

Conveniences and Necessities

That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:

Ephesians 2:12

In order for our physical life to exist, there are three necessary components; that being food, water, and shelter. If any of these three became impossible to obtain, we would soon perish. Aside from these three, everything else can be classified as conveniences. In today's world, we are so saturated with conveniences that we sometimes confuse them with necessities. We have grown so accustomed to having luxuries that imagining life without them is hard. Any time a thunderstorm creates a power outage, our lifestyle is drastically altered until power is restored. If you are in a certain age group, you can remember a day when there were no cell phones. Now when we forget our cell phones, a feeling of desperation comes over us. Ask any person who has been incarcerated, and they will testify that life can and does exist without the many luxuries of everyday life. As technology increases, our tendency to depend on these conveniences also continues to increase, but there will always be the certainty of life's absolute necessities.

As believers in Christ, we realize that the greatest necessity in life is God. Before our conversion, though we were aliens from God and had no true hope, we still benefitted from His grace and goodness. The Apostle Paul proclaimed the self-existent God who graciously provides benefits to man and is ready and willing to provide so much more for all who turn to Him when he preached to the Athenians on Mars Hill saying: *Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; That they should seek the Lord if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us.* Our very breath comes from Him, and everything that man makes is ultimately dependent on the resources God has supplied in His creation. Upon finding the Lord, our blurred spiritual vision was cleared, and we began to see the Lord's guiding hand in our life. Instead of following our intuitions, we became (aware of our dependence) dependent on the Lord for direction and provision. In our Christian walk, the Lord allows us to exhaust our earthly resources so that we may find and embrace Him as our greatest resource. When we are weak, we can become strong. When decisions overwhelm us, we find wisdom in Him; when lonely, we may experience walking in the light with Him, and when our finances diminish, we find that we can rely on the riches of His grace. With the Lord as our Good Shepherd, we shall never want.

It is frightening to imagine a life in this world without God. We are observing in our country what happens when the influence of God is pushed away. Selfishness, anger, violence, perversion, and corruption prevail. All the conveniences of this world will not make it any better until people realize that God is necessary for making things right. As we appreciate the things that make life easier, let us never forget what is truly necessary.

J. Ekis

Degrees of freedom

*Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.
Romans 6:18*

As we pause to contemplate and thank God for our liberty, let us recognize that there are different degrees of freedom. America today celebrates the declaration of an independence that freed it from tyrannical rule and injustices that deprived men of rights to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. Yet what was founded then had to be further determined and finally codified in a constitution defining a framework intended to hopefully retain a free nation. Thus, the design of freedom from an unacceptable form of rule had to be defined in a different set of rules, which would promote individual freedom in different areas of life, but would still need to protect men from each other. The common issue remains the depravity of man. So, while escaping one form of bondage, there remains the danger of entering another.

In Romans chapter six, Paul contrasts two types of servitude. Before becoming a Christian, we are servants of sin. This is the plight of every human as a result of Adam's decision in the garden, as explained in chapter five. But observe that his description of the freedom from that bondage is another form of servitude. However, that form is not compelled or egregious. It results from a willing submission and love for the One served.

Every person is a servant, whether it is recognized or not. In many historical and present cases in this world, the servitude has been recognized. Many have experienced bondage against their will, and in most, if not all, of those cases it has been recognized. When those bonds have been broken, there has been much rejoicing. However, there are those who boast of freedom in the course of continuing servitude. Peter describes them as promising liberty, but serving corruption (II Peter 2:19). Then he states the principle behind his statement, that whatever overcomes, or rules, a person is what brings them into bondage. Thus, though some may believe themselves to be free in a civil sense, there are forces beyond that realm that still bind, which are described by Paul as the law, or principle, of sin that rules his members, i.e., his human nature. As followers of Christ, we are freed from that bondage, by freely choosing the good and beneficial master of righteousness, which has been freely given to us in Christ. This is the highest degree of freedom, which motivates not only an escape from evil influence, but even greater the desire for good that glorifies our Lord.

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

The God Who Cares

1 Peter 5:7: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.

For many centuries theologians have been debating the matter of whether the Lord God exhibits any emotion. There are those who frame their arguments to defend the doctrine of the *Impassibility of God*. We certainly do not want to worship a mercurial God who is given to whim and caprice as characterized by the pantheon of Greek gods, but the opposite extreme leads to deism which views God as cold, distant, and impassive—a God who deigns not to interact with humanity.

Even a cursory reading of scripture will yield multiple texts that ascribe to God, deep emotions. It is obvious that God cares for His children 1Peter 5:7. That He is angry with the wicked Psalms 7:11. That His compassions fail not Lamentations 3:22. That He loves with an everlasting love Jeremiah 31:3. That He experiences joy at the repentance of one sinner Luke 15:7. And that Jesus, who is “the express image of God”, wept John 11:35 and was “touched with the feeling of our infirmities” Hebrews 4:15. Man, who is made in the image of God, is endowed with these same emotions.

Those who argue for the passibility of God point out that it is God’s eternal, divine sympathy that leads Him to be involved in His creation and to voluntarily allow His heart to be touched by the suffering of His people. God is transcendent, yes, but He is not aloof.

Blessings to all who read,

Pastor

Fountain of Life

It is the spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.

John 6:63

There are a variety of ancient myths that tell of fountains that supposedly restore youth to those who drink from its waters. The Spanish conquistador Ponce de Leon is credited as the first European to explore Florida in search of the mythical fountain. Though he contributed to expanding Spain's influence in the New World, nothing in his journals speaks of the Fountain of Youth. The indigenous people of the Caribbean Islands had a legend of the mythical land of Bimini, which was supposedly a land of wealth and prosperity from which the myth probably grew. Tales of such a fountain are also found in the writings of Herodotus and some of the writings of the early Crusades. In all likelihood, these stories emanated from man's futile quest for immortality. That quest still resides in the hearts of mankind to this day. Under normal circumstances, everyone has a desire to live and to live longer; unfortunately, they are looking in all the wrong places to satisfy their elusive hope.

Today's verse is found in Jesus' teaching on the Bread of Life. After miraculously feeding five thousand people with a few fish and loaves of bread, many came to Him the next day seeking more. Jesus then teaches the spiritual significance of the miracle by saying that He is the Bread of Life, which, if a man would eat, he would live forever. Not understanding this lesson, the spiritually blinded were repulsed, thinking that they had to literally eat Jesus' flesh and drink His blood. Our Lord then teaches that the spirit makes us alive and that His words are spirit and they are life. In John 5, Jesus states, *"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."* Before conversion, we are dead to God and the spiritually refreshing life He has provided for us. Just like a fountain that refreshes one who is parched from crossing a desert, the spirit of the living word gives us life.

The spiritual life-giving word continues to refresh us way beyond our conversion. Our spiritual life is dependent on the nourishment we derive from it. We can continually extract an inexhaustible amount of divine wisdom from every verse. Even familiar passages never cease to provide new depths of truth to meet our every need. The more we meditate and assimilate the Word into our lives, the more spiritually minded we become. The scriptures teach that *to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace*. This life and peace can abound more and more as we abide in His Word.

As the world continues to vainly search for the mythical fountain of youth, let us demonstrate as God's children the true life that is found in Him. By continuing to drink from this His fountain of truth, we can have our life renewed by His spirit and His word.

J. Ekis

Condescension

When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?

Psalm 8:3-4

As we contemplate the excellent and magnificent name of the LORD our Lord, the contrast and condescension of His power ought to overwhelm our souls, as it did David's as he penned this psalm. Perhaps David, as a young shepherd watching his sheep under the expanse of the heavens, spent much time considering the work of God's hands as he gazed into the vastness of the universe that he could see, and also observed the wonders of the terrestrial that were about him. The stark contrast between the power of God to create all this compared to the relative minuteness of man led to the clear conclusion of the excellence of the Creator, who has set His glory above all these observable heavens. In conjunction with this contrast, he then recognized the overwhelming position that God gave to man in assigning him dominion over the creation. It is quite a marvel to contemplate this privilege bestowed on mankind. For God to even take thought of man would be one thing, yet to visit him – communicate and make Himself known to him – is another marvelous step of condescension revealing the love of God for man. David recognized through his knowledge of the creation account that the Lord's crowning of mankind with responsibility over His creation is a manifestation of that excellent love.

In our fast-paced world that often distracts us from opportunities to reflect on these truths, we must make time to recognize the grace and mercy of God in His care for us, as well as in what He has entrusted to us. Although through Adam's fall he made mankind powerless to fulfill that role, the writer to the Hebrews makes it clear that God Himself has redeemed that role through the visitation of Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels to become man, yet still God, that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man (Hebrews 2:9). This further condescension has provided salvation for all of mankind who will believe on Christ, so that when He returns again, all who believe will share in His authority over all creation in paradise restored. As we consider this amazing grace, we should echo the refrain that begins and ends this psalm: "O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!"

Perspective

*For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory...
– 2 Corinthians 4:17 –*

I recently took a drive through the neighborhood in which I grew up. It was one of those days where I was missing my parents (who have both gone on to glory), and I happened to be in the area, so nostalgia got the better of me and I decided to spin past the old homestead – the place I spent the better portion of the first twenty-two years of my life. While there were some changes in the neighborhood that were obvious – updates to homes, old trees and shrubs cut down, new pavement, etc. – the area was largely the same. But one thing was strikingly different. *It all looked so small!* That took me off guard. I used to play backyard football and baseball in that neighbor's field, or sled rode down that neighbors' hillside, or biked from that neighbors' house up to that one? It seemed back then like those were gigantic areas to cover, but not so much when I looked at them today. Nothing really changed in the neighborhood. But I have. Older, bigger, more life experience. Wow – what a significant difference a change in perspective makes!

This all got me to thinking about what all the trials of this life will seem like on Heaven's shore. They seem so big right now. So many who are reading this are either experiencing some enormous struggle, or watching helplessly as loved ones are afflicted. Mortal combat with the invasive monster of cancer, debilitation due to stroke, life-altering battles with incessant infections, the ravages of Parkinson's, the heartbreak of Alzheimer's, *ad infinitum*. Then there are the spiritual and emotional battles – wayward loved ones, betrayals, neglect, mental duress. So many problems that encompass our way and permeate our pilgrimage through this cursed and barren land. Man is born unto trouble, and it sometimes seems as if the best of mankind is afflicted the most.

But our faith changes the perspective. Paul reminds us that this is all light affliction. What? It sure doesn't feel light right now. More like heavy, hard, and exhausting. Ah, brothers and sisters, but that's the point! When we pass through the veil of death or rapture into the inner sanctuary of Heaven that our Savior has secured for us, the things which right now seem so insurmountable will become so very – small. The hymn writers understood this undeniable reality of our faith...

“Just one glimpse of Him in glory will the toils of life repay...”

“And the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace...”

“Life's trials will seem so small, when we see Christ...”

Hang on, afflicted believer. Heaven awaits. Today's tears will be our joy and rejoicing in God's tomorrow. The eternal is so much bigger than this temporal. Hold fast. It won't be long. --- D. Murcek

A Time to Be Fast, and a Time to Be Slow

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:

James 1:19

Speed has been elevated to a premium in modern culture. Popular thinking tells us that the faster we go the more we can accomplish. Transportation and communication are two areas where rapidity has greatly increased. In 1804 the Lewis and Clark Expedition journeyed a year and a half to reach the Pacific Ocean, while today that same distance can be covered in a couple of hours. Similarly, because news traveled so slowly, the last battle in the War of 1812 was fought *after* the peace treaty had already been signed. While speed certainly has its advantages, it also has its disadvantages. No one would want a surgeon to rush through an operation or a pilot to hastily go over the pre-flight checklist before a flight. Depending on the situation, both swift and slow have their place.

We need the Holy Spirit to give us the insight to know when it is best to be swift or slow in our Christian life. The theme of the Book of James concerns the outward expression of our inward faith, and today's verse highlights the need for speed in one area and yet the need to slow down in others. Often, we do the opposite of what we should do. By failing to listen thoroughly to God's word and allowing it to sink into the depth of our souls, we speak and act inappropriately. The former is meant to control the latter. If we don't meditate and assimilate what we hear, our words and actions are fueled by carnal wisdom and emotions. Speaking too quickly or losing our temper can each produce negative effects that sometimes are irreparable. How often have we wished we could retract words that have been said or actions that have been displayed? We have some control over the sounds that we hear but, for the most part, our ears are involuntarily open; however, our words and actions are controlled by our will. A wise man once said because we have two ears and one mouth, we should listen twice as much as we speak. Just as we take time to truly listen and apply God's word for our edification, we must also learn to listen to the things that others say. Slowing down our words and actions will demonstrate that the Spirit of God is in control. Our words should be fitly spoken and tempered with grace and love. When our heart is imbued with God's word, we have a wonderful means to help, encourage, and inspire. Incorporating the scriptures into our conversations will transfer the divine message to others. Concerning our anger, there are very few times that we benefit from it. Most often our wrath reveals our old nature. The best thing to do with our anger is to lose it for good and never let it control us again. The scriptures teach: *He that is slow to anger, is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.* (Proverbs 16:32)

Today, we start anew with what we hear and what we will say. When we read God's word, may we hear the Holy Spirit speaking to our hearts the eternal words of truth. Every day we will have an opportunity to apply those truths. Pray that the Holy Spirit will give us ears that are quick to listen, mouths that are slow to speak, and wrath that is only used in righteousness.

J. Ekis

Meek strength

*Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.
Matthew 5:5*

As the Lord announced this beatitude, He not only simply stated a sublime truth, but also inherently implied its meaning and application as He reached back to the psalm from which it came: *But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.* (Psalm 37:11). The context of Psalm 37 illustrates aspects of meekness, which leave in the hands of the Lord things that we might be tempted to grasp for ourselves. These include common temporal needs, as well as deliverance from apparent injustices that we may experience in this present world. Yet the psalm instructs us that if we trust in the Lord, delight ourselves in Him, and commit our ways to Him, that He will provide what we need. It also promises that, if we rest in the Lord and patiently wait for Him, we need not fret over those who appear to currently prosper through wicked devices.

As we submit to God's application of the spiritual gift of meekness, we must recognize that our human spirit would naturally desire the opposite. We would put first the defense of our own rights, to obtain what we think we deserve. Yet the spirit of meekness provides a strength to forego our own needs or revenge against those who would do us wrong, especially when we have the ability to exact them. A. W. Pink describes it thus: "Meekness is the opposite of self-will toward God, and of ill-will toward men." There is no greater example of such strength than that exhibited by our Lord Jesus, as He submitted Himself to undeserved abuse and torture from men to fulfill the will of the Father and obtain eternal redemption for us.

From the human standpoint, such an attitude is also developed as a result of the Spirit's application of the first two beatitudes pronounced in this sermon. As one recognizes his own spiritual poverty, and therefore mourns over his state before a righteous God, recognition of personal right of any kind vanishes, as we humbly approach Him for mercy. In this state, let us observe the tense of the verbs. Blessed *are* the meek. In this present tense, the blessing rests, not only in temporal satisfaction, but in the future hope that by His grace the meek *shall* inherit the earth, yea, "all things" (Revelation 21:7).

Rehearsals

And it came to pass in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first day of the month, that Moses spake unto the children of Israel, according unto all that the LORD had given him in commandment unto them...

– Deuteronomy 1:3 –

The book of Deuteronomy is the closing of the Pentateuch. It is primarily a rehearsal of the God's Law and His righteous acts in bringing Israel from the Egypt to the Promised Land, and therefore a repetition of much of what we read in Exodus through Numbers. For Israel, it was a reminder of what God had done, in order to encourage the nation for what He was about to do. For us, this book underscores a vital spiritual truth that every believer must face and embrace – that human beings, including and perhaps especially the people of God, are forgetful.

Our hearts are unfortunately subject to an invisible and escalated law of spiritual entropy. Our frame is fragile, and the one thing that permits us to live godly in this foreign land – our faith – continually needs strengthened. We are bound by time, but only have access to now and then. Yet to come, at least in terms of our earthly existence, is a secret that must be unfolded moment by moment. This can give rise to great fits of fretfulness and apprehension. The only antidote is to trust God, which requires us to focus on Him – Who He is, what He has promised, and what He has done. Hence the need for frequent rehearsals.

We rehearse every time we soberly open our Bibles. Regularly consuming His Word calms us when afraid, strengthens us when faint, corrects us when wayward, and generally encourages our next steps in this great journey of faith.

We rehearse every time we witness. We must not be mealy-mouthed about our Savior. He has done great things for us, and the world ought to know! Speaking for Christ is a wonderful rehearsal of what He has done – at Calvary and in our lives.

We rehearse every time we gather with fellow believers in His Name. Church is vital to the Christian walk. Fellowship is necessary to our spiritual success. Praying one for another in Christ's Name enhances our peace and security. God's people are strengthened by corporate worship, sharing heart-deep "Amens" and "Hallelujahs" that are reserved for those alone who cherish His Word of Truth and are cognizant of His great acts of righteousness.

We rehearse when we thank God. When challenges arise, how oft does our earnest supplication for deliverance transform into joy and praise as we recount before His throne the wonderful ways He has worked, reminding us that He is about to work yet again on our behalf.

Let us not be neglectful. We are weak people, and we need strengthened in the inner man. Let us rehearse what our God has promised, what He has done, and what He is about to do for us, His dearly beloved. --- D. Murcek

How Long

LORD, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph?

Psalms 94:3:

In the current state of affairs, as the devil's agents advance their agenda with

the rapidity of a devouring beast and with "evil men waxing worse and worse", we are apt to pose this same rhetorical question - Lord, how long? All lovers of the truth and justice have patiently awaited a retribution for the evildoers of our generation. How many innocent babies have been slaughtered without a retributive response from the Creator of all life? We have watched with astonishment as treason has been perpetrated in the highest echelons of our republic and yet, to date, there has been no commensurate judgment meted out against the perfidious perpetrators. Venal politicians have been caught peddling influence to our avowed enemies while padding their own bank accounts and yet they continue to hold public office. Even a former president perjured himself by lying to a grand jury and yet he remains a respected leader in his party and still garners exorbitant speaking fees. And still, all of this nefarious activity has proceeded unabated without any just recompense. Must God be charged with the miscarriage of justice? How long wicked triumph?

What one inspired writer asks, another often answers: "The triumphing of the wicked is short" Job 20:5. Our problem is that we **are an impatient people**. We expect a swift response to an evil action, but God is in no hurry to avenge evil. Ezekiel 33:11: "Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live:" We must learn to stand in awe of His patient restraint. There will be a "due time" and we are assured that justice will ultimately be established.

David had within his grasp the opportunity to rid himself of his wicked adversary Saul and his protectors pursued him without cause and meant his destruction, but while they succumbed to the soporific effects of the dank cave of En-gedi, David's "heart smote him" and he refused to execute the demands of righteous vindication. Instead, he deferred to His God whose "ways are not our ways". In due time God would avenge David of his adversary.

We dare not confuse God's patience with ambivalence. The righteous martyrs of the tribulation justly echo the cry of our text: "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" The divine response to evil will come in "a little season". We must not forget that it has been two millennia since the world rejected and crucified the Son of God. No retribution has been applied to satisfy the injustice of that cruel act. But a day of reckoning is coming "Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness". The believer is to rest in the knowledge that though they may suffer many unredressed injustices - "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

Have a blessed day - Pastor

What is Your Identity?

And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land.

Jonah 1:9

Our identity is often a reflection of the major roles in our life. We may become known for the occupations, roles, and activities of our lives, which will become the topic of many of our conversations. Our occupation in the workplace, our role in our families, or even our position on a team is often easily determined after a conversation. But as followers of Christ, our life and faith in Him should be our major identity. All of our earthly identities should pale in comparison to who we are in Christ, and who we are in Him should be manifest in every area of our life.

Who was Jonah, and what was his identity? Well, the book of Jonah is categorized as one of the Minor Prophets. The opening verse tells us that Jonah was the son of Amittai, but aside from that, not much is given concerning his background. Jonah earned the reputation of being a backslidden prophet who is most known for being swallowed by a whale because of his disobedience and bigotry. This account is further validated by the Lord Jesus when He taught that He would rise from the grave after three days – *For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (Matthew 12:40)*. Aside from Jonah's negative reputation, one thing stands out in his ordeal. Amid a turbulent storm, he confesses his true identity. When the mariners asked him these questions: What is your occupation? Whence comest thou? What is thy country? And of what people art thou? – he responds by saying "I am an Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land." Even in his spiritually declined state, when pressed by the heathen sailors, his trust in Jehovah God comes to light. He was not what he should have been, but he still held that he belonged as one of the children of the true and living God.

There are several lessons we can learn from the Book of Jonah, but let us today focus on the warning about disobedience. How could one who acknowledges the true God that made heaven and earth try to run or hide from Him? This futile attempt stands as a stark warning to each of us. Yet, with all of his failings, under the pressure of trial, he acknowledged his fear of the Lord and his allegiance to God's people.

As believers, we should always remember that we are born-again children of God and that our fear of Him and faith in Him should guide every aspect of our lives. Psalm 119 reminds us that *we are companions of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts*. Forgetting this could lead to the same path that Jonah followed. Whatever activities occupy our lives, may they be an extension of our true identity. As believers, we praise God that our greatest identity is not our occupation in life, but rather that we are an adopted child of the LORD. Let us remember to fear and serve Him, for He only is the Maker of heaven and earth. J. Ekis

Truth benefits

I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth.

I John 2:21

In the midst of John's warning to his readers about false professors that infiltrate the church, he stops, as he often does in this epistle, to explain his reason for writing. So far, he has warned of those who profess to love God but deny the Lord by their hatred, and, in this immediate context, of those very antichrists who have wrought schisms by their false doctrine that denies the deity of Jesus the Son. Yet to those among his readers who know the truth, he reminds them that they have received from the Lord that very precious gift that will allow and empower them to carry out the tests he admonishes them to perform. He is not treating them like they need to know the truth. He is reminding them to employ the tool that they've been provided. Just before this he reminds them of the unction, the anointing Holy Spirit, promised to the apostles in the upper room, who would deliver this gift of truth and discernment to His own. So the apostle exhorts them, and us, that, though it is a glorious blessing to know the truth, we must not think that it is sufficient for us to only know it, but we must employ it in the discernment of false teachings and false professors.

To know God's truth is to have the holy common sense to be able to humbly identify liars. John is not afraid to use this strong language throughout this epistle. The benefit is two-fold. If the reader is in fact one of these liars, who professes Christ but denies Him in practice and precept, the conviction of these warnings can reveal the need for repentance and surrender to the truth unto salvation. If the reader is a possessor of the truth, acting upon these warnings can guard the heart and mind against error, as well as enable one to gently rescue others out of the snare of the devil. Let us each examine ourselves to discern how we have heeded this warning.

Bitter or Blessed?

And the LORD spake unto Moses that selfsame day, saying, Get thee up into this mountain Abarim...and behold the land...And die in the mount whither thou goest up...Because ye trespassed against me among the children of Israel at the waters of MeribahKadesh...thou shalt see the land...but thou shalt not go thither...And this is the blessing, wherewith Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death.

– Deuteronomy 32:48-33:1 –

(A full reading of the brief passage cited in part above is recommended...)

The God of the Bible delights to use the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, to cause the wealth of poverty to expose the poverty of wealth, and to reveal the power of the Almighty through human frailty. He continually makes a spectacle of principalities and powers in heavenly places in this work. And by what means? Faith.

We would not know who Moses was but for his faith. A full reading of Moses' inspired autobiography in Exodus through Deuteronomy reveals that this man that spoke with God at the burning bush and received the Law by the disposition of angels at Sinai was riddled with fault. But God graciously used him because of his obedient faith. A single, egregious lapse of that faith at the waters of Meribah was enough to prohibit Moses from entering the promised land. He requested leave but was forthrightly denied. Though permitted to view the inheritance from the heights of Pisgah, the Lawgiver could not and would not bring God's people into the promised land.

But here, nestled within a chapter division between Deuteronomy 32 and 33, do we not see another triumph (perhaps the greatest one of all) of Moses' faith? Fresh off a reminder from Jehovah of his failure that brought what may have appeared to be a harsh chastisement, Moses could have fostered deep bitterness of spirit. Having recently suffered the loss of Aaron, and having been so personally faithful to God but for one angry moment over the past four decades, would not human reason supported by hellish whispers recommend the right to be frustrated at the seeming injustice of his sentence? But Moses spurns the temptation, choosing instead to bless the children of Israel before his death. By rehearsing all that God had done and was yet to do on behalf of His people, this man by faith not only departed this world in the sweet grace of God, but in so doing, he gave the devil one final black eye as a parting gift. (Is this perhaps why both Heaven and Hell took such great interest in the man's burial (Jude 1:9)?)

The Bible issues many warnings about bitterness. It is a choice weapon of Hell against humanity because it coddles self. As believers, we, like Moses, must eschew this temptation. How? By choosing to focus on the blessings we have received and don't deserve, rather than the ones we think we may have missed. The power of praise will always cut off any root of bitterness. Let us thank God for His blessings again today. --- D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Be Sure To Wear Your Girdle!

Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind. | Peter 1:13

We have before us an admonition in the form of a figure of speech. The girdle was an essential element in the warrior's panoply as well as an article of dress in the East, and worn by both men and women. The common girdle was made of leather, (2 Kings 1:8 ; Matthew 3:4) like that worn by the Bedouins of the present day. A finer girdle was made of linen, (Jeremiah 13:1 ; Ezekiel 16:10) embroidered with silk, and sometimes with gold and silver thread, (Daniel 10:5 ; Revelation 1:13 ; 15:6) and frequently studded with gold and precious stones or pearls. The military girdle was worn about the waist; the sword or dagger was suspended from it. (Judges 3:16 ; 2 Samuel 20:8 ; Psalms 45:3) Girding the tunic or robe prevented the garment from interfering while in combat or impeding the performance of a menial task. Hence "girding up the loins" denotes preparation for battle or for active exertion.

Our minds are easily distracted and, in this "age of information", a multiplicity of thoughts are constantly vying for the rights of preoccupation in the mind. We have even learned the fine art of "multitasking" (though most of this is performed at a subconscious level). Some people maintain that they can think several thoughts at the same time, while most of us have enough trouble keeping our minds attentive to a single thought. I believe that thoughts are linear and sequential though competing thoughts may be running on a number of parallel tracks at the same time. We may be switching tracks at times so rapidly that we think we are thinking two thoughts at the same time. The mind is such a complex and miraculous gift from God, providing us with the capacity to think deep and pure thoughts or to plumb the depths of human depravity with evil thoughts. The epistle of James expresses the bipolarity of the streams of conscious thought: James 3:15&17: This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish...But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits. Earlier he notes that: "A double minded man is unstable in all his ways". Isaiah reminds us "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee".

And so it is imperative to apply certain rigid disciplines to this wondrous mechanism so as to glorify the Creator who gave it to us. Just as slovenly dress hindered the soldier in battle, so sloppy thinking is a severe encumbrance to our progress in matters eternal.

Leave no unguarded place,
no weakness of the soul;
take ev'ry virtue, ev'ry grace,
and fortify the whole.
That, having all things done
and all your conflicts past,
ye may o'ercome through Christ alone
and stand complete at last.

Have a powerful day,

Pastor

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

Pitfalls of Forgetfulness

But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.

2 Peter 1:9

Depending on what is forgotten, forgetting something can either be a minor inconvenience or catastrophic. Usually, common and mundane events tend to fade from our memory, while more sensational or unusual occurrences are etched in our memory bank. Some folks are blessed with the ability to retain the most trivial information, while others seem to have perpetual amnesia. Memorizing scriptures and spiritual truths has its unique difficulties because of the spiritual battle Satan wages against God's saints. Remembering the events of the Bible and their spiritual significance are of utmost importance for believers' edification and confidence. Throughout the Biblical accounts, memorials were set up so that God's people would be reminded of the many benefits and attributes of the Lord. Memorials, pillars of stone, the Tables of Stone, Feasts, baptism, and communion all serve as reminders of the Lord's truth and faithfulness.

Today's text reminds and warns believers of the consequences of forgetting that we have been purged from our sins. In verses 4 -8, Peter delineates a list of virtues that will enhance our Christian life. Virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity are to be in believers and flow out from them. Losing our vision of the death, burial, and resurrection can allow the enemy of our souls to blind us with concerns of this life. These virtues cannot be developed by our willpower, but rather are developed by feeding the spiritual nature we received when we were converted. Reading and meditating on God's word so that we become a doer of His word will help to nurture spiritual virtues. When we gain more depth in God's truth and become more aware of His leading and not our own desires, we allow the other virtues to grow. The Lord will guide our steps into situations where we can exercise patience, display godliness, and offer brotherly kindness or charity. If we do not regularly refresh our memory, time will erode the awareness of Christ's passion and His sacrifice for our salvation. Any sense of appreciation for God's love and commitment to His cause will diminish when we do not reflect on our conversion. Remember, the bold claim of Peter that he would never deny the Lord went unfulfilled when he feared being identified as a follower of Jesus. Not until the cock crowed did Peter remember Jesus' warning of his denial. Peter's weeping in bitter remorse should remind us to be wary of repeating the same error.

All of us will have lapses in remembering God's promises. Sometimes, just getting caught up in the business of life can cause us to lose focus. By God's grace and remembering His promises, we can avoid the pitfalls in our spiritual life. Take time today to remember that we have been purged from our old sins. J. Ekis