen situations of bondage. Without a covering of true righteousness, we eventually become servants to the sins which we commit whether it be the outward sins of the flesh or the secret pride within. All sins equally bind up and rob us of our relationship with God. While we languish in this condition, we long for some form of deliverance. The only One who is righteous, Jehovah Tsidkenu, *became sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him*. Because of the wrath that was cast upon the sin-bearer, His righteousness can be imputed to those who believe. When faith is placed in the Lord Jesus, the Heavenly Father looks on one who was stained with sin, but sees one who is now made righteous because of Jehovah Tsidkenu. Hallelujah!

J. Ekis