

Using the Gifts

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith;

1 Corinthians 12:6

The wise men who brought gifts to the Christ child spawned a tradition shared at Christmas time for centuries. Giving and sharing gifts to show the love of Christ plays a large part in celebrating Christmas. Toys, clothes, books, tools, and money are some of the common gifts that are given. Whatever the gift, the recipient anxiously looks for an opportunity to use the gift. Kids boisterously playing with a new toy is a familiar memory of Christmases past. A gathering after Christmas is usually filled with people wearing some new clothing item they received as a gift. Stores become crowded after Christmas with people who will spend a cash gift or gift card for something they desire. There certainly is greater satisfaction in using the gift than just having it as a possession.

Our Lord has endowed to his children, spiritual gifts that are to be used in His service. Because people have such diversities, God equips the body of Christ with various gifts to advance His kingdom while helping to edify others. We don't get to pick and choose what gifts we would like to have, rather God in His infinite wisdom distributes the gifts to everyone severally as He wills. We must recognize and utilize the gifts given to us so we might best serve Him. By allowing God to order our steps, we can expect opportunities to arise to demonstrate God's love by applying our particular gift. Each experience should contribute to refining that gift so the Lord is truly glorified. Believers should also be aware of the devil's plan of diminishing the effectiveness of the gift. If we hide behind the shadow of the cross, we can avoid the pitfall of pride, which makes our efforts a work of the flesh, nullifying the true work of God through His Spirit. There also should be no jealousy concerning what gifts God chooses to bestow on others. God has made each individual for His purpose, and it is best for believers not to compare themselves with others. God is fair and equitable in His distribution of gifts to His children. He expects each to do their best with what they have been given.

Every day of this New Year will present situations in which we are to fulfill the purpose for which we were made. God gives us a realm of ministry so that we may expand the influence of the Gospel. Each person, as a member of the body, works in unison to glorify our Maker. No gift is more significant than another, but each is meant for the individual to accomplish God's will for their life.

J. Ekis

Lovingkindness

*Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses.
Psalm 107:28*

This statement is found four times in some form in this psalm. In some cases, it comes after a cycle of men following their sinful, rebellious, or foolish ways and then facing the consequences. In others, it may be a result of life in a fallen world, where troubles naturally come. In our text, it seems to be associated with natural disaster that could occur in the life of mariners. In every case there is trouble. In each instance, it describes how the LORD heard their cry and delivered them out of their distresses. We might be quick to judge the rebellious or foolish cases as deserving of their troubles, unless we are wise enough to consider our own experience and recognize our need to be thankful for God's patient lovingkindness in such instances. Thus, the psalmist concludes, "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the LORD" (verse 43).

The longer we live, the more we find that this life is full of troubles for each of us. Some are obviously of our own making, but others do come simply in the course of living in the global result of the curse that started in the garden. In any case, whatever the cause of the trouble, we are wise to observe these things and realize that the only recourse we have is to throw ourselves and our situation before the mercy of the LORD and remember His lovingkindness. Though He has the most and only right even to point to those situations where our trouble is self-induced, yet His lovingkindness has been shown even in those cases, as observed in this psalm. We can therefore be thankful that when we are at the end of our own devices, and actually before we ever try to exercise our own devices, our only real alternative is to cry unto Him in our trouble and remember His lovingkindness.

Demeanor and Encouragement

*The light of the eyes rejoiceth the heart: and a good report maketh the bones fat.
— Proverbs 15:30 —*

The human countenance is an amazing thing. Unless willfully constrained, it reveals the attitude of the heart. This can be observed most easily in children who are not skilled in the art of emotional intelligence, or in the elderly who are often beyond caring about the proprieties of social conduct! Yes, older folks and kids pretty much tell us what they are thinking without saying a word. Humans can and do frequently express anger, joy, fear, frustration, disgust, apprehension, appreciation, etc. absent any verbal communication at all. Add to this astounding characteristic the art and skill of verbal utterance, and it becomes remarkably clear that as human beings, we possess in our countenance and voice either the most dangerous combination of weapons or the most exquisite tools of edification. Our demeanor and our words matter greatly. They carry significant import with regard to the genuineness of our witness as ambassadors for Christ.

At fifty years of age, I have come to realize that I still have great strides to make in this area. Being analytical by nature, I personally have the tendency to permit my facial expressions to relay the at-times torturous nature of the wrestling match that is taking place in my brain as I calculate, analyze, and assess various thoughts about this or that, trying to turn ambiguity into something more concrete and understandable. The problem? What I'm reasoning through at any given moment is likely temporal in nature and therefore unrelated to the abiding joy within the deepest part of my soul. I inwardly ask, if I am standing across from myself and seeing what others see, do I behold a countenance that is enlightened and unburdened by the worries and cares of this life, or would I be observing what appears to be a man bound by some kind of concern?

And then there is the power of my words. How do I choose them? How do I use them? Are they mundane or meaningful? Do they carry help and assistance, or do they simply commiserate around the common effects of the curse to which we humans are all alike subject? I am an ambassador from Heaven. I carry with me the greatest of news – that God loves us and longs for us. Do I act accordingly and bring a good report that is saturated in that reality, or am I too focused on the here and now to “get to that”?

Our text makes me think of the ultimate example of our Jesus. What it must have been like to converse with Him! How He must have shown by His countenance the riches of God's love before ever speaking a word, and then how those words, once finally spoken, must have swept away all preoccupation with any present distress as His light and life uplifted and encouraged the soul! Blessed Lord, grant us the secret of such demeanor and mastery of conversation, that all may know that God is in us of a truth! — D. Murcek

The Great Apostasy

II Timothy 3:2-3: For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good

The biblical warning of men becoming lovers of themselves seems hauntingly relevant today. From husbands and wives who prioritize their desires above their families to the celebrity Pastor phenomenon where the leader becomes more prominent than the teachings of Jesus Christ. The spotlight on self is blinding us to the needs of others. It is the new religion that is forming. The religion of self and the religion of pleasure. The religion of pleasure isn't new fallen humanity has always been drawn to it. Today many worship at the altar of pleasure. We live in an era dominated by Pleasure Seekers rather than God Seekers. An era that embraces the m"antra eat ,drink and be merry for tomorrow we die". The religion of pleasure is really the worship of the flesh. We must be vigilant because our very nature is attracted to pleasure.

There are those who attempt to pretend that there is no pleasure associated with sin. There is a pleasure that comes with sin pleasure. There is pleasure in fornication in adultery in sexual immorality. There is satisfaction in sowing discord and seeking revenge. Drugs and alcohol too offer their own forms of pleasure. Sin in its many forms can be enticing ITimothy 5:6 "but she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth". An ungodly person who is living their life for pleasure is alive but is as good as dead since they are not living for God. The pleasure of sin deceives because it never lasts. The pleasure of sin always attempts to make you want more and more and more more and more, The world is going to worship at the altar of pleasure in 2024. The religion of pleasure is selfish it pushes you to put your sinful desires above the well-being and the future of your loved ones.

Fall in love with your family put them before pleasure. Fall in love with your children put them before pleasure. Think about how your sin can destroy your family. Think about how your sin could cause a division in your family. Pleasure can pull you away from your responsibilities. It can pull you away from your duties as a husband or a wife. Fall in love with your husband .Fall in love with your wife. Fall in love with your children, they are worth more than the pleasure of sin. The pleasure of sin is deceptive, it will deceive you into thinking you can live a double life. You can't- you really can't! What secret pleasure do you have that your husband or wife or family know nothing about? Be sure your sin will find you out- be absolutely certain that your sin will find you out be sure your sin will find you out!

As we move forward the need to be vigilant has never been greater as we stand on the cusp of 2024 the trends of global unity, technological advancement, spiritual apostasy and moral decay are more than mere observations, they serve as cautionary signposts urging us to reflect, discern, and act based on our convictions. While the world may veer towards a new world order, believers must find strength in their faith and scripture. We must remain steadfast, nurturing our relationship with God and reinforcing the foundations of our beliefs.

Pastor

Support System

The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand.

Psalm 37:23,24

So many things in life need a support system to function properly. Trees need their root system, the strength of rivers depends on their tributaries, animal populations require a food supply, and even modern machinery depends on a power source. Building structures need foundations to stand, while societies need laws to survive. With people, a spiritual belief that includes a strong morality code coupled with quality education and a solid family unit are ingredients that help support a successful community.

As believers, we also need a strong support system, and thankfully God has provided us with one. First and foremost, He is the foundation upon which our life is built. *For no other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ* (Cor. 3:11), is a reminder of the sole importance in the believer's life. The foundation of our life is Jesus Christ, without whom nothing else really matters. Gaining all the world and losing our soul, which is secured by the sacrificial death of the Savior, will profit nothing. Because of this foundation, we truly *live and move, and have our being*. Having the Lord in our life is infinitely better than having the whole world as your friend yet being without God. We also have the support of God's Word as we traverse this life. When we hear His teachings and apply them, we will wisely build our lives and not be negatively impacted. The scriptures shed light on the path we are to take and where we are ultimately headed. God provides necessary wisdom through His Word that enables believers to have the spiritual insights needed to make better choices. In times of testing, both light afflictions or severe trials His children find hope and comfort through the promises of His Word. In times of change and confusion, His Word brings stability and clarity. Believers have the promise that even though heaven and earth will pass away, His Word never will. The support of the brethren is something the Lord supplies to help His disciples through times of dark waters. Sometimes, simply knowing that a brother or sister in the Lord has gone through a similar trial brings a ray of sunshine in the darkest of times. An encouraging word or a shared prayer can make all the difference in the world for the one who is overwhelmed. Just knowing that there is another who knows what you are going through helps a person to know that they are not alone. The proverbs tell us there is even *a friend that sticketh closer than a brother*. (Proverbs 18:24). Spiritual friends can also help keep each other on track in following the Lord. *Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labor. For if one fall, the one will lift up his fellow*. (Ecclesiastes 4:9,10)

Ultimately, our greatest support is the Creator of heaven and earth, the Lord our God. He holds us with His everlasting arms, and there is nothing that can pluck us out of His hands. Trust in and look for His support today knowing that He will be with us always, even to the end of the world.

J. Ekis

Posterity prayer

Praise ye the LORD. Blessed is the man that feareth the LORD, that delighteth greatly in his commandments.

Psalm 112:1

For those who want the blessings of the Lord upon our posterity, this psalm provides a prayer list of attributes for us to request for them. The first is that they fear the Lord, not in a way that only does right for fear of punishment, but with an awe that delights in His powerful holiness that He graciously extends towards us, in giving us commandments designed for our good and well-being in body, soul, and spirit. The next is that they would be mighty among those on earth, characterized by uprightness. As explained by the Savior, the easy way is the broad way to destruction, but we pray for our seed that they would draw on His might to walk in that narrow way of life to which the Lord calls His own, that they would know the resulting blessings of the Lord.

Then also we pray that they would know wealth and riches, not just of earthly gain, but the true spiritual riches, that they might be forward to share both with others, because they know that their own righteousness is forever, being established in the gift of righteousness by Jesus Christ, and not of their own doing. Therefore, because of the light given to their souls, they will exhibit graciousness, much compassion, and righteousness in their character. Our prayer is that they will exhibit these characteristics in practical ways, such as showing favor and lending to those in need; yet not in a frivolous and irresponsible way, but with discretion and discernment in their stewardship.

While there is also much uncertainty in their generation, we pray for their hearts to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might, not being afraid of rumors or enemies, because of a heart that is fixed, unmovable, trusting in the Lord, and always abounding in His work. This will include the work of dispersing to the poor in both material and spiritual blessings, allowing the Lord to be honored in what they do. We pray that this work of the Lord will be so established within their spirits and deeds that they will be humbly unaffected by any resulting honor, or by any detraction from the wicked. May the Lord bring all these blessings upon our posterity, for His glory, and for their benefit. Amen.

Discipleship

Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.

– John 8:31 –

Salvation is an all-encompassing experience. It pertains to our whole being – body, soul, and spirit. Our soul was rescued, our spirit has been renewed, and our body will be glorified. We are a people of a triumphant future possessing a meaningful past and a formative present.

This reality of our redemption creates a juxtaposition for us in real time. We are engaged in necessary daily spiritual battles in a war that has already been won. A critical component impacting our earthly pilgrimage as believers is understanding that while we cannot be lost, we can nonetheless be rendered impotent and ineffectual. We must therefore be in a constant state of striving to enter the Kingdom of Heaven in order to fulfill our Savior's purpose in us. This continuance is the keystone of true discipleship. No one possessing a genuine born-again nature "was" a disciple. If our salvation is real, we "are" disciples, and "will be" disciples until the day we go home.

Many folks make starts for the Kingdom, but then fizzle out. They may be well-intentioned, but they are often not well-executed, and frequently not well-thought out. Emotion can be a necessary contributor to coming to Christ, but it will not carry us through the salvation experience. Resolution is required. Jesus said that we need to count the cost. There is a life-and-death seriousness to following Him. We must not only mean it, but also be prepared for what's coming. There is a forsaking of everything else in following Christ – a preparedness to lose houses, and family, and friends, and land, and possessions, and status, and everything that the world has to offer. There is a crucifying of self – a daily mortification – for the disciple. True believers possess a Jacob-like tenacity, stubbornly and desperately hanging onto God no matter what might be happening around them, or in them. Disciples know what our Lord has said, but we go back to those instructions over and over again so as to ensure that we are personally aligned with His will. Disciples storm heaven daily, because though yesterday's provision was wonderful, today's need is much greater. His way is a right now matter. His will is a pressing obligation. It must be our always present preoccupation to follow Him, no matter what.

Let us continue in our Lord's Word today... --- *D. Murcek*

Daniel's Vicarious Identification with the Sins of His People

As it is written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us: yet made we not our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth. Daniel 9:13

Times of trouble should be met with deep introspection. Though not directly responsible for the judgments that fell upon his nation, Daniel nobly adopts the plural pronouns *US*, *WE*, and *OUR* when reflecting on the cause for the plight that had befallen the captive nation. True intercession is characterized by vicarious identification with the object of its petition. Our Savior "became sin for us who knew no sin" and "in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people".

The perilous times in which we find ourselves call for a similar admission. Before our eyes, we are witnessing the dissolution of the land of the free. This ruination has been progressively corroding the moral fiber of a once resolutely Christian nation and "if the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?". Likewise, Daniel witnessed the moral laxity of his time and lamented that in the face of such decline "we made not our prayer before the Lord our God". The judgment came but not without warning. Elijah, Micaiah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and a host of those who were valiant for the truth gave out the rebuke and also with it, the remedy, but the warnings went unheeded.

As Christians, we may be able to argue that we are not directly guilty of the abortions, the virulent sexual perversions, the rampant violence, and the political corruption that has brought the judgment of God upon us. But Christians must accept our responsibilities as Daniel did his. We are the salt of the nation. Was it that our anemic prayer lives and our effete evangelism has failed to turn men from their wicked ways? Could judgment have been averted had we been more forward with our intercessions and the understanding of the truth? Did it not grieve the heart of God in the days of Isaiah when "He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor"?

These calamitous times must be met with determined, intercessory prayer. This is no time for indolence nor for apathy. We have had this unique self-quarantine where so many of our time-consuming frivolities have been stripped away. We are left with the luxury of free time to understand the truth, turn from our iniquities and make our prayer before the Lord our God.

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

A Lesson from the Nine

**And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?
There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger.**

Luke 17:17,18

So, who were the nine and what lessons can they teach us? The one definite from the text is that there were ten lepers. The common bond that brought them together was the feared disease of leprosy. Leprosy is an infectious disease that affects the nervous system, skin, and nasal passages and is characterized by ulcerations, and loss of sensation that leads to traumatic tissue damage. People afflicted with it were cast out from the general population and often congregated with fellow lepers. Hence, in this account, the lepers stood afar off and cried out for Jesus to have mercy. How they came to know to call out to Jesus, assuredly was the result of the reputation the Lord earned from previous healings he had performed. With their common bond of affliction, they jointly called out to Jesus, asking Him to have mercy on their condition. Seeing the lepers in their affliction, the Lord told them to show themselves to the priest, who had the authority to declare them cleansed. Upon discovering their healing, only one of the ten interrupted his journey to the priest so he could return to thank Jesus. The Lord then specifically notes that the one who returned was a Samaritan, which would seem to indicate that the other nine were Jews. The outcast Samaritan did show himself to the highest priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, bringing with him a worshipful offering of thanks. The nine on that day had the same encounter with the Master but chose a different path than the stranger.

Why did the nine not return to give thanks? Were they so overjoyed with their new lease on life that they just ran to their families, or did they dutifully go directly to show themselves to the priest? Possibly, they just saw Jesus as one who had the power to perform miracles, and not as the Messiah. Were they so enthused that fellowship with other people was now possible, they forgot the One who made them well. They could return to what their life was before they contracted leprosy, but they missed the opportunity to find true eternal life that is only found in Jesus. If they were leprosy-free for the rest of their lives on this earth, they missed the greater blessing of falling at the feet of the Lord and finding spiritual healing.

As believers, there will be many times when we will have opportunities to be like the nine, or will we be like the Samaritan? In those times when God does something for us in a powerful way, will we, like the nine, go our way, or will we fall at the feet of Jesus and give Him thanks? Today is another day the Lord has given us. Take time to fall at His feet and give Him thanks. ~J. Ekis

Blessed boundaries

And I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy precepts.

Psalm 119:45

There are those who view liberty as being free from all constraints. However, this simple verse provides a higher view of liberty that is consistent with God's word. The psalmist with this statement reveals a divine gift of understanding the foundation of true liberty. He knows that the precepts of the Lord comprise that foundation. The more a person seeks, out of a sincere desire, the precepts of the Lord, the more understanding is gained of their benefits. The precepts that He provides for us to live by form a safe boundary within which to walk. The illustration is given of a child living in a home near the road. Although the parents may allow the child freedom to play in the yard outside, the yard with a fence around it provides more freedom to both the child and the parent. A yard with no fence requires more constraint by the parent for the child, to keep the child in the way that is safe from the danger posed by the roadway. The child in a fenced yard is freer to roam within the safe boundary.

Seeking to know the Lord's precepts provides us the spiritual and practical guidance needed to live within the boundaries of their truth, so that we have the freedom to live and walk in this world guarded by the fence of understanding what is good and bad for our lives and souls. God has given His precepts, not to keep us from the good that He has in store, but to protect us from the dangers that we might ignorantly pursue to our own detriment. Although the world and the devil may tempt us to think that the Lord is withholding something from us, just as the serpent tempted our first parents in the garden, we can know that He has given us the blessing of His precepts as guides for our spiritual growth and maturity, so that we may freely live and pursue the abundant life that He promised. Jesus said, "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:36). And this freedom is enabled by the fulfilment of the promise, "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people" (Hebrews 8:10). Let us therefore walk at liberty, as we seek and love His precepts written in our hearts.

The Gospel!

And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.

– Revelation 14:6-7 –

Our text is astounding. In the midst of God's age-ending, world-cleansing, curse-eradicating wrath, He remembers mercy – even to the point of publishing the Good News by the supernatural voice of a member of the heavenly host, offering recalcitrant mankind one final chance to flee for refuge to the hope He has laid before them. The New Testament brings out such texture and hue of this “everlasting gospel” that it is impossible to miss why those who do not obey its gracious offer are punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord (1 Thess. 1:8). Let us relish for a few moments the many facets of the Good News that has changed our lives and eternity as believers...

This Gospel is the Triune Godhead's offer to mankind. It is characterized as the Gospel of God, of His Son, of His Christ, and of the Holy Ghost (1 Thess. 1:5; 2:2; 3:2). It is the Good News of an everlasting Kingdom (Mt. 9:35) which is universal in its expanse and scope. The invitation to this Kingdom is extended to the entire world (Mt. 24:14) and carries especially the promise of recompense and reward to the broken, destitute, maligned, and down-trodden offspring of Adam's race (Lk. 4:18).

It is our peculiar possession as believers (Paul called it “my gospel” and “our gospel” (Rom. 2:16; 16:26)), to which we are constrained to devote our very being. It is worthy of our labor in its fields, our embracing of its bonds, our defending it against heresy, and if necessary, the hazarding of our very lives for its advancement (Philippians 1:17; Mark 8:35; 2 Timothy 1:8; Philemon 1:13; Philippians 4:3).

Why would we be so disposed? Because this Gospel is one of wonderful and matchless grace (Acts 20:24) that brought salvation to us as lost sinners (Eph. 1:13). It bestows an enduring peace in the heart (Rom. 10:15) and a steadfast hope in the soul (Colossians 1:23). It brings life and immortality to light (2 Timothy 1:10), establishes us in the truth (Colossians 1:5), and promises us eternal glory (1 Timothy 1:11). While we await the advent of its Kingdom, it adopts us into the family of God and creates an everlasting fellowship of spirit amongst all who respond to its message (Philippians 1:5).

Let us praise the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost for this most transformative message – the Gospel of Jesus Christ! — D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

The Rise of Uberman

Daniel 11:36: And the king shall do according to his will; and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvellous things against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the indignation be accomplished: for that that is determined shall be done.

Uberman literally means "overman, a superman" and was coined in 1883 by the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche and was a character in his novel *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. The *Urbemensch* was meant to be an ideal future human and an ultimate goal for humanity. Hitler was glad to co-opt the symbolism and justify his model for the superior and evolved Aryan race. It would seem that Superman, an American superhero created for DC Comics by writer Jerry Siegel, was an adaptation of Nietzsche's theme. But for that matter, one must also consider that the concept of man becoming a god has its roots in the Garden of Eden.

The sinister machinations of the devil include the manifestation of the "Man of Sin" "who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God." (See II Thessalonians 2). There is an endless list of would-be supermen who have appeared as pharaohs, potentates, popes, and presidents, who promised to lead humanity into the utopian golden age if everyone would submit to their absolute sovereignty. In every case, their kingdoms have rapidly devolved into a dystopian failure.

The demented genius of the Antichrist will convince unsaved humanity to receive the mark of the beast to insure unhindered access to necessary goods and services. Satan knows "all that a man hath will he give for his life". Those who have nothing more to live for than the temporal issues of this life will willingly sacrifice their soul for a "pottage of lentils". (Genesis 25:33-34).

There are those like the sottish children of Israel who heard the oration of King Agrippa and responded by saying, "It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost" Acts 12:22-23. As believers let us not be satisfied with "lesser gods" with their hollow, panacean promises of hope and change. There is only one Superman- the man Christ Jesus. He came into the world to seek and save us from our sins. In contrast to the false christ, he humbled himself and directed all glory to God.

Have a Blessed Day,

Pastor

All Day and Every Day

Let not thine heart envy sinners: but be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long.

Proverbs 23:17

Because God's commitment to the believer is eternally binding, the believer's commitment to Him should be the same. Faith in Christ is not only for times of convenience when a need arises, but it is to be woven into the fabric of a believer's life. The true disciple's faith impacts their thoughts, words, and deeds. It should influence decisions and reactions, whether in church, at home, or in any activity. Today we look at some verses that show what we as Christians should demonstrate *all the day long*.

Proverbs 23:17 which is today's text, tells us that we should be in the fear of the Lord all day long. This fear emanates from understanding God's awesomeness and who He is. It is not a fear that cripples a believer from attempting to live life; but a reverential respect of the Holy One who loved us enough to pay for the sins of the world. This fear is the beginning of knowledge and will help us depart from evil.

Psalm 25:5 ... *for thou art the God of my salvation, on thee do I wait all the day long.*

Our trust in Him for salvation is also to continue to be applied to every situation that arises. God's promise as well as His answers to prayer are not always immediately fulfilled. God in His infinite wisdom is very specific about a time and a place to meet our needs. He rules from the realm of eternity and His ways are not our ways. If we wait on Him, He will renew our strength.

Psalm 71:15 *My mouth shall shew forth thy righteousness and thy salvation all the day,*

How we speak as Christians should show outwardly the inward presence and work of God. Our words should be seasoned with grace. We should also use the opportunities the Lord gives us to share the divine words that bring the light of the knowledge of Jesus Christ and His salvation so that He can make manifest the savour of His knowledge by us in every place.

Psalm 89:16 *In thy name shall they rejoice all the day:*

Joy is one of the fruits of the Spirit and should be a trademark of a believer. The Lord told us that in the world we will have tribulation: but to be of good cheer, for He has overcome the world. There are many burdens to bear on this side of eternity, but if we take time to reflect on God's infinite love and that our names are written in heaven, we can find joy in the midst of trouble.

Psalm 119:97 *O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day.*

God's word is not just to be read, but to be thought upon and obeyed. The blessing is not in reading it, but in keeping it in our hearts and allowing it to influence our actions. Joshua reminds us we are to meditate in it day and night, that we may observe to do all that is written therein: then our way will be prosperous and we will have good success.

As we implement these truths in our lives all day and every day, we should also be encouraged by knowing that our Lord and Savior is our Keeper who neither slumbers nor sleeps. All day long He is our God forever and ever: He will be our guide even unto death.

J. Ekis

Help

*My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth.
Psalm 121:2*

This very familiar psalm reminds us that the LORD is our powerful helper, unto whom we can look for help at all times. It is notable how often in the scriptures the power of the LORD is represented in reference to creation. Should we ever consider a source for help other than Him, the simple conclusion is that there is no other who has made heaven and earth, and all that is in them. There is nowhere else in the world, not even the hills full of the false gods of the idolaters to which the psalmist refers, where we should look for help. There is only one helper, and He is our Creator. All others that He may employ to bring us aid can be appreciated, but we must always remember that they are subservient to Him, who created them also.

As He is described here as the help, keeper, shade (protector), and preserver of Israel, so the heathen justified by faith in Christ Jesus and blessed with faithful Abraham (Galatians 3:9) may also lift our eyes unto Him for all these things. His keeping power is described here to not allow our foot to be moved. This figure is reflected in the apostle's exhortation to be "stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord" (I Corinthians 15:58), as we understand the power of His resurrection to deliver us from eternal death. As a shade to protect from the heat of the sun, so the LORD will protect His own from them who would harm them (I Peter 3:13). Note in this regard that, in His sovereign plan, He may yet allow us to suffer for righteousness' sake (I Peter 3:14) as we follow in His steps, yet even through such circumstances He will keep us unto Himself. So finally He is described as the preserver of the soul. Even as Jesus spoke of those who choose to follow Him, "Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it" (Luke 17:33), the apostle Paul could confidently say "And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (II Timothy 4:18). Let us also confidently add our Amen to his.

Heart Matters – Part I

A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.

– Ezekiel 36:26 –

The faith we hold as believers is a matter of the heart. This mysterious spiritual organ therefore needs to be both thoroughly understood and constantly maintained to ensure that our outward lives align with our inner principles. The heart in its natural state is altogether unlovely. Bible-believing people cannot possibly miss this truth. Below are but a handful of the myriad of scriptural passages that warn us about the natural state of our hearts. The human heart is described by God as...

Deceitful and wicked: The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? – Jeremiah 17:9

Irreverent and self-willed: O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children forever! – Deuteronomy 5:29

Self-righteous: Speak not thou in thine heart, after that the Lord thy God hath cast them out from before thee, saying, For my righteousness the Lord hath brought me in to possess this land: but for the wickedness of these nations the Lord doth drive them out from before thee. – Deuteronomy 9:4

Duplicitous: They speak vanity everyone with his neighbour: with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak. – Psalm 12:2

Perverse: A man shall be commended according to his wisdom: but he that is of a perverse heart shall be despised. – Proverbs 12:8

Bitter: The heart knoweth his own bitterness; and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy. - Proverbs 14:10

Grossly defiled: But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man. – Matthew 15:18-20

Foolish and dark: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. – Romans 1:21

Hard and impenitent: But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God – Romans 2:5

We need to be honest about who and what we are – what that fleshly nature in us is all about. The above verses help us to do that. But there is good news, too. Our text in Ezekiel promises a new heart to the believer! We will explore that truth next week... --- D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Discouragement

And the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way. And the people spake against God. Numbers 21:4-5

Life in an imperfect world is fraught with challenges. Maintaining one's sanguinity amid multiplied trials can prove to be difficult, if not altogether impossible. Satan has intentionally crafted impediments that he has deceptively placed in "the way" to provoke believers into forsaking the Living God. Before believers were first called Christians at Antioch, they were called the "people of this way" (Acts 9:2, 24:14) It was meant to be a pejorative epithet, but it held an ironic significance since Jesus said, "I am the Way".

It is an incalculable error to suppose that our earthly journey would be without some difficulty. The Master warned us when we embarked on "the way" that "In the world, ye shall have tribulation". This place, where believers are denominated as "strangers and pilgrims", is infested with snares, nettles, and bogs, obstructing the path and causing distress to those who travel through it.

In John Bunyan's seminal allegory *Pilgrim's Progress*, he places Christian in the miry bog. "It is the descent whither the scum and filth that attends conviction for sin doth continually run; and therefore it is called the Slough of Despond. For still, as the sinner is awakened about his lost condition, there arises in his soul many fears and doubts, and discouraging apprehensions, which all of them get together, and settle in this place: and this is the reason of the badness of this ground". At that PLIABLE began to be offended, and angrily said to his fellow, "Is this the happiness you have told me of all this while? If we have such ill speed at our first setting out, what may we expect 'twixt this and our journey's end? If I get out again with my life, you shall possess the brave country alone." And with that he gave a desperate struggle or two, and got out of the mire on that side of the slough which was next to his own house: so away he went, and CHRISTIAN saw him no more.

As we journey on this narrow way, expect some trials and troubles but never give in to discouragement. The devil is hoping that discouragement will lead to infidelity and then to "speaking against God". The Master will lead us out into "pleasant places" Ps 16:6 if we chafe not at these disturbances." We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;" II Corinthians 4:8-9.

Pastor

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

Divine Replacement

To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of Joy for mourning, the garment of praise for heaviness...

Isaiah 61:3

In today's text, the prophet Isaiah speaks of the future when the Messiah sets up His kingdom on earth, and He will take away mourning and the spirit of heaviness, replacing them with praise and beauty. Here the word beauty implies a beautiful headdress or ornament. This beautiful headpiece would replace ashes on the head which were a symbol of mourning. In the Old Testament, Job, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Jonah all refer to ashes used by people to demonstrate their deep sense of mourning. Whether it be the loss of a loved one or some great tragedy ashes were employed to broadcast a person's extreme sorrow. When Messiah sets up his kingdom, the nation Israel will be restored, erasing the centuries of oppression and alienation. They will experience the joy and beauty of a new life of true fellowship with their God.

In His first coming, though He was rejected by His own, Jesus brought the qualities of the Kingdom. He preached good tidings unto the meek, he bound up the brokenhearted, proclaimed liberty to the captives, and opened the prison to them that were bound. Jesus' message and His healing touch dynamically changed lives for the better. The physical restoration would still be temporary until the day when God will remove the curse. Still, the spiritual aspect of the lives of those who accepted Him was eternally impacted. Jesus removed the mourning of the widow of Nain, Jairus, Mary, and Martha when he raised their loved ones from the dead. The woman at the well had her sadness of endless searching for a fulfilling relationship replaced when she found refreshment in the living water that Jesus offered. Bartimaeus was no longer burdened by a life of begging when the Lord restored his sight. The woman taken in adultery was on the verge of being stoned to death when Jesus set her free to go and sin no more. And the many nameless others who were drawn to the message that Jesus brought had hopelessness replaced by the spiritually healing message of the gospel.

Today, Jesus can still take away the ashes of our mourning and replace them with the beauty of His presence and purpose. Many situations in this life can cause emotional pain and sorrow that crushes the spirit. The comfort and compassion of the brethren is a balm to the soul, but it only goes so far. Praise God that the One who bore our griefs and carried our sorrows knows the depths of life's pains, and with his gentle touch brings the Oil of Joy to the burdened soul. May His garment of praise replace any heaviness we feel today.

~ J. Ekis

Blessings of fear

Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways.

Psalm 128:1

What wonderful promises are described in this psalm for those that fear the LORD. The clear connection in this opening verse with the fear of the LORD is the resulting life that walks in His ways. To such a walk it attaches the blessings of enjoying the fruit of one's labor, happiness and well-being, family life, and a peaceful nation. Simply considered, to walk in His way is to live according to God's plan and purpose for mankind. His ways, which are described for us clearly in His word, are for the purpose of blessing us, because He who made us knows what is best for us. Thus, to fear the LORD means not to be so afraid that we run away from Him, but to reverence His directives as we understand His great lovingkindness, which instructs us in the ways that will bring happiness and well-being to our souls. When we depart from those ways, we should expect the opposite result, such that the designed consequences are something to be feared. In such cases, we fear the LORD because in His love He will chasten us, as the writer to the Hebrews expands: "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Hebrews 12:11).

The culture of our current day might miss the blessings promised here because of a misunderstanding of this fear. One facet of such misunderstanding is to wrongly assume that God's nature is selfish like our own. This results in arrogant men thinking that the self-sufficient Creator needs our obedient worship, and that He therefore coerces it through fear of punishment. However, when we rightly understand the righteous love of God, we know that He needs nothing from us, but instead in unselfish kindness prescribes the way of blessing for our lives and souls, as He bestows the power and result of His righteousness in us. Why then should we not fear to depart from that right way? Thus, faith in, love for, and fear of Him all work together for the blessing of His people. Let us therefore fear the LORD and, by His grace, walk in His ways, to realize the conclusion: "Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD" (Psalm 128:4).