

Pastor's Thoughts of the Week

Modern Molechs

Little children, keep yourselves from idols. I John 5:21

I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour. Isaiah 43:11

Men have erected their false gods in defiance of this exclusivity. Idols come in varied forms and it behooves believers to detect their manifestations so as to deter their intrusion upon our sanctified walk. To say American culture is changing at breathtaking speed is to state the obvious. Social, moral, and legal constraints are abrogated with rapidity as the philosophical idols of historicism, humanism, sensualism, and pseudo-science have co-opted the forum of ideas. "Cancel Culture" has now launched its vitriolic vendetta against all free speech and thought that doesn't find compatibility with its definitions of acceptability.

Idolatry in its broader sense is properly understood as any substitution of what is created (be it money, lust, political governments, social constructs, ad infinitum) instead of the creator who made all things. In the first chapter of Romans, Paul excoriates the idolaters of this world and concludes that they "*worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator*".

Josiah was an iconoclast before the term was coined during the reformation. He understood that there was to be no leniency allowed regarding idols, else the image of the beast would insinuate itself into the body politic of the people of God and its corrosive influence would vitiate the entire congregation. In many ways Josiah's task was far easier than ours today. The idols of his day were tangible objects that were purported to possess efficacy in regards to the current and future estate of the worshipper. The destruction of the idol would be a graphic illustration of its own inefficacy. Clay, wood, and plaster, though gilded in gold, would still easily succumb to a few inexorable blows of the sledge.

The idols of our current epoch are intangible and abstract and thus far more difficult to root out and destroy. From our earliest developmental years we have been programmed to accept the idolatry of humanism, statism, sensualism, philosophical relativism, and natural selection as espoused by public education and the media. These corrupt ideas are firmly entrenched in the psyche of so many of our unsuspecting population. But when the Holy Spirit convicts the mind of "*sin, righteousness, and judgement*", He provides for us the advantage of a renewed mind. And with that regenerative power we can "*gird up the loins of our mind*" and take up the task of demolishing these imposing idols. Our Lord tolerates "*no other gods*" before Him.

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

He is Good

*O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: because his mercy endureth forever.
– Psalm 118:1 –*

We are all no doubt familiar with fallen man's oft-repeated accusations against God. "If God is good, why is there so much evil?" or, "Why do such bad things happen to good people?" Sinful man, injured or puzzled by the problem of the curse, instead of seeking God, frequently takes the easier road of blaming Him for the ills of this world. As believers, it is vital to recognize that our own hearts are not immune to this evil tendency. Though we may not flagrantly "blame God" for problems, our lives are all-too-often marked by discontentment and complaint. It is therefore important to come to our text in contrition of spirit, permitting it to melt our tempestuous hearts as we mediate upon its central message – "He is good."

In Genesis, we find that God is good in every aspect of His creation, marking each movement of the creation week and then summarizing His work with the imprimatur of His goodness (Genesis 1:31). This goodness was not decimated by the curse, Psalm 33:5 declaring that "the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord."

David understood that God's goodness was the special possession of the believer, his inspired pen writing, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Psalm 23:6). In Psalm 31:19 he declared with overwhelmed heart, "Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!" And the twenty seventh Psalm cites the goodness of God as the certain hope for persecuted or faltering faith, stating "I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." (Psalm 27:13)

Nahum 1:7 tells us that God's goodness is our stronghold in the day of trouble, Micah 6:8 reveals that He has shown and shared His goodness with men, and Isaiah 61:1 announces that the gospel itself is one of good tidings to all.

We ought to frequently pause and permit our hearts to sing...

"He is good, He is good, His love endures forever. Give thanks, for He is good."

By so doing, our hearts will continuously rediscover the freedom and fortitude of His overwhelming care.

-- D. Murcek

Casting Away Our Garments

And casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus.

Mark 10:50

The recorded miracles of Jesus in the Gospel accounts have many applications for us today. From turning the water into wine at a marriage celebration to the raising of Lazarus from the dead, each miracle validates Jesus as the Messiah, while also providing inspiring lessons designed for our edification.

Today's text gives the account of the healing of blind Bartimaeus. The events surrounding his healing are an accurate description of the salvation process. The blindness, his hearing of Jesus, his calling out to the Lord, the Lord calling for him, his rising up and casting away his garment, the Lord opening his eyes, and his following Jesus after his healing - all are elements in conversion. Our focus today is on the casting away of his garment.

Since Bartimaeus was a blind beggar, it is assumed that his garment would likely be a tattered rag. Casting off his garment suggests that he was coming to Jesus with no pretenses, just as he was. Isaiah reminds us that *all of our righteousnesses are as filthy rags*. We must leave behind *all* of our own goodness and humbly fall at the Savior's feet.

Calling out to Jesus for salvation is not the end of our coming to Him. In the sanctification process there will be many times He calls us to come closer, and there will be other garments to cast off. The ever-present garment of pride needs to be discarded, for it crowds out the fulness of the Holy Spirit. There is the garment of unforgiveness that clings to us hindering our prayers and preventing growth that comes from learning the valuable lesson of forgiveness. Our garment of inconsistency needs to be cast off, for it detracts from the testimony of Christ in our life. The garment of complaint should be replaced with the garments of thanks and praise.

Our spiritual closets are filled with many garments that need to be cast off and, by God's grace, be replaced with the Lord's garments of righteousness, joy, peace, and an array of other coverings that are designed to bring glory to our God.

J. Ekis

Word power

*When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick.
Matthew 8:16*

John begins his gospel referring to Jesus as the word, who in the beginning was with God and was God. That word created all things, as attested to clearly also in the first chapters of Colossians and Hebrews. In Genesis chapter one we see the heavens and the earth being spoken into existence by the power of that word. As the Son of God on earth, Jesus continued to demonstrate His divine authority over His creation as in today's text. He cast out the spirits and healed all that were sick with His word. Earlier in this chapter, He healed the centurion's servant by speaking from afar, as the centurion clearly expressed his faith in Jesus' divine authority to simply speak the word to effect the healing. As Jesus went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil, He continually substantiated the divine authority of His word.

As these examples demonstrated that authority in Jesus' earthly ministry of temporary healing and deliverance, the authority of His word goes even further in granting eternal healing of the soul. Matthew makes that connection in the account as he points to the fulfillment of Isaiah 53, as Jesus demonstrated his authority over the effects of sin's curse. Yet we see clearly that Isaiah's prophecy extends and focuses on healing from transgressions and iniquities, which result not only in the infirmities of this life, but in eternal judgment. Therefore Jesus could say, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). So He has left us His word to give us full assurance of faith, that what He has promised He is able to perform, and to save to the uttermost those that come unto God by Him. For those that, with the centurion, trust the authority of His word, this is our peace. If otherwise, the warning is clear, "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh" (Hebrews 12:25).

Restitution

Then it shall be, because he hath sinned, and is guilty, that he shall restore that which he took violently away, or the thing which he hath deceitfully gotten, or that which was delivered him to keep, or the lost thing which he found, or all that about which he hath sworn falsely; he shall even restore it in the principal, and shall add the fifth part more thereto, and give it unto him to whom it appertaineth, in the day of his trespass offering.

Leviticus 6:4-5

While the book of Leviticus begins with numerous instructions for the presenting of offerings for various cases and situations of sin, at the juncture in our text we see the first instance where, preceding the prescription for the offering, there is first provision for restoration of the thing deceitfully or violently taken from one's neighbor -- plus twenty percent interest. Although the sin is against the Lord, it is also specifically against another person in the unlawful acquisition of material possessions. The previous offerings are either more general in nature or are related to non-material matters or circumstances of relationship. Almost every instance described is a sin against the Lord. Yet in this case, where there is a material offence, the offender is instructed to make restitution regarding the material part of the offence, signifying repentance. After this, the required offering to the Lord is prescribed, as in all the other cases.

There are three aspects to observe. First is the restoration of the principal thing to its owner. Second is the payment of the extra fifth. This may be viewed as simply penal, or perhaps is better understood as payment to the owner for the lost time of possession. Up to this point, we could say that things have been made right in the human, material realm. The third aspect is the required trespass offering unto the Lord, the details of which had been described previously. In contrast to the first two points, we are reminded that there is no possible way for man to make restitution to God. We cannot undo or pay for the sin, nor satisfy Him with our works. The offering in all cases indicates the necessity of sacrifice to satisfy the holiness of God and restore right relationship with Him. In this aspect, the restitution can only be made by the Lord. Therefore we see the ultimate fulfillment of all of these offerings: "that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (II Corinthians 5:19). Only He could make the payment that satisfies His justice. In the human realm we can and ought to make restitution where possible, but in the whole we must believe and receive His only payment and restoration.

Pastor's Thoughts of the Week

Finite Minds

Psalms 131:1: LORD, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me.

Men created in the image of God are capable of thinking deep thoughts. It was God's purpose to permit man access to some of His secret wisdom while keeping so much of his workings shrouded in mystery. We, like curious children, are ever probing the perimeters of the unknown in hopes of penetrating that confining boundary and satisfying the unquenchable desire to know what is not given to us to understand. The ungodly audaciously assume that there are no such boundaries and so exercise themselves in needless speculation in matters too great for man's diminished powers to comprehend. They find themselves meandering in a labyrinth of intellectual "black holes" where their imagined conclusions can never be verified. The book of Jude calls these "*filthy dreamers*" and "*wandering stars*". Paul denounces them as "Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."

It would be laughable, if it were not so tragic a spectacle, to consider the farcical contrivances that fools proffer in explaining the inexplicable. It was the sophist, Protagorus, that first introduced the "thinking" world to the notion of existential relativism with his quote, "*Of all things the measure is Man, of the things that are, that they are, and of the things that are not, that they are not*" or simply stated "*Man is the Measure of All Things*". If this be the case then the logical conclusion is that all knowing begins and ends with man. What a *reductio ad absurdum* this assertion has become. The ultimate folly for mankind is the vain pursuit of knowledge that is beyond the faculty allotted to our finite minds.

Believers possess an abiding assurance that there is a super intelligent God whose "*ways are passed finding out*". He does not weary himself with matters best left in the realms of the unknowable. Our lot is not to try and figure out the infinite ways of God. We are content in His word, knowing that "*The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.*"
Deuteronomy 29:29"

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

Alone

*And Jacob was left alone, and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.
– Genesis 32:24 –*

Jacob could be described as a “loner”. While it is true that our text finds him at a point in his life when he is married and has many children, his actions heretofore have proven that his wrestles heart was always really caring for the singular king of self. He connived and schemed to secure both birthright and blessing from his father, he spent many long years conning and being conned by his uncle Laban, and he appears here even to have methodically chosen how to segregate his family and leave certain (less favored?) more exposed to the perceived danger of his brother’s vengeance than others (Gen. 32:7-8). Make no mistake, Jacob was concerned foremost and nearly exclusively with the welfare and security of the object of his dearest affections – himself.

When a man chooses to live for himself, God often rewards him with his desire. This is an act of retributive Justice in eternity, for those who live for self to their last breath will live with none but self forevermore. But here on earth, God’s use of isolation is often a merciful tool to expose a man to his fears and drive him to ultimate salvation. As Jacob had promoted himself so long as master of his destiny, he was about to find out how powerless a potentate he actually was. With no friend or family here on this mount to support him, an eerie stillness likely surrounding him, and the dread of approaching revenge hovering over him, “Jacob was left alone.” God could have left him that way. But He had a purpose for Jacob, and His grace would instead wrestle with him until the breaking of the day (as well as to the breaking of Jacob’s self-serving heart.). As Jacob surrendered decades of self-will to God’s grace on that mountain, God transformed that lonely supplanting soul into the Prince of God.

Has He yet done the same with you, dear reader? Do you walk with a blessed limp in your spirit and a sweet scar in your conscience, reminders of a death-match struggle when you (and you alone) surrendered to His plan and purpose for your uniquely crafted life? If not, the day is breaking. Cling to him in full surrender and discover the freedom to henceforth happily hobble after the Angel Who has so graciously redeemed you from all evil.

-- D. Murcek

Unseen Workings

On that night could not the king sleep, and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king. And it was found written, that Mordecai had told of... Esther 6:1,2

The source of powerful workings is sometimes invisible and can only be detected by its manifestations. The destructive power of a volcano or an earthquake actually begins in the unseen regions below the earth's surface. In talking with Nicodemus, Jesus used wind as the example of an invisible force to illustrate the unseen working of the Spirit. In today's text, we see that a Persian King's sleepless night was the catalyst that brought about deliverance for the Jews. Was Ahasuerus's insomnia the direct result of the Jews fasting and praying? Esther was about to go into the King's inner court uninvited to make a request that would affect deliverance for the Jews. She urged her people to fast for three days before she risked breaking the Persian law of coming uninvited into the King's presence. But a sleepless night for Ahasuerus had caused him to remember that Mordicai the Jew had saved the King's life. The power and force of unseen prayer would also manifest itself in a series of events that brought a miraculous victory for God's people.

Critics of the Bible have cited that there is no mention of God in the book of Esther, and yet there is evidence in the entire account of the divine working of His invisible hand and the power of prayer. This should encourage us when we pray for situations which may outwardly appear to be impossible. Sometimes we may be tempted to quit praying for a person who has not shown any noticeable inclination towards God as a result of our efforts and prayers. We must remember that our invisible prayers work to move the unseen hand of God to do His work on those hearts and minds. When somebody rejects our outward attempts to influence them for heaven, we still have the powerful resource of prayer. Concerning our own conversion - Will God one day reveal to us that there was someone of whom we were not even aware that was doing the invisible work that served to bring us to Christ?

Today we can have confidence that the Lord is still doing His unseen work.

J. Ekis

Sanctified Boasting

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 –

There are so very many things about which men boast. We learn to brag on ourselves early in our lives, continually conditioned to be proud of our accomplishments. This tendency rarely abates upon graduating into our careers. Advancement in the professional world is innately tied to boasting. Resume-writing hinges upon trumpeting one's talents and accomplishments and credit-taking is often the pathway to promotion. Additionally (and more ubiquitously), commercial marketing has created a widely accepted and culturally sanctioned sociological avarice whereby we are not only tempted to strive to "keep up with the Joneses", but also encouraged (by default) to look down upon those who do not or cannot attain to our socio-economic status.

This comparing ourselves among ourselves is not wise (2 Cor. 10:12). In reality, our natural state before the Almighty is one of abject poverty. All our righteousness is as filthy rags (Isa. 64:6) and none of us does anything inherently good (Ps. 14:3). Additionally, everything we have, whether material or metaphysical, are gifts from our Creator. What do we possess that we have not received from His hand? Our talents, abilities, wealth, occupations, or relationships – everything we tend to depend upon – all bear the blatant temporality of their nature by their obvious exposure to cessation. Talents wane, riches make themselves wings, jobs are eliminated, and even our dearest family and friends must die. So why do we boast in any of them as if they are the result of our own efforts or a reward for our own righteousness?

God does, however, provide us *one* thing in which we have a divinely sanctioned right to boast. It is our unique and individual relationship with Him. This is quite literally the only thing that we possess that is intrinsically eternal and immutable. A personal God has not only created each of us in His image, but redeemed us by the gift of His Son, and is preserving us for eternity by His Spirit. This is the only way we could understand and know Him, and He has been so very gracious to supply it.

When we are next tempted to boast of anything, let us pause and recall Jeremiah's inspired words – and then glory in the magnificent fact that *Jehovah Himself is our possession*, both now and forevermore. -- D. Murcek

Fearful or faithful

And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.

Matthew 8:26

Three times in Matthew's gospel Jesus describes his disciples as "ye of little faith." First, in the sermon on the mount, He teaches them and a multitude of others how to pray and how to trust God for their needs, instead of worrying as those of little faith. Second, here in our text, He links this description directly with their fear. Third, while the disciples are concerned that they had forgotten to pack their bread for the day, and Jesus uses the occasion to warn them metaphorically of the leavenous doctrine of the scribes and Pharisees, He employs the phrase to reprove them for forgetting His miraculous power to provide bread, and for their lack of understanding. In all of these instances, there is a connection between their lack of faith and a preoccupation with the temporal over the eternal. In the other two instances, both included a fear of lacking the temporal needs of the body, particularly food. In this second instance, their temporal need was for life itself, as they fearfully believe they're about to die. Yet Jesus remained asleep through the storm, with perfect faith in the care of His Father. What a contradiction as they wakened Him, with their first statement indicating their belief in Him to save them, and the second their belief that they are perishing. What a detrimental effect fear has on faith. (I John 4:18)

There are many today who would threaten us with fear of the unknown, fear of loss, and fear even of death, often in an effort to control. Yet we have a choice to be controlled either by fear or by faith. Jesus clearly indicated that His disciples ought to be controlled by faith. It is the gift of God. Let us heed His admonition and follow His example to rest in the care of our Heavenly Father, that we may say with the psalmist, "I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust" (Psalm 91:2). He who rebukes the winds and the sea is able to bring a great calm to our souls.

Pastor's Thoughts of the Week

Incomparable Love

In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old. Isaiah 63:9

Love: the term is so cavalierly applied to relationships, circumstances and proclivities that it behooves us to qualify its usage. The greeks settled the matter by producing six distinctly different words to express what our one English word is used to describe. They are: eros: sexual passion, philia: deep friendship, ludus: playful love, pragma: longstanding love, philautia: love of the self, agape: self-sacrificial love. Humans are acquainted with each of these forms but constrained by syntactic limitation to gather them under a single heading.

Descending from the heights of glory came the son of God. And with Him came a love of incomparable value-agape love. Here is a love that stands above any other form as it seeks to please others and not ones self. Agape was later translated into Latin as caritas, which is the origin of our word "charity". The anointed translators of our authorized version wisely employed that word to give attribution to this highest form of love: Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

Observe the superlative depth of what the apostle Paul defines as "the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge". Our text from Isaiah reminds us of the complete identification with His creation that the Lord experienced as he saved us, pitied us, endured our affliction, effected our redemption, and carried us through the tribulations of this life. All the other forms of what we clumsily gather together in a single word are so far deficient in expression as to demand a separate category of expression.

Valentine's Day is a holiday given to the expression of love and affords us an opportunity to experience love in all of its manifold nuances. They are wisest who have emulated the Savior in his incomparable love for mankind. As opportunities arise let us freely give to others, as was freely given to us.

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

Fervent Charity

*And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover a multitude of sins.
– 1 Peter 4:8 –*

Jesus told His earliest followers, “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35). That love is to be deeply earnest and profoundly authentic. Paul teaches us of the pristine qualities of Christian love in 1 Corinthians 13, and he also reminds us of the characteristic genuineness that should mark our love one for another in Romans 12:9. And the Apostle John frequently admonishes believers to display this unpretentious love one for another – love that is not merely in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth (1 John 3:18). Truly, *fervent charity* among Christ’s followers is the defining tangible witness of the abiding presence of the intangible God.

Fervency is ardor, a glowing of white-hot intensity. Charity is love in action. Peter thus reminds us in our text that what is to mark the assembly of the saints is *a continually zealous and active love one for another* – a deep and abiding affection that can be *felt, sensed, and observed*. It may manifest itself in a myriad of ways, but it will always be conspicuously thriving amongst obedient and healthy congregations. The very impetus of God-honoring weekly worship is each member’s love for the Savior as well as his or her love for the brethren.

Yet we must also beware because Jesus warned us that our love can wax cold (Matthew 24:12). Familiarity often breeds contempt in fallen men. Sinners have little patience for sinners! But this ought never to be the case with God’s people. There is a Holy Ghost within each of us Who enables us to forgive, forbear, and unify in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:2-4).

As Christians, we must always strive to carry the gospel to a lost world. But in truth, our greatest witness to that world is a *deep, abiding, and genuine love for each other*. Every parent dreads the heartache of disunity amongst their children. God hates it in His family as well. This is why our adversary is constantly exploiting our frustrations and igniting our biases within the assembly of the saints. Let us not be ignorant of his devices. Lord, teach us to deeply and sincerely love one another.

-- D. Murcek

Restored Joy

Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.

Psalm 51:12

There is much to glean from the penitential Psalm of King David. David's love and zeal for God is evident throughout the narrative of his life. We see his zeal as he descends into the valley to confront the enemy giant of the Philistines, and his love is displayed as he joyfully dances when the Ark of the Covenant is returned to Jerusalem. Truly David was the "apple of God's eye", and yet his great and careless sin with Bathsheba comes at a great cost. He does not lose his relationship with God, but he does lose his joy and closeness with Him. In his repentance and confession, he prays that the joy of God's salvation be restored to him.

As believers we also should have a fountain of joy that resides within us because of the great salvation we have received. Joy is one of the nine fruits of the Spirit that is to be manifested in our lives. Although the seasons of life present many burdens, still joy may reside within when we contemplate all of God's plan and promises.

Truly no man can take our joy from us, but our disobedience or even our lack of spiritual focus can rob us of its fulness. The importance of confession and repentance should not be overlooked. We may not fall into gross sin, and we may even be trying our best to serve the Lord, but we may sometimes lose our focus and succumb to burdensome trials of this life. This is why it is so important to maintain our daily personal devotions. By reading, studying, and searching the scriptures, our faith is fueled and our focus is stayed on the light and lamp of His Word. Prayer and meditation draw our thoughts and soul into intimacy with God enabling us to better see His will. Just like the ordinance of the Lord's supper, our daily communion is to be done in remembrance of Him. These Christian disciplines will keep our sights fixed on our great salvation and the joyous appreciation that accompanies it.

No matter how long we have known the Lord, it is important to keep ourselves in close communion with Him that we might have His fulness of joy.

J. Ekis

Overlooking our Best Resource

*And at that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah, and said unto him,
Because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on the LORD thy
God...*

2 Chronicles 16:7

The books of Kings and Chronicles record Israel's history from King Saul to the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. The books list the series of kings of both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms and record the accounts of their reigns. The history of the kings brings to light the failure of human monarchies, although there were a few that were instrumental in bringing spiritual revival to the land.

Asa was one of the few good kings; his ascension to the throne is summarized as one who did that which was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God. He removed the shrines to the false gods and destroyed the idols. Using his position of authority, he commanded the southern kingdom of Judah to seek the Lord God, and to keep the law and the commandments. It was a time of revival and prosperity for the nation. As the years passed, Judah's enemies began to threaten them. In this trying situation Asa sought help from the king of Syria instead of relying on the Lord God for deliverance. Later in verse twelve, we learn that when Asa was stricken with a disease, he sought the physicians for relief instead of the Lord. Somewhere in Asa's life, he began to overlook seeking God first as his greatest resource; instead, he looked to fleshly resources for deliverance.

If we neglect striving to stay spiritually vigilant, the same could become true for us. Prior to understanding that salvation is by grace, we sought some false alternatives for securing our own salvation. That same reliance on the flesh can often replace our dependence on the Lord. It is certainly not wrong for us to utilize doctors and other professionals to help in areas of need, but our first and best resource is to seek the Lord for His guidance, help, and even intervention. Early in His reign Asa commanded Judah to seek the Lord; may his command become our resolve today. – J. Ekis

Departure

And, behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus: and when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart out of their coasts.

Matthew 8:34

In the accounts of Jesus' encounters with people, especially groups of people, this one presents an abnormal reaction. In many cases we see the multitudes coming after Him or even thronging Him, or individuals seeking Him, for opportunity to hear His teaching or obtain His aid in some way. Some, as we see in John chapter six after the feeding of the 5000, even go after Him with corrupt motive, but even they understood the benevolence of His power. Besides this, we typically see only the religious rulers of the Jews displaying a negative attitude towards His miraculous activity. Yet in this instance, after the miraculous deliverance of two men from demon infestations, and the transfer of the demons into the swine-keepers' herd, the news from keepers who fled into town brings a backlash of protestors back to Jesus. Compare this to the account of the Samaritan woman in John chapter four, where the woman's testimony about His knowledge of her life brought the townsfolk out to meet Jesus, and they were also convinced that He was Messiah.

There was something substantially different about the Gergesenes in our text. Why were they not rejoicing to be free from the torment of the demoniacs? One evident difference is the impact of the miracle on the business of the swine-keepers. Could it be that they were more concerned with the welfare of a lucrative business than the deliverance of the oppressed? While there is debate about whether these Gergesenes were Jewish or not, the legal aspect of their trade need not be the key factor in their reasoning. Common knowledge would attest that men panic when their business is threatened, even when something good may precipitate the threat. The apostle Paul later faced this issue in both Philippi and Ephesus. So, without further investigation into the benefits of the presence of Jesus, men will reject Him and demand that He depart, that they might hold on to their temporal monetary profits. As He obliged their wishes then, so He continues to allow mankind this freedom of will. What a horrendous moment it will be in that day when they will also hear Him say "depart from me." Let us urge people to behold, or perhaps behold for yourself, dear reader, the greater miracle that reveals the benefits of His presence.

The Error of Balaam

Woe unto them! For they ... ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward...

– Jude 1:11 –

Balaam is perhaps one of the most enigmatic figures in the Old Testament if not the entire Bible. We learn of him predominantly in the narrative of Numbers 22-24, then hear him alluded to in Deuteronomy, Joshua, and Micah. Finally, he is referenced by the New Testament writers but three times (2 Peter, Jude, and Revelation), all in remarkably disparaging fashion.

Balaam obviously knew Jehovah. (Whether that knowledge was salvific is safeguarded in the counsels of the Judge of the Earth.) What is also evident from the Numbers account is that when Balaam was sought by evil men for an evil purpose, God's initial response was crystal clear and demonstrably decisive – "Thou shalt not go with them..." Had Balaam resolved to accept that directive, the remaining course of his life and career would doubtless have been different. Instead, we find his heart very susceptible to an Achilles heel – promotion and honor (Numbers 22:17). It would appear that Balaam's unique relationship with Jehovah was unfortunately not enough to satisfy him. The promise of worldly status and material gain were glittering gems that the prophet simply could not (or would not) resist. Thus, he went back to God multiple times for permission to do something that he already knew was contrary to God's expressed will.

There are many temptations we face today which are reminiscent of Balak's solicitation of Balaam. God has spoken decisively in His word about many issues that pertain to life and godliness. Additionally, He leads us in prayer and fellowship with Him toward His perfect will for our lives. Yet Satan also has his emissaries seeking our participation in side ventures, appealing to our fleshly desires. Worldly status, social acceptance, avoidance of conflict, wealth, temporal security, and such like are bartering chips the Enemy uses to derail us from our Father's lovingly devised path. This is none other than the error of Balaam – *heeding fleshly solicitations that entice us to seek God's permission rather than being satisfied with His approval.*

God has a plan and because He is our loving Heavenly Father, we can trust His "do not's" as much as His "do's". Let us beware of veering out of His perfect will. There is nothing more to be gained beyond an unbroken fellowship with Him and His gracious smile upon our lives.

-- D. Murcek

The Foundation of our Faith

Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel:

2 Timothy 2:8

In the second epistle of Timothy, the Apostle Paul gives instructions for believers to stand strong against the many assaults that were being hurled at the early church. False doctrine was already threatening to dissuade believers from the truth of the gospel. It was in this environment that Paul exhorted Timothy to remember the foundation of the Christian faith: that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. There are several things that are important to remember about this foundation, and remembering them helps establish a confident faith.

First is that we have a provable faith. Though there are many things surrounding the resurrection that are beyond natural understanding, our faith still stands on many infallible proofs. The death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus was the fulfillment of many prophetic passages which skeptics reject, but to us they are the power of God. Proofs substantiate what we first embrace by faith.

Second is that we have a unique foundation. The resurrection is what separates Christianity from other religions. The teachers and founders of other religions have all proven to be mere men and cannot be compared to the *God who was veiled in flesh, crucified, and risen again*. The mystery of the Creator dying for His creation demonstrates an unsurpassed love that is lacking in other religions.

Third is that we have a powerful foundation. At its inception, the Christian faith amazingly prospered in the midst of the oppressive and corrupt Roman Empire. The strength of its Cornerstone enabled Christianity to survive persecutions though the gates of hell roared against it. This foundation liberated nations and cultures from the clutches of false beliefs. The greatest testament to its power would be the deliverance of countless lives who were subjected to a lifetime of bondage.

So, in times of fear or doubt, or when the many facets of persecution come our way, it is important to always *remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead*.

J. Ekis

Are you hungry?

*Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.
Matthew 5:6*

Hunger and thirst are some of most common aspects of life. In our natural bodies, they are desires that God has planted within us to sustain our life. If we had no hunger, we would not seek to nourish our bodies and would eventually die. Without thirst, we might forget to drink sufficient water and die even faster. While there are other benefits of eating and drinking, such as the pleasure sensed by the taste buds, simply feeding that pleasure with food or drink that only tantalizes taste could also leave us malnourished, as well as also eventually kill us. Our bodies would not survive on a constant diet of candy.

The parallels in the spiritual life are easy to recognize. Just as hunger and thirst are evidence of the existence of physical life, the hunger and thirst for righteousness are evidence of the existence of spiritual life. The beauty of the promise in this fourth beatitude is that our hunger and thirst for righteousness shall be fulfilled. Since righteousness comes from God to us through Jesus Christ, we know that His limitless righteousness is available to fill all who desire it. His Spirit dwells within, bearing witness with our spirit that we are His children, and manifesting His presence through the hunger and thirst for our daily walk to be consistent with His righteousness that He imputed to us when we believed. The apostle John expresses this when he states that “every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.” The hope to which he refers is that of being like Jesus when we shall see Him. And we have the promise that the desire created by this hope planted within us shall be filled. This spiritual hunger not only sustains our spiritual life, but brings abundant life, which Jesus promised (John 10:10) and described as “a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14). Let us continue to allow our spirits to be nourished with the blessings of His righteousness.

Principle application

After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances. Ye shall do my judgments, and keep mine ordinances, to walk therein: I am the LORD your God.

Leviticus 18:3-4

As the Lord continued His instruction to the Israelites regarding right and wrong manners of worship, both in ceremonial rituals and in collective health and hygiene, He inserts a basic principle here that is key in generally discerning what is good or bad. Before God began to give his law in Exodus 20, in the previous chapter He explained through Moses His purpose for it. There He made clear that following His way would make them different from the nations around them and identify them as belonging particularly to the Lord God – that is, peculiar. The principle stated in our text is related to that purpose. Since the people of God would be uniquely different from their unbelieving neighbors, it is generally the case that the doings and the related ordinances of the unbelieving world were to be rejected. Instead of these, they were to live according to the Lord's judgments and ordinances. The reason for this is also basic – "I am the Lord your God" – which implies His supreme love and care for their welfare. Following this principle is provided a list of precepts pertaining to destructive practices of the Gentile nations that were to be shunned, not to keep God's people from pleasure, but to keep them from destruction.

This principle continues to apply to the present. As the people of God, we ought to understand His magnificent love toward us, such that we know that all of His statutes are for the benefit of mankind. Therefore, when we in faith turn to the saving embrace of our heavenly Father through the redemptive work of Christ, "old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (II Corinthians 5:17). As a result, when we review the ways, rules, and mindset of the unbelieving world around us, we should apply this principle that, generally, these ways must be at least questioned and, after godly examination, rejected if found contrary to God's way. We in the western world may observe in local laws and cultures vestiges of practices and ordinances derived from God's law. However, as the culture about us declines toward more ungodliness, we must take care to recognize the need to apply this timeless principle in testing those things that we approve or disapprove, for our own benefit and that of others.

Pastor's Thoughts of the Week

Our Great Abolitionist

But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel: II Timothy 1:10

Anyone who has ever stood before the casket of a loved one and shuddered at the grim prospect of never again seeing that beloved face glow with animation, must receive this glorious text with a mingled sense of relief, joy, and expectation.

“Death”- what a foreboding word is this? How could so formidable an adversary, who has brought to destruction the mightiest of humanity and fertilized countless graveyards with the dust and ashes of multiplied billions, ever be ABOLISHED! Within the time that it takes to read this devotional over 300 people would have succumbed to the inexorable scythe of the grim reaper. Physician and apothecaries administer their temporal drafts having in some cases delayed the inevitable quietus; but death, in all of its hideous forms, invades obtrusively and unabated laying claim to its victim with no respect of age, health or status.

Under the big top, the lion tamer advances toward the ferocious beast with whip and chair in hand and intrepidity in his heart. The snarling animal slinks back to his seat in pusillanimous submission. The king of beasts has met his master. And as surely as the death angel halted at the blood stained door of the faithful Hebrew captives so does death find its tamer in the person of the risen son of God. Our Mighty God, “through death...destroyed him that had the power of death”. All enemies must be put under His feet and that last enemy is death. Abolished!

But that is only half of this divine equation. In death's dreadful wake lies dormant countless multitudes whose mortal frame awaits a transfiguration. And so the great Captain of our salvation is risen with healing in His wings, bringing the spoils of His conquest: life and immortality for all who believe the gospel! Now the sting of death is forever extracted and the fatal venom rendered ineffectual. Our eternal avenger “loosed the pains of death” and secured the ultimate victory.

As we do each week let us assemble to celebrate the resurrection on this Lord's day and be careful to render praisefull homage to our Great Abolitionist.

Have a blessed week,

Pastor
Pastor

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