

# Pastors Thoughts of the Week

## Continuing

*Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved. Acts 27:31*

Apostasy in the church has reached endemic proportions especially among the young. The son of a world-renowned pastor now boasts of a following of 900,000 young people who eagerly consume his blasphemous excoriations of the Bible and fundamental Christian doctrine. This arrogant reviler jumped ship at the age of 19 and now makes a lucrative business of “debunking” evangelicalism while publicly dishonoring his father. No one automatically inherits faith from their parents. Salvation is obtained by a volitional act of belief. For a season we may try to please a parent, spouse, or peer group by putting on a masquerade of faith, but superficial belief cannot be sustained for any protracted time.

The doctrine of continuity asserts that the true believer will “abide in the ship”. Jesus asked the twelve *“Will ye also go away?”* and Peter answered *“to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life and we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.”* Judas was notably silent! When put to the Master’s test the believer, who is sealed with the Holy Spirit, will always aver allegiance to Christ. Those who *“draw back unto perdition”* like Lot’s wife ultimately prove that they had a deficient faith. They, like the seed sown on stoney ground, *“for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away”*.

When the fisherman pulls in a full net of fish it is almost inevitable that some of the fish brought aboard somehow wriggle and writhe until they flop back into the sea. In John Bunyan’s classic *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, Pliable begins the journey to the Celestial City but is easily discouraged when the trials of the Slough of Despond envelop him.

Let us then follow the incipient example of that first church who *“continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers”*.

Have a blessed week,

*Pastor*

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

## Fight or Flight

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*The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion.  
– Proverbs 28:1 –*

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This life is fraught with dangers, snares, and torments of all shapes and sizes. Like as the Lord makes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, so the Enemy seeks to persecute and molest every fallen son and daughter of Adam. And because he is the god of this world, one thing is certain in all the variableness of life under the sun – trouble is coming.

Sadly, those who know not God possess neither shelter in time of storm nor reservoir from whence to draw strength in the day of difficulty. There is perhaps no greater tell-tale of this pathetic exposure than demeanor and body language when forcibly faced with mortality. When next you visit a funeral home, take a moment to lovingly observe the lost visitors. Discomfort and fear will be on abundant display, most frequently manifested via an over-compensatory bravado or aloofness that silently screams for release from the encounter. Because there is no anchor of the soul, they nervously await the soonest exit while they socially flail, making every plausible attempt to ignore the ominous reality – that one day soon it will be their turn to be the silent, still casket-occupant of such a room.

Whether facing death itself, or illness or financial stress, or whatever other malady-of-the-moment, unregenerate men and women tend to seek for either compromise or release from the threat. But not so the righteous! For the believer there is a recursively stable footing to be found in time of trouble. The believer has already secured victory over life's great eternal threat, so any temporal menace becomes a mouse. Because the Holy Ghost resides within the breast, great boldness characterizes the soul's response, even and especially in life's otherwise most torturous moments. The heart may become overwhelmed for a moment, but only until faith is summoned to the fore. Yes, the child of God can face each and every agitating circumstance head-on, securely resting in the fact that the Savior has him enveloped in His protective care.

Burdened reader, is some trouble taunting you today? Has Hell marshalled yet another assault against you or your loved ones? There is no need to run and hide. Simply remember Who holds you. Then with lion-like audacity, confidently press toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

## Remember! Jesus Prayed

*And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray*

*Luke 11:1*

And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. (Luke 6:12) And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place and there prayed. (Mark 1:35) And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone. (Matthew 14:23) And it came to pass, as he was alone praying, his disciples were with him: and he asked them, saying, Whom say the people that I am? (Luke 9:18) And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. (Luke 9:28) I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. (John 17:9) I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. (John 17:15) Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. (Matthew 26:36) And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. (Luke 22:44)

Prayer is a curious thing! On one hand, it can be easy and as natural as breathing, yet at other times it can be as difficult as climbing the highest mountain. It can be our greatest resource to draw on or to neglect. Sometimes our prayers ascend the heights of heaven, yet at other times they seem incapable of penetrating the ceiling. There are no boundaries to prayer whether short or long, loud or silent. We can feel like we are learning much about prayer, while at the same time feeling like we haven't even scratched the surface of its potential and power. Prayer can be uttered from the seasoned saint or a desperate sinner. One thing is certain from reading the scriptures, Jesus prayed and we are admonished to pray.

As Jesus said: *men ought always to pray, and not to faint*. So, no matter what our circumstances, whether trial or tribulation, abounding or abased, always remember, the only begotten Son of God, our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ prayed! And so should we!

~ J. Ekis

## Majesty and Reverence

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*I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty, and of thy wondrous works.  
– Psalm 145:5 –*

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Something dangerous has happened in the Church of Jesus Christ that requires the attention of every child of God. Because Christendom has quaffed from the poisoned waters of the world's psychological torrent, many genuine Christians have adopted an unbalanced view of the God to whom they profess to belong. A frequently lopsided and softened perspective of the nature and character of God is winning the day in many assemblies, thereby weakening the faith as well as the usefulness of many a believer. *Sadly, we have over-familiarized the majestic God of the Bible.*

There is no doubt that every Christian can revel in the fact that God is both personal and relational. He has categorically declared us to have been adopted into His family (Eph. 1:5; Gal. 4:5) and openly invites us to think of Him as our *Abba*, or Daddy (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). Jesus Himself taught us to approach God on these familial terms by continuously referencing Him as our Father and declaring at His resurrection, "...I ascend to my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." (John 20:17)

But the blessed fact that God is a loving heavenly Father does not negate the many other verities of His character. He is also august, holy, just, true, and righteous. In short, our God is *majestic*. These truths are not contradictory. Our Father to whom we run for every need is also our regal Sovereign to whom we must give an account. *Therefore, our deportment before Him ought to exhibit both truths.* In human terms, our Daddy does not supervise a garbage dump, he rules a kingdom. Our discussions with Him in prayer, our discourse about Him with fellow saints, our songs to Him in adoration, the preaching of His gospel – every aspect of our worship and service – ought to reverently reflect His majesty.

The Laodicean age in which we live is beckoning believers to compromise and soften our perspective of Who God is. Let us remember the inspired words of the psalmist, "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him." (Psalm 89:7). By properly reverencing our Father, we not only hallow His name and reflect His majesty, but also inoculate ourselves as a people against the devil's subtle infiltration into the assembly of the saints.

-- D. Murcek

## Such an heart

*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 for ever!*  
*Deuteronomy 5:29*

In this chapter, Moses repeats the ten commandments to the generation of Israel remaining at the end of the forty years of wilderness wanderings. That forty-year chastisement of their parents' generation came as a result of unbelieving refusal to enter into Canaan and take the land, in spite of God's promise of victory over their enemies. Now that generation had died in the wilderness, and Moses was preparing the next generation to inherit what their parents had refused. As he recounts the experience of God bringing the commandments to Israel at Sinai through the sound of His voice, there is no doubt that a large number of those listening to Moses now were present as youngsters at that initial experience. Although the basic ten commandments are obviously the same here as the original record in Exodus chapter 20, here Moses provides to this next generation some additional details that reveal further insight into the desire of God for His people.

While recalcitrant hearts may view God's law as a prohibition of their personal pleasure, this statement that the Lord made to Moses revealed His purpose in it. The previous generation had heard God's voice and seen His consuming fire upon the mount as they listened to the decalogue, and in response they begged Moses to no longer be subjected to this ominous experience, lest they die. Instead they desired Moses to be their mediator and pass along God's word to them. This response of the Lord to their request reveals that His purpose was "that it might be well with them, and with their children." And this was followed with that special qualification – "forever." This blessed state comes as a result of fearing the Lord and, therefore, desiring to keep His commandments. This is the heart of the heavenly Father for His own. He knows what brings the best for those He created. Yet how much they misunderstood His holy love for them.

May we instead learn from this that the commandments and purposes of God for us are motivated by His eternal and holy love and desire for our very best. While we know that our keeping of the commandments cannot save our souls, we understand that they will benefit our lives. With this knowledge we can say with David, as he prefigured the coming Messiah, "I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart" (Psalm 40:8).

# Pastors Thoughts of the Week

## Not Double Minded



*But as God is true, our word toward you was not yea and nay.  
II Corinthians 1:18:*

The Romans contrived the idol-god, Janus, who bore the image of two faces posed in opposite directions. Janus, among his other designations, represented duality; meaning a contrast in concept and nature. Moderns have derived the expressions “two-faced” and “speaking out of both sides of one’s mouth” from this false deity. Many politicians have elevated this kind of duplicity to an art form and in so doing have unwittingly fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy that *“truth is fallen in the streets”*.

Admittedly, all of us have had to change our minds on matters as we mature in thought and spirit, but how refreshing it is to know that we have an unchangeable guide who bears with our ineptitude and gently leads us to His immutable word. Pilate may have had to cynically ask *“What is Truth?”* but believers have never had to contemplate such uncertainty. We possess what Peter called *“a more sure word of prophecy”*.

God’s revelations are not *“yea and nay”*. What was morally abhorrent to God in ancient times, remains so to this day and throughout eternity. If it was wrong then, to steal, murder, fornicate, commit sacrilege, etc. one can be assured that God has not changed His mind today. *“Remove not the ancient landmark”* was an oft repeated warning that has spiritual implications. Boundaries were to be maintained whether they be one’s property or a nation’s morality. The mercurial mores of modern society have no terminus. Societal architects have whimsically ignored biblical proscriptions and have reversed God’s “nays” into “yeas” and vice versa.

While we have our brief existence in this topsy-turveydom, it is an abiding consolation to possess a steadfast word from the Maker of heaven and earth. Our God is ever and always true. With Him there is no “shadow of turning”. His children can walk confidently amidst the confused bedlam while we *“hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left”* Isaiah 30:21.

Have a blessed week,

*Pastor*

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

## The Secret of the Lord

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*The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant.  
– Psalm 25:14 –*

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Secrets are private matters of great value and import held in confidence by a select few. In fallen men, secrets frequently and unfortunately carry a negative connotation in that the value they hold has a great propensity toward harm or embarrassment if revealed.

But when God holds a secret, we must not regard it in the same negative light. Jesus said, "...in secret have I said nothing" (John 18:20). The secret of the Lord is therefore open – open to any and all who *want* to know it. The Word of God is a revelation of His will to all mankind. This secret, hidden in Christ from the foundation of the world, is now manifest to every son and daughter of Adam. Yet why do relatively so few know and understand it? Simply stated, it is directly proportional to each individual's desire to know it.

The truth is, each of us can be as close to God as we *want* to be. Almost every individual that God raised to prominence in the Scriptures was so elevated precisely because they wanted to be closer to Him than others. Abraham was the father of the faithful and the Friend of God because of the profound tendency to simply listen to Him and believe Him. Moses was entrusted with the Law of God due to a heart that desired to see His glory. Daniel was a man greatly beloved and a revealer of secrets because he had set his heart to understand God's Word. John was the beloved disciple because he sought to be close enough to Christ to hear the Savior's very heartbeat. Paul was God's instrument to the Gentiles because his chief desire was to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings. Over and over again, we see that God's inner circle is made up of individuals who possess an *overwhelming desire to know Him and understand His ways*.

We only share the most intimate thoughts of our hearts and lives with those we trust. God is much more gracious than man, revealing His plan openly to all of mankind. Yet it is also true that His secret is with them that fear Him. It is only to those who want them that He will entrust the hidden treasures of His Word and the nuances, hues, and textures of His character and plan. Are you trustworthy? All that is required is a desire to know Him more.

-- D. Murcek

## **The House of our Pilgrimage**

*Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage,*

*Psalm 119: 54*

The past century has brought many changes to our world. With the development of modern transportation people have become more transient in both their vocation as well as their leisure time. Because of business and job opportunities, populations have shifted throughout many regions of our country. This phenomenon stands in contrast to the past century when most people never traveled very far from their origins. But whether we have chosen to relocate or opted for our entire lifetime to stay in the same city, as Christians we must remember that we are merely pilgrims in a strange land.

At our conversion we become citizens of a heavenly country and now we are strangers traveling through this life. We must remember that our physical house and our fleshly body are temporary dwellings. Being strangers in a foreign land, we often become weighed down with the burdens of this life. As evil men wax worse and worse, external peace and securities diminish. Newscasts are filled with distressing events of violence and corruption and problems with seemingly no solutions. The void that is created by the loss of Christianity's influence is replaced with the carnal wisdom of secularism that is only capable of spawning more evil. Cultural decay has weakened long-standing boundaries that served as safeguards for our national and personal wellbeing. Gender identity has become extremely confused, recreational drug use is being legalized, and the remaining governing laws are disregarded. No wonder the Bible tells us that we are pilgrims and strangers in this world!

It is this troubled world to which God has called us to be ambassadors who represent a heavenly kingdom. Along the way God has given us resources to help us overcome the pressures of this life. The indwelling of His Spirit, the light of His Word, and the fellowship of His saints are to help us as we travel through this foreign land. Today's verse reminds us that the psalmist had a song in his heart that emanated from God's word. The cheerful heart that is energized by the songs of Zion can help us to rise above conforming to the world. Hiding the Word in our heart helps us not to sin against God and also reminds us that we are marching to Zion. Let us keep singing as we march!

~ J. Ekis

## Everyone's Calling

*Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us ...*

*2Peter 1:1*

In Matthew 10, Jesus specifically calls his twelve disciples, commissioning and empowering them to miraculously declare the coming of the Kingdom of God. Later, Matthias would replace Judas Iscariot, and Barnabas and Paul would be brought into this exclusive group. The word for apostle means to send forth, and these men were sent by Jesus to perform miracles reflecting God's power while establishing a heavenly foothold in this world. Several of the apostles also were inspired by the Holy Ghost to pen the eternal word of God. Though the apostles had a special calling they did not see themselves as special. When Cornelius bowed down to him, Peter tells him to *stand up, I myself also am a man*.

At the beginning of his second epistle *to those that have obtained like precious faith*, Peter declares himself to be a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ. Though an apostle, he first reminds the readers that he is a servant. As the Apostolic Age ended and the written Word was established, the continuation of God's work down through the ages would be entrusted to His servants. Whatever one's vocation in life, our highest calling is that of being a servant to our Lord and Savior. With the endowment of a diversity of gifts equally significant, all believers have daily opportunities to serve the Lord. Our service should not be done out of obligation or coercion, but as a deep and rich service pouring out from a heart energized by the love of God. Even a simple cup of cold water given in Jesus' name has all the potential for changing a person's eternal destiny. If we take what God has given us, whether it be five, two, or one talent, and utilize it for His service, we will receive the ultimate reward by hearing these words – *well done good and faithful servant*.

Today, let the words of John 12:26 sink in: *If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honor*. Let us fulfill our highest calling, remembering that we serve the Lord Christ!

~ J. Ekis

## Power for wealth

*And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day.*

*Deuteronomy 8:17-18*

This reminder to the Israelite generation on the verge of inheriting the land promised to their forefathers has a general application for all. This exhortation comes at the end of a warning that, after they would inhabit the land of God's promise and enjoy all the benefits of God's blessings in and from it, they should not forget Him and His commandments, thinking that they somehow earned all of these blessings by their own power. Instead, they were admonished: "When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which he hath given thee" (verse 10). These warnings are indicative of the selfish and forgetful nature of mankind, and of God's penetrating understanding of that nature.

It is quite appalling to recognize how unthankful and even arrogant we can be when we reap the benefits of God's merciful principles. One principle seen here is His goodness and mercy that blesses His chosen in spite of their sinful natures, because of His covenantal promises. These Israelites were clearly reminded that God's blessings were due to His promise to their fathers, and not to their own righteousness (see Deuteronomy 9:4-6). We must also beware of being tempted to forget that the blessings of God's salvation are provided to us, not through our own righteousness, but through the righteousness of Christ. The abundant life that we inherit through His redemptive work and worth should not lead to smugness but to overwhelming thankfulness.

A second principle is that of sowing and reaping, whereas God's common grace grants abilities to men, they are able to achieve wealth through the natural processes that He has supplied. Yet how often do we hear those who have achieved wealth proclaim themselves to be "self-made," often neglecting not only God, who gives the abilities, yea even the daily strength, to succeed, but also others who have mentored or supported? As we rise to each new day to pursue our labor and its rewards, or as we complete the day and look back on the accomplishments achieved, let us always remember to be thankful and to bless the Lord, who gives us power to get wealth, and gives us "richly all things to enjoy" (I Timothy 6:17).

# Pastors Thoughts of the Week

## A Win Win

*1 Timothy 4:8: ...having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.*

The devil often baits his hooks with the offers of a life of sensual thrills and endless pleasures. He warns the unbeliever that a surrender to Christ equates to a life of hardship and deprivation. Even with his audacious forty day temptation of Jesus, we can only imagine what else he offered along with the kingdoms of the world in exchange for absolute homage—"Worship me" he threatens "or suffer the loss of all these things!". One must always be reminded that Satan is the Father of Lies "*because there is no truth in him*". In truth, the devil only traffics in temporal pleasure while subjecting his victims to vitiating habits and degradation with no lasting satisfaction .

Peter once wondered whether he had any hope of compensation for having left his fish nets

*"Lo, we have left all, and followed thee."* And Jesus said unto them, *"Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting."* It was a win now and win later proposition. But the devilish thought is to assess profit and loss by accumulation of immediate goods and pleasures. Paul had a ready reply to that tempting thought : *"I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ"*.

The Christian "*life that now is*" must be evaluated with unseen metrics. The fruits of the Spirit cannot be quantified. To be "possessed with a hope that is steadfast and sure", as the songwriter framed it, is of inestimable value. What measure can be used to compare with a peace that "*passeth all understanding*"? All people endure hardships and disappointments but the believer has, in the *life that now is*, the promise of an unseen presence of One who will never leave us nor forsake us.

Lucifer is the all-time biggest loser. Though once known as the "*anointed cherub that covereth*", his greed for gain and aspirations for power brought him and the angels that followed to an inglorious doom. And yet today, those that follow his beguiling temptations in hopes of gaining the world end up losing their own souls. They avariciously grasp that which they can never keep and find no satisfaction in the acquisition of that which they so covetously pursued.

Wise children of God, let us be content with such things as we have, knowing that our temporal lot is soon to be transformed in a glorious estate. Enjoy His daily provisions now and rejoice in the kingdom that is yet to come.

Have a blessed week,

*Pastor*

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

## A Man Sent from God

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*There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.  
– John 1:6 –*

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Our Lord's Messianic ministry and salvific work did not spontaneously burst upon the scene of human history. Not only was it foretold in specific detail as to time, place, and nature by the inspired prophetic utterance of the Old Testament prophets, but it was also immediately introduced by the ministry of His forerunner, John the Baptist.

It had been four hundred years since God had spoken to His nation. It felt for many as though the heavens were brass. Because of no great positive movement in the events of the times, there was great potential to assume that God had forgotten them. It is true that there had been some stirrings in the hill country of Judea about thirty years prior – stories of angelic messages to shepherds, mysterious visits from regal satraps from the East, and seemingly prophetic oracles from some old saints in the Temple. But decades had now silently passed since and those glimmers of hope were as distant a memory as God's final words to Malachi. These dull hearts had no idea that God was about to visit them as promised in the Person and Ministry of Christ. And so, God sent them a man whose name was John. This voice that was crying in the wilderness was a necessary disruption to their lethargy and began to stir their consciences in order for them to take interest again in the promise of God.

What God did nationally for Israel through a man named John He repeats spiritually in the heart of every individual He seeks to redeem. Jesus rarely brings His salvation abruptly to alienated sons and daughters of Adam. God usually sends a forerunner – a disruptor, a messenger – to break through the sleepiness of the soul and prepare a pathway for the Savior to trod into the sinner's heart. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. God has also sent many others – Bobs, Lindas, Debbies, Ryans, *et. al.* – to introduce lost and hopeless souls to the nearby Christ. It is His way.

And who was *your* John? Who did God send to you who was bold enough to awaken you out of your sinful stupor? Perhaps it was mother or father or friend or coworker or preacher. But *someone* prepared you to receive Christ. And now, *to whom is God sending you to perform John's similar work?* Our spheres of influence put each of us in contact with many sleepy souls whom God has not forgotten. This is not an accident. Let us resolve to be men and women sent from God.

-- D. Murcek

## Joy in His Presence

*Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.*

*Psalm 16:11*

Though the Book of Psalms was penned nearly a millennium before the birth of Jesus, many of the psalms contain verses pertaining to His ministry and kingdom. Psalm 16 contains elements that speak of His resurrection and ascension. Though the Messiah would be crucified and buried, He had the hope of resurrection and being positioned at the right hand of the Heavenly Father. To be in the presence of the Father would produce fulness of joy, and sitting at His right hand offered pleasures forevermore.

The two-edged sword of God's Word in this verse wields truths that are applicable to our lives as well. Though crucified with Christ, we nevertheless live because of the power of His resurrection. Our new life in Christ imparts to us the indwelling Spirit Who is available to guide our steps to fulfill God's perfect will. The Good Shepherd will make us to lie down in green pastures for times of nourishment, and lead us beside still waters for peace and refreshment. He will not merely give a minimum of life; but an abundant life filled with His designed purpose. Joy floods our soul as we press onward in His cause and draw waters out of the well of His salvation. Spending time in His presence alone is cause for fullness of joy! It is there in close proximity to His throne that we can hear Him call us by name. Realizing that the creator and savior of the world knows our name produces a kind of joy and contentment that surpasses anything this world can offer. With our resurrected life in Christ, we become a new creature. Simple things that we often overlooked take on new significance when we see that He gives us all things richly to enjoy. The old life and its temporary pleasures are replaced by the true treasures supplied by the Lord, and in Christ we will find pleasure in things we would have never thought possible in the old life. Delighting to do His will we can find the purpose for which we were made. Finally, when we have finished our course and we step onto eternity's shore, there will be pleasures that will exceed anything we have ever known in this life.

Help us O Lord to experience the fulness of your joy today! ~ J. Ekis

## Rejoice in the Lord

*Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.*

*Habakkuk 3:17-18*

The joy of the Lord is independent of present circumstances. As Habakkuk's prayer prophetically describes the judgments of the Lord and their resulting desolation, he is able to contrast that circumstance against the unsurpassed joy provided to him by the God of his salvation. The order of the terms is notable. He did not say he would rejoice in the salvation of his God, although that could also rightly be a source of joy. The main and greatest source of joy is simply knowing the Lord, who provides salvation, as well as all things that pertain unto life and godliness (II Peter 1:3). The Lord spoke parallel truth through Jeremiah's similar prophecy: "But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD" (Jeremiah 9:24). When David was threatened with stoning by his men who blamed him for the loss of their families at Ziklag, in his distress he "encouraged himself in the Lord his God" (I Samuel 30:6). When the Israelite remnant wept at the reading and expounding of the law, they were reminded by Nehemiah and his fellow leaders that "the joy of the Lord is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10).

The privilege of knowing the Lord of all, although at this time we see Him not and yet believe, is "joy unspeakable and full of glory" (I Peter 1:8). This magnificent truth was the focus of Jesus' prayer for all who would believe on Him unto eternal life, "that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3). While the world longs and looks for happiness through various experiences, acquisitions, or human relationships, they miss the fundamental source of true joy, which is knowing the God who made them. Let us who know Him exhibit to the world about us that our joy is not bound to our earthly circumstances, as we welcome the command to "rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice." (Philippians 4:4)

## Simply wise

*The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.*

*Psalm 19:7*

People have pursued wisdom through various avenues. In many cases, these pursuits follow and assimilate wisdom obtained from others who have claimed to obtain wisdom, generally in particular areas of knowledge or understanding. While there are many who claim to be wise, an important criterion is the source of wisdom. Our text clearly states that the one perfect source of wisdom is the law of the Lord. His law is the solid foundation upon which all true wisdom must be based. It is the only perfect source. The important aspect of that noted here is that its perfection convinces the natural man that his soul is desperately in need of conversion. The apostle Paul works through the steps to that realization in the first three chapters of his epistle to the Romans, where the natural revelation available to all mankind ought to invoke a search for the Creator, and the special revelation of God's law through Moses reveals to the human heart its utter failure and sole need for God's grace to provide justification and reconciliation to Him. From that humbled state of the soul, which recognizes its own lack of wisdom and relative simplicity in comparison to God, the sure testimony of the Lord can then be applied through the work of God's Spirit in a believing heart to impart the wisdom of God. The apostle emphasizes this conclusion in the Corinthian epistle: "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God" (I Corinthians 2:12).

The getting of wisdom, therefore, is predicated on knowing the perfect source of wisdom. While society assigns a significant premium to formal education, if the foundation of that education is not the word and wisdom of God, it cannot make one truly wise. Instead, it produces men that are wise in their own conceits, who progressively reject the true wisdom and rule of the only true God that they need. Professing themselves to be wise, they become fools (Romans 1:22). In contrast, the soul that believes the truth of God and surrenders to the fact of its own moral simplicity can be spiritually educated beyond mere knowledge, to understand the deep things of God (I Corinthians 2:10). "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10). Therefore, when we know Him who is the author of wisdom, believe his word, and surrender to His sure testimonies, we have the privilege to progress from simple human understanding to godly wisdom.

# Pastors Thoughts of the Week

## Nonconformity

*Romans 12:2: And be not conformed to this world*

Peer pressure is one of the most subtle weapons in the devil's diabolical arsenal. When God created Adam, He placed within him the desire to conform to the image of God. We innately long to win the favor of our Almighty Creator. But in a perverse way, Satan turns this impulse into merely a desire to conform. We observe people acting in ways to curry the acceptance of others despite the deleterious effects those conformities may have on body and soul.

Consider, as a case in point, the disgusting habit of cigarette smoking. Here is a practice that merits no immediate gratification when at first one inhales the noxious fumes of 900° burning tobacco. There is no natural benefit derived from this habit; no human need is satisfied such as is the case with hunger and food or thirst and drink. In fact, the body, at first, rebels against the intrusion of those 19 poisons. The only benefit derived from this is the perceived acceptance that one receives from their peer group. The same could be said for alcohol consumption, body piercing, immodest clothing, and to some degree drug use. Apparently, to many people, it is that important that they fit in with what everyone else is doing, and therein lies the rub.

The damnable nature of such conformity finds its ultimate goal in fabricating an anti-Christian "groupthink". The devil delights in creating a fear of rejection in the hearts of the simple. John 12:42-43 : *¶Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.*

To be a true follower of Jesus will often require a willingness to be ostracized from current company. Our orders are plain: *"Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues"*. God's people have always found themselves out of step with the travelers on the broad way of destruction. We are called to *"go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach"*. We can expect the inevitable repulsion from the world for if they hate the Lord do we expect them to receive us. Our consolation lay in the knowledge that we are *"accepted in the beloved"*.

Have a blessed week,

*Pastor*

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

## Unlearned and Ignorant

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*Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.*

– Acts 4:13 –

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It is likely that prior to becoming Christ's disciples, Peter and John were faithful synagogue and Temple attendees, keeping the sabbaths and other sacerdotal obligations. But they were also fishermen. Their adult lives had been spent more in their boats than in any synagogue, making them relatively unschooled in the rabbinical teachings surrounding the Law. Like most, they would have depended upon the "scholars" and their traditions for their understanding of the God of Israel. That is, until Jesus called, "Follow me." That invitation sparked a years-long education where they learned more of God than if they had been brought up at the feet of Gamaliel. Because they had been with Jesus, they knew not only the letter but also the spirit of the Law. And because He sent His Spirit, they were now actively advancing students regarding His plan as well as partakers of His resurrected power and authority.

On trial before the very rulers who had condemned Jesus to death, Peter and John displayed this remarkable new status in vivid hue. It is noteworthy that these pinnacled doctors of the Law who had condemned Christ just months prior now *marvelled* at Peter. It means that despite his lack of acceptable credentials, *they inherently recognized the authority of his words and were threatened by an equal or superior knowledge*. They were in the presence of men who actually knew God. The witness of the healed man and the cogency of Peter's counter offensive left Annas and Caiaphas spiraling.

Today, we live under the faux reign of a secular (as opposed to a religious) intelligentsia. The powers that be in our society situate themselves in media, academia, political office, and on corporate boards. They boast pedigrees from Harvard, Yale, Berkley, Stanford, and Princeton. They leverage their influence to advance "science", policy, and product, and frequently go out of their way to use their platforms to assault biblical Christianity. This is how they put each of us on trial in our own minds, hoping to make us cower due to our relative ignorance of their gamed system. Our lack of buy-in to their godless narrative troubles them. The question is, will we permit them to intimidate us, or, like Peter and John, will we stand and boldly proclaim our resurrected Lord?

Brothers and sisters, we need not bear any shame in our relative unlearned and ignorant state of this world and its system. There is a mystery of godliness that is at odds with the mystery of iniquity. Take heart, because we have been with Jesus. Let us live in the confidence of His resurrection power and light, and men will marvel.

-- D. Murcek

## **Response to an Insincere Request**

*And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad; for he was desirous to see him of a long season, because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him. Then he questioned with him in many words; but he answered him nothing.*

*Luke 23:8,9*

The Lord Jesus Christ himself is the answer to all of our questions and our needs. His interactions with humble and sincere inquirers provided them with conviction, hope, and real solutions to life's problems. His words brimming with divine wisdom were designed to influence people for His kingdom. From the religious ruler Nicodemus, to the unnamed woman at the well, and many others recorded in scripture, Jesus' answers to their questions would point their lives in the right direction. Characteristics that stand out in the wide variety of people who were positively impacted by Jesus - they were humble and sincere.

Today, we hear the Lord's voice through His word and His spirit. These are the means by which the questions to life's problems are answered. Our troubles seem to shrink when His reassuring words bring light and comfort to current distresses. Not every question is answered, because the greatness of God and His ways are past finding out; but those He does answer reveal His plan for us. We should never take for granted the great privilege of having the Lord speak to us. For the Lord to go silent would mean that we would be left to our own feeble and insufficient resources to guide and comfort us through life.

Today's verse uses Herod as a warning. Jesus' miraculous works were more than enough validation of who he was. The miracles were a means to an end; fulfilling the prophecies of the ancient writers, the Messiah's arrival was confirmed. Though Herod had not seen Jesus before this account, he obviously had heard about Jesus; and what Herod heard should have enabled him to recognize who Jesus was. Proud Herod's insincere request was met with silence. The One who holds all of life's answers would not respond to Herod's request... for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. Herod had the opportunity of a lifetime to be rewarded by exercising sincere faith, but he was met with deafening silence.

Today, with sincere hearts we can hear from that same One Who is the answer!

~J. Ekis

## Sanctified Through Truth

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*Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.  
– John 17:17 –*

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Sanctification is the doctrine that God's people are set apart to a sacred purpose – that of belonging to Him. We learn a great deal about the means of that separating process in this very succinct prayer of Christ's. Just prior to His passion, Jesus prayed for all of us who would hear His voice and follow Him, that the Father would sanctify us through the truth of His Word.

The Israelites were a sanctified people. God had set them apart as His nation. They were the recipients and in some respects the guardians of His revelation to mankind (the Old Testament Scriptures). Their genealogy and pedigree were to be zealously guarded, their worship meticulously executed, and their culture scripturally centered. By obeying God, Israel was to exhibit to the Gentile world Who God is and how to approach Him. None of this was burdensome to a right heart that understood God's jealous care, but it did run universally contrary to the cultures of every pagan nation that surrounded them that had no express revelation from the God of Heaven. Unfortunately, the people as a whole could not sustain a right heart and desired rather to assimilate with their godless neighbors. It took a Babylonian captivity for the nation to accept its privileged status of sanctification.

As Christians in an increasingly godless world, we share a similar purpose as well as a similar pressure. We are to reflect the light of the gospel and the hope of salvation through Jesus Christ. But fallen man, through Satanically inspired elite societal architects, is trying to re-define everything – sexuality, race, marriage, right, wrong, even God Himself. We must not fall prey to the vain jangling surrounding us. We hold the truth in His marvelous Word which is forever settled in Heaven (Ps. 119:89). As the father of lies tightens his grip on societal discourse and culture, we need not acquiesce nor live on the defensive. Because of Christ's victory, His truth dwells in our hearts by His Spirit. And He is the Spirit of Truth Who reproves the world of sin, or righteousness, and of judgement (John 16:8, 13). Because we are sanctified through truth, we hold the counter-offensive to Hell's onslaught.

Dear friends, let us re-double our efforts to know the Word of God. There is perhaps no more vital use of our time than to dig deep into God's revelation. The days are evil, but our God is good, and He has provided us His Word and His Spirit. May we revel in our separated status, embrace the conflict, and be valiant for the truth!

-- D. Murcek

## Rule of law

*And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites: And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them: That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment.*

*Deuteronomy 17:18-20*

Through Moses God prophetically gave the rules for a king, which He knew the Israelites would eventually desire as they emulated the surrounding Gentile nations. As the rules just before this text enumerate prohibitions for the future kings, this text provides the positive command that would protect the king and the citizens of Israel from evil. Yet, as we survey the history of the Israelite kings, in both the united and divided kingdom, we sadly see this and the previous principles unheeded in most cases. A notable point of this instruction, compared to typical governmental schemes of other nations, is that the king is himself subject to the higher law of the Lord God. In this position, he is to view himself as well as those he rules to be subject to God's law, which is no respecter of persons. In this light, the king is commanded to keep a personal copy of God's word and read it with purpose throughout his life. The purpose is to fear the Lord and to keep and do His commandments. It is also to remind him that, although he is the king, he is not above his brethren in the sight of God. Every statute of the law for God's people is also applicable to their rulers. This principle is ultimately fulfilled in the King of kings and Lord of lords, who knew and kept every point of His law, and yet made Himself servant to His brethren, as He also taught them to keep His commandments and serve one another.

Although we do not live in a theocracy, as did the Israelites under the Old Testament system, we do well to pray for our leaders to at least recognize their responsibility, yea culpability, before the law of their Creator, which He reveals to men's consciences through the light that lights everyone who is born (John 1:9). Our highest aim would be that they would surrender to Him as Lord and make His word their source of life, conviction, and sense of humility. The benefit is for both the leader and the led. As we pray this for our leaders, we also recognize that, as the leader is not above his people, these statutes are just as applicable to all of us. Thus, let us heed and do them, and provide a living example of their benefit to those who would govern.

# Pastors Thoughts of the Week

## Imaginations

*Psalms 2:1: Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?*

“Why indeed?”, we may ask, seeing that God is the author of the unique ability to imagine. Without imagination we could never conceive of the events described in the Bible or, for that matter, the agonies of the cross, the power of His resurrection, the glories of heaven, or the terrors of hell. We must depend upon the power of imagination to formulate faith in all of the vital doctrines of scripture.

A Christian songwriter captured the human incapacity to comprehend the unseen world:

I can only imagine  
What it will be like  
When I walk by your side  
I can only imagine  
What my eyes would see  
When your face is before me  
I can only imagine

Knowing the importance of this attribute, the devil does his best to invade this faculty and infect our thoughts with vain imaginations. His evil inventions lead men into many destructive snares. Consider the evidence:

Genesis 6:5: ¶ *And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*

Genesis 11:6: *And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.*

Ezekiel 8:12: *Then said he unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? for they say, The LORD seeth us not;*

Luke 1:51: *He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.*

II Corinthians 10:5: *Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;*

The serpent filled our primal parents with the foolish notion that they could be as gods. Vainly puffed up in the vanity of their nascent minds, they “*refused to hear my words*” and “*walked after the imagination of their heart*” and in so doing found themselves cast out of paradise. In 1971, the devil inspired John Lennon to pen this paean to universalism:

Imagine there's no heaven  
It's easy if you try  
No hell below us  
Above us, only sky  
Imagine there's no countries  
It isn't hard to do  
Nothing to kill or die for  
And no religion, too

We must assiduously petition God to sanctify our imaginations, lest they become corrupted with such worldly notions and “*lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.*” 2 Peter 3:17.

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

## Only Believe

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*As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, he saith unto the ruler of the synagogue, Be not afraid, only believe.*

*– Mark 5:36 –*

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Jairus was the ruler of a synagogue. His title tells us many things about him. He was somewhat of a learned man. He was esteemed within his community. He rubbed shoulders frequently with even more prestigious “rulers”, possibly even with members of the Sanhedrin itself. As such, there is a high probability that he was under significant pressure to help drive skepticism or resistance to the ministry of the Nazarene.

But Jairus was also a father. He had a little girl, about twelve years of age. She was sick. Jairus and his wife must have tried everything to help get her better. Like another in their vicinity, we can imagine them carting her to physician after physician and spending all, yet the girl was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse. And now she lay at the point of death. Oh, the pathetic scene in that home! The fever was high. The girl was languid and pale. The reaper’s presence was palpable. The mounting pressure to resist public acknowledgment of Jesus now collided with the only possible hope for his little one. He must have made a stark and abrupt choice at the eleventh hour. We can almost hear him as he runs out the door, “I will go to Jesus!”

When he found Christ, Jairus forgot all about his prestigious position. He fell at His feet like a beggar. The Master was more than willing, immediately setting course for Jairus house. But then the delay. Another needed Jesus, and the Lord was just as receiving. In fact, it may have felt to Jairus that He was being overly gracious toward this woman with a bloody flux. And then, the messengers. Their doleful expression followed by the devastating news, “Thy daughter is dead.” No!

We can easily empathize with Jairus. We, too, have experienced times when it felt like God was about to answer our prayer, just to find that circumstances had turned for the worse. We understand the evil tendency of the human heart in those situations – the bewilderment and frustration that arises almost immediately. He answered someone else’s prayer, but not mine? We foolishly forget about *our* delays in seeking Him and question rather *His* timing in His response to us. But then the gracious encouragement, “Be not afraid, only believe.” You have come this far. Is the matter out of My reach now?

Jairus could have brushed Jesus’ hand off of his shoulder and resentfully returned to bury his child. But he summoned more faith. And Jesus did exceedingly abundantly above all that Jairus could have ever thought.

Burdened reader, it may be so very dark, but be no afraid, only believe. Jesus has nothing but an astoundingly wonderful answer in store for the heart that will dare to keep on believing Him.