

The End of the Commandment

Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned

1 Timothy 1:5

Since its inception, Christianity has been challenged and attacked with false teachings. The trinity, the resurrection, and the inspiration of the scriptures are a few of the topics that have been and continue to be targeted. Today, with the abundance of informational avenues available, there is never a lack of aberrant teachings that seek not only to erode the foundations of Christianity, but also to sidetrack believers from the purity of their mission. Science and education have greatly strayed from Biblical influences resulting in detrimental effects to both the secular and religious realm. In these times it is imperative to clarify and stay true to the heart of the Gospel message.

In his epistle to Timothy, Paul warns about false doctrine and cautions his son in the faith to give no heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying. Inspired by the Holy Spirit with words capable of bringing things into focus, Paul summarizes the heart and soul of the Bible's content. With all of its detailed divine instructions, laws, and commandments, the fundamental message of the Bible is still rather simple. Believing God at His word, and placing sincere faith in Christ as Lord and Savior will secure our salvation and a resulting pure love for Him and all of mankind. Jesus said that when our lives demonstrate a genuine love for God and man, we are fulfilling the Bible's greatest commandment. The effects of the Gospel make us a new creature in Christ. Our thoughts and actions should be impacted from our relationship with Him and cause us to have a conscience void of offence with God and man. Faith is not to be conjured up when needed, but it is to be always present and sincere, affecting every area of our lives. Childlike in its essence yet confident in knowing that though we may not understand everything, our faith assures us that God is working out His will.

Today it is possible for people to be involved in Christian service without possessing the foundational elements of true Christianity. Energized by the flesh, or even peer pressure, one can demonstrate externally the Christian lifestyle; but the real power of the Christian faith lies in charity out of a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith. ~J. Ekis

Beginning to Sink

But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord save me. Matthew 14:30

For most people who have to maintain a yard or garden, pulling weeds is a pesky problem. It's a chore that becomes increasingly harder if we procrastinate. Pulling a weed is easier when it first shows above the surface, before its roots have time to anchor it into the soil. Some of life's problems are similar. It can be easier to correct a problem in the beginning before the situation gains momentum. Early detection of something that is taking us away from the Lord is best resolved quickly and with His help of course!

Peter's life provides us with many profitable practical and spiritual lessons. We find in today's text that the Lord designed a lesson not just for Peter, but for us as well. Jesus constrained the disciples to get into a boat and then sends them to the other side of the Galilean Sea. He then goes up the mountain to pray. The scriptures do not record His prayer, but the ensuing account in all likelihood shows the content of His prayer. He who controls the universe provides a storm to teach the disciples and us about our need for utter dependence on Him. While focused on Jesus, Peter performs the impossible by taking a few steps on the troubled water before he suddenly realizes his extreme circumstance. Taking his eyes off the Lord, the wind and waves overwhelm him and he begins to sink. Peter immediately recognizes his helplessness and calls out to the Lord. He didn't wait until he had sunk lower, nor did he try to save himself. Though Jesus certainly could have delivered Peter had he sunk to the bottom of the sea, it was best for Peter to realize the desperation of his situation and cry out for a rapid rescue. Without completely sinking he still learned the lesson of the futility of self-deliverance and the value of seeking the Lord's immediate assistance.

As believers, we must perceive when we are more focused on our circumstances than on the Lord himself. When this occurs, we can easily be overcome by the temptation and testing of those circumstances. Peter's immediate cry prevented him from sinking further. What residual loss can occur when we flounder in our struggles! Immediate help is available when we call out to Him. May we be alert to that moment when we begin to sink and remember to call out quickly.

J. Ekis

Freely give

*Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.
Matthew 10:8*

Jesus gave this command as He specifically called twelve of His disciples, equipped them, and commissioned them as apostles. As disciples, they were followers. This does not mean merely that they followed Him around wherever He went, but that by doing so they learned and sought to apply what He taught. It is evident that many were following Jesus at this point, attempting to similarly apply His teachings. But as He had specifically called these twelve, as is recorded of some of them, with the command “follow me,” He now has called them and given them a new command to “go and preach.” Hence, they are now called the twelve apostles, which means those who are sent as His representatives. Just as Jesus and the Father had authenticated His own ministry with miraculous works, He gives these apostles His authority over spirits and sickness, which would identify the works that they performed to be His works, not theirs. And to qualify His purpose in gifting them with this authority, He reminds them that they are to distribute these gifts as freely as He had given to them. They were not to selectively distribute them, but to freely share with all to whom they were sent.

After His resurrection, Jesus would again commission the eleven remaining apostles to go and teach all nations to observe all things that He had commanded them (Matthew 28:19-20). Thus, the preaching of the gospel is perpetuated through all who will obediently follow. As the early gospel preaching of the apostles was authenticated with miraculous authority, so the preaching of the gospel continues to be authenticated with the record of that authority in the Bible. In some instances, God may choose to further confirm His word with miraculous works. In any case, the main command is to preach the gospel, and the accompanying command still applies. As God has provided spiritual gifts to men for the preaching of the gospel (Romans 12, I Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4), these confirming gifts are to be shared as freely as they have been distributed by Him. So as we exercise His gifts for proclaiming the good news, let us not be selective, but freely give to all what has been freely given.

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

We Shall Behold Him

*Exodus 33:18,20: And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory.
... And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man
see me, and live.*

The Lord has intentionally hid the ineffable glory of His countenance from the eyes of man. Moses had dwelt in the effulgence of this glory for forty days, but this must be understood to be in some diminished fashion. The sun is always shining in its full radiance even though it may be shrouded behind thick clouds. So we must assume that though it be Moses on the mount, Jacob at Penuel' or Isaiah at the throne of heaven, they only saw the glory of God in some partial form. God demands belief without seeing, which is the essence of faith. We can only see through a "glass darkly" and that must suffice us until the day of His revelation.

Now there was something delightful in Moses' divine encounter that elicited his request to see the full glory of God. He had experienced the exhilaration of standing in the partial presence of the Almighty and his appetite was whetted for the full manifestation. What unimaginable thrills and joy unspeakable greets those who pass on into that unseen realm where angels adorn the halls of heaven with ceaseless anthems of praise and all of the saints in antiphonal chorus shout "Worthy is the Lamb". How mundane our former life on earth will seem when once we stand in His presence and absorb those salubrious rays emitted from His glorious face.

Moses was denied his request, for he knew not for what he pled. The Lord says to us, as He did to the waves," Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further! ". There are metes and bounds which here and now must be respected. Lucifer could not be satisfied with being a finite created thing and so he sought to trespass where angels dare not tread. There shall always remain a great gulf fixed between the Creator and His creation for as long as we inhabit these clay vessels, but Revelation 22:4 promises "And they shall see his face."

We could end with no more apposite benediction than this most ancient of all:

The LORD bless thee, and keep thee:

The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee:

The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

Darius's Knowledge of God

Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions. Now the king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee.

– Daniel 6:16 –

It is difficult to fathom the depth of darkness experienced by the ancient pagans. Without a written revelation from God, they either groped hopelessly in the dark to find Him or else tried to wholly ignore their intrinsic need of reconciliation to Him. Such was the case with the Babylonians, the Medes, and the Persians. While these kingdoms could boast many marvelous achievements, they were utterly and totally blind from a spiritual standpoint.

When Nebuchadnezzar's brutal bands pillaged Jerusalem and carted away its citizenry, it was at once an act of divine retribution as well as one of heavenly mercy. The judgement God executed upon His recalcitrant chosen nation He also leveraged mercifully for these hopeless marauders from the East. You see, in that line of chained Jewish captives was a young man who would remarkably impact his captors as well as the history of mankind by simple obedience to his God and a stubborn public living of his faith in a foreign land. As Daniel obeyed God, God raised Daniel. Over time, though the man semi-assimilated into the Babylonian and then the Medo-Persian governments, he never ceased to be a stranger in a strange land. Despite the risks, Daniel continued to live out loud for the God of his fathers, which ultimately brought him to a capital violation of the law of the land and thus, the lion's den.

What is remarkable is Darius' statement upon the execution of Daniel's sentence. "Thy God, whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee." Perhaps it was more hopeful than confident, but it nonetheless speaks volumes about the brilliance of Daniel's witness to this powerful yet stunningly helpless pagan king. He had watched Daniel for years, and whether at royal social events or legislative sessions or private conversations between just the two of them, Darius never witnessed anything in Daniel more notable than that the man was all about his God. Daniel's monolithic witness was God's way of revealing Himself to Darius. And as the king rushed at morning's light to the den, his hope for his friend defying his sleep-deprived body, he found an even more astounding witness to the power of Daniel's God – the fact that He did, indeed, miraculously deliver Daniel from the rage of the lions.

Brethren, there are many Darius-like people in our world today, sad products of their culture, their circumstances, and their own sinful hearts. The only Bible they engage is us. Are we a consistent and reflective read?

-- D. Murcek

Prepared

Therefore, he said unto Judah, Let us build these cities, and make about them walls, and towers, gates, and bars, while the land is yet before us; because we have sought him and he hath given us rest on every side. So, they built and prospered. 2 Chronicles 14:7

Chapters 14, 15, and 16 of Second Chronicles record the reign of King Asa over Judah. After years of religious decline that started with Solomon, and ended in the nation being divided into two kingdoms after his death, Asa is eventually crowned king of Judah. It is recorded that Asa did that which was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God, and during that time the land had rest for ten years. He took away the altars to the false gods, and the idols that polluted the land. Then he commanded Judah to seek the LORD God of their fathers, and to do the law and the commandment. Construction of walls, gates, and bars was accomplished and an army was assembled for protection against any possible outside threat from enemies. All of this proved wise, for eventually trouble came from an enormous Ethiopian army. The LORD empowered the army of Judah and they were able to repulse the invaders. Asa's foresight and faith in God saved the day! His example should encourage us to do the same for our own spiritual protection.

At our conversion we were delivered from the clutches of our soul's enemy; but the Devil continues to assault us for the remainder of our earthly days. The newfound peace we discovered when we were spiritually delivered is eventually tested and attacked by our adversary. We should exercise the same kind of foresight that Asa employed by building barriers that will not allow anything through the ears, and eyes, that can draw the heart away from God's purpose. The protective power of His word, when hidden in the heart, helps us not to sin against our Lord. With the insights gained from His word are like a strong tower enabling us to see dangers afar off so that we can have a better defense. Walls of defense are made strong because their secure foundation is in Jesus Christ himself! We must remember that it is not by might, nor by power, but by His Spirit that we are empowered to defeat the demonic minions that come against us.

While enjoying the Lord's peace today, let us be prepared by building strong defenses for Satan's inevitable assaults, having confidence in Christ to resist him, so that he will flee from us. - J. Ekis

Heart matters

*And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.
Deuteronomy 30:6*

This chapter is another demonstration of God's amazing grace. After multiple chapters of delineating warnings concerning the curses connected with variations of disobedience and hypocrisy and the blessings associated with knowing, loving, and obeying the Lord, God knows that the Israelites will inevitably choose the way of cursing. Yet in this chapter He still provides the remedy of repentance to restoration. The key to the remedy is the work of God within the heart of man. The concept of heart circumcision is a common theme in the law and the prophets, and it is directly stated here, as in Deuteronomy 10:16 and Jeremiah 4:4. However, in these other two passages, the people of Israel are commanded to circumcise their hearts, whereas in our text the heart circumcision is performed by the Lord. In this context, the Lord's action is His work in response to the people's heart of repentance and returning to the Lord from the nations where they will be driven by their pursuit of the cursed ways. Their return is characterized in verse two as being with all their heart and soul. Thus, in the application of the metaphor, we see the two-fold work of the Spirit of God upon the heart. First, He draws the heart to repentance, yet even in repentance no one can make his own heart clean (Proverbs 20:9). So then in His mercy He replaces the heart of the repentant with a circumcised one (Ezekiel 36:26) that loves the Lord thy God.

The apostle Paul echoes this truth in Romans 2:29 as he addresses the Roman Jews. This was not a new concept introduced by the apostle, but the consistent truth of scripture, now applied to both Jew and Gentile in his systematic explanation of the only way of justification before the righteous and holy God. He later laments his nation's ignorant zeal in going about to establish their own righteousness, instead of submitting themselves to the righteousness of God, which must be implanted by Him through faith in the finished work of Christ (Romans 10:1-4). The old must be discarded as all things become new (II Corinthians 5:17). The promise of our text and its fulfillment through faith in Christ is the only way for a person to be able to love the Lord with all of our heart and soul through a new and living way. Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift!

Saturation

Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass: Because I will publish the name of the LORD: ascribe ye greatness unto our God.

Deuteronomy 32:1-3

In this song of Moses, which God gave him to teach the Israelites before his death, to be a reminder of the benefits of loving and serving the Lord, he begins with a call to hear his doctrine. He describes his doctrine in natural terms that would resonate with their agricultural society, in comparison to rain and dew upon the crops and the grass. Although most of us are not immersed in agriculture in our daily lives, we can still appreciate the metaphor within our modern experience. As I contemplated this description, it reminded me of a trek across my back yard during the evening after a rain earlier in the day. By the time I returned to the house, my shoes were drenched, even though it had been some time since the rain. Many of us have had the same experience from a cool evening or morning of significant dew. God created the grass, as well as the herbs, to naturally soak in and retain the moisture for their sustenance and growth. In the same way He has created mankind to be able to soak in and retain His doctrine when it comes as the rain upon the grass to our ears and hearts. It comes to sustain and promote spiritual growth for our souls. Its effect can soak, not our shoes, but our entire being with the life-giving encouragement of the truth of God. If we will hear the words of His mouth, and drink his doctrine, and let it cover and stick to our thoughts and inner being as the grass does the dew and rain, our souls can benefit from its refreshment and nourishment.

Although we have this ability as well as the availability of His word and doctrine, it is possible to raise an umbrella of coldness or busyness or distraction that prevents the needed soaking of our soul. Also, in our age of sound bites and text messages, we should beware lest this culture affect our intake of the word and doctrine. We need more than snippets of doctrine. As children of God, let us not think that we can be nourished with just a few bites a day. Instead we should seek to saturate our minds and hearts with healthy portions of doctrine, first by daily attendance upon His word, and also by meditation and contemplation, as well as exhortation from others who have done the same. Let us heed with Timothy the command of the apostle to “give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine” (I Timothy 4:13), that we may say with the psalmist “O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day” (Psalm 119:97).

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Out of Order

*"I have seen servants upon horses,
and princes walking as servants upon the earth."
Ecclesiastes 10:7*

In 1848, amidst a divided nation, James Russell Lowell wrote *The Present Crisis* which rapidly became the poetic anthem for the abolition movement in America. His thoughts echoed the words found in our scripture text today:

*"Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne,
Yet that scaffold sways the future, and, behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own."*

The god of this world has turned everything upside down; it being his nature as a fallen spirit to subvert truth and exalt the lie. When the Prince of Peace visited this earth He was greeted with vituperation, crowned with thorns, and subjected to an ignominious death while Caesar, Herod and Pilate sat ensconced in gorgeous array. This is a well proven biblical pattern. Observe the arrogant Haman occupying the seat of authority while Mordecai sits with the servants in "the king's gate". David languishes in caves while Saul sits enthroned. Elijah makes due in the wilderness while Jezebel and Ahab luxuriate in the castle. John awaits his execution in the dungeon while Antipas enjoys the fineries of the palace. Paul is beaten and chained while the incestuous Nero contemplates his latest perversion.

Believers take heart for though now *"we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things"* *"it doth not yet appear what we shall be"*! The divine reversal will remediate the injustice, for the first shall be last, and the last first when His kingdom comes.

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

Slow of Heart

*Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken...
– Luke 24:25 –*

The Bible decries many general tendencies of the fallen human heart. It is good for us to continually re-acquaint ourselves and meditate upon these inspired warnings in a personal fashion, for the same propensities exist in all of us, whether young or old, man or woman, newborn or seasoned saint. Even in believers, the heart is deceitful above all things (Jer. 17:9), frequently divided (Ps. 86:11), easily disquieted (Ps. 38:8), prone to doubt (Mk. 11:23), and even at times, hard (Mk. 16:14). On the road to Emmaus, Jesus gave us yet another divine perspective into the human heart in His conversation with His two sorrowful disciples – its slowness to believe.

We can be sure that our brethren who witnessed the crucifixion of our Lord would have wanted nothing more than to trust that He was somehow still alive. They had heard His clear teachings on the subject many times over the last three years. But three days had now elapsed since Calvary's awful events and the certitude of His death had eclipsed any recollection of the promise of His resurrection. Despite the sure words of the Old Testament prophets as well as the personal teaching of the Lord Himself, as far as they were concerned, Jesus was irrevocably deceased. Their belief in His Messiahship seemed now more of a wishful fantasy than a real hope. Unfortunately, they had unwittingly yet egregiously erred by promoting their comprehension of immediately credible facts above the sure promises of their Master and the settled Word of God. They were walking by sight and not by faith.

We can surely identify with these disciples, for are we not often guilty of the same slowness of heart to believe? We live in increasingly dark days. The devil seems to be advancing his agenda and wielding his influence in all strata of humanity. "God is dead" is no longer just an ivory-tower idea from the insane minds of nihilistic academics but has become the burgeoning motto of large masses of everyday men and women. It can *feel* like Satan is actually winning. We can sense his pressure. We can smell the brimstone. But wait a moment – do we not also hear our Lord's whisper within? "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken." What things? The fields are white, the devil has but a short time, Christ is King, and He is returning soon to trample Satan under His feet. Let us take heart and return to the things we know to be true by faith, quickening our hearts, and communing with our Lord. Then we will find the strength again to boldly live in the power of His resurrection and advance His cause until He comes!

Seeing Clearly

For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light.

Psalm 36:9

Light is the great revealer. In the darkness of night, the forms of things are only partially seen because darkness covers intricate details. When the sun rises with its penetrating light, things once shrouded in the cover of darkness, now take on distinct shape. As night gives way to dawn, obscurity takes on clarity.

Our true life finds its source in God's fountain of eternal life. Being born again empowers us to live a life that is filled with divine purpose. Repenting of the old life opens the door to all things becoming new. With the Holy Spirit residing within us, we now have the Great Teacher Who is able to reveal to us things once hidden to our dead spirit. As we draw closer to the brightness of the Lord's presence, the more fully he will shine allowing us to see things hidden below the surface.

One benefit derived from dwelling in the light of His presence is being enabled to uncover the depths of His word. Some of the Bible's teachings are easily observed, while others require the Lord's light to mine deeper truths. Going beyond casual reading and taking time to meditate on the Word allows the light to shine in every nook and cranny of a verse. The brighter the light, the fuller the revelation. *With the entrance of the light of His word to give us understanding (Ps. 119:130), our path will shine more and more until that perfect day (Prov. 4:18).*

Another benefit of being in His light is that our inner sins are revealed. At the time of conversion, our more obvious outward sins are usually the first of which we repent. Lest we grow comfortable in our newly changed life, the Lord shines more brightly to reveal the hidden sins of our hearts. After delineating a list of sins in Mark 7, our Lord states that: *All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.* As the Holy Spirit brings the self-centeredness that affects our motives to the surface for us to recognize, we can then, with the Lord's help, repent of it. In the light of His presence, our pride, envy, wicked thoughts, anger, vengeful spirits, and a host of other hindrances are revealed, and He provides us the choice to be liberated to a fuller and deeper relationship with our Lord.

J. Ekis

Still No Other Name

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

– Acts 4:12 –

While it is true that the Jews believed in the exclusivity of the God of Israel, they did not understand Him to be manifested in the Man Christ Jesus. The nation crucified the Son of God precisely because of His claims of divinity. When Jesus stepped out of the grave on resurrection morning, He secured forever a Name above every name in heaven and earth. In God's economy and timing, every knee will bow, of things in heaven, and earth, and under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Php. 2:9-11).

Because of this truth, when the Apostles preached salvation to the Jews as well as the Gentiles, it could be neither generally nor solely in the name of the God of Israel. Personal salvation from sin, death, and hell rests squarely upon the fuller manifestation of God in the Person and work of Christ. The early church would have been nothing more than another Jewish sect had they not adhered to an uncompromising promotion of the Name of Jesus Christ. It is wholly in the Name of Jesus that they shook the powers of darkness and turned the world upside down.

Today, the devil still hates (because he fears) this Name. You can feel it anytime you bring Christ specifically into a discussion with an unbeliever. Many people may be willing to converse in general terms about God. But there is an appreciable spiritual resistance when the Name of Jesus is mentioned. This is because principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in high places know that even today, more than two thousand years after His death, burial, and resurrection, there is unparalleled power in the Name of Jesus Christ – the power to turn the human heart from darkness to light and from the bondage of Satan toward the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Brothers and sisters, there is no salvation outside of the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Many churches and individual Christians think that there is an easier road to winning souls to Heaven's ranks. It is becoming popular to believe that we can woo men with general "God talk" and introduce them slowly and methodically to Christ at some later juncture. But this is as unbiblical as it is useless. It is Jesus's Name alone that can save. Let us ensure that we who have been redeemed by His blood also emphatically and boldly proclaim His Name before men. As we do so, hell will be plundered, Heaven populated, and our Lord will be well pleased.

Magnification

*And the LORD said unto Joshua, This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee.
Joshua 3:7*

Magnification is a matter of perspective. Thus, it can also be relative. We use devices to magnify objects, so that they appear larger than they are in reality. We often do this so that we can see them better, normally to capture or appreciate a noted feature, at times for a particular purpose. We also use words to magnify things, thoughts, places, and persons. This may be to make them appear larger, or more significant, than they are in reality, or it may also be to make them appear as large as they really are relative to the hearer's perception. In the case of our text, God used neither a magnifying device nor words to accomplish His stated purpose of magnifying Joshua. He instead used an event – the miraculous parting of the Jordan river, so that the Israelite nation could cross on dry ground. It is notable that the LORD described the relative nature of this magnification; it was in the sight of all Israel. Joshua's place and purpose in the Israelite nation would be perceived differently by them, yet before God he would continue to be the same man.

An important aspect of this event was Joshua's perspective. He was magnified by the LORD in the sight of the people, but he did not magnify himself, neither before the people nor God. Evidence of this is seen in the immediate context, as well as throughout the historical account in this book. We see in the context of the chapter no mention by Joshua to the people of his own expectation for this new view. He simply allowed God to do as He said He would. On the other hand, we see in verse 10 that, in preparation for the event, Joshua himself magnifies God: "the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites." Later in verse 13 he describes beforehand the event to be done by "the LORD, the Lord of all the earth." With these words, Joshua brings the person of Jehovah into proper relative perspective, not making Him greater than in reality, but in fact confirming the reality of His greatness for the people. Thus, we see a key to true humility exemplified by Joshua, such that when God magnifies him, he retains the real perspective, and rightly magnifies the LORD. May we follow this example and follow the admonition to "humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up" (James 4:10).

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

We Would See Jesus

John 3:30: He must increase, but I must decrease.

John the Baptist had a powerful, though brief, impact on his generation. He was “a burning and shining light” though only “for a season”. How refreshingly different it is to observe a man so devoid of self who willingly bowed out of the limelight in the stead of one so much his superior. In the modern context we observe the venal politicians unwilling to cede their pretentious thrones of power, tenaciously clinging to the levers of power until they are run out of office. Even then they pine for recognition, dedicate libraries to themselves, and speak of their legacy ad nauseam. But for our consideration today is the Baptist, who was content to find a servile position that Christ might be magnified in the eyes of his followers. In so doing, John affords to us a sterling example of true discipleship.

In days of yore it was customary for the royal page to clear the passageway with the officious command “Make way for the King!”. It is the obligation of every minister of the mysteries of God to politely get out of the way. Servants of God do well to remember that no one attends their meetings to see them or to hear their words. Like the Greeks of John 12:21, the people “would see Jesus”. Let us assiduously clear the pathway of all things which obscure and detract from the King.

So easily do we fall into the trap of considering ourselves to be more important than we actually are. Admittedly, we all have an “I” problem. John’s credo was “I must decrease”. The chief purpose of man is to bring glory to his creator and this is best accomplished by hiding beneath the shadow of the cross. Psalms 40:16: *Let all those that seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee: let such as love thy salvation say continually, The LORD be magnified.*

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

Fear and Comfort

Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

– Acts 9:31 –

God's truth, like His nature, is always double-edged. We must condition our hearts to ever be aware of both His goodness and His severity. There is room to err to the right hand or to the left. This fact should keep us in close contact and communion with Him in order to avoid Satan's traps.

The early churches in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria are a model of this happy discipline of balanced theological perspective. They grew (in number, power, and influence) because of a wholistic understanding of the character of their Lord. They did not live merely or exclusively in the doctrine of God's grace, nor did they hold to a limited or isolated view of His austerity. Rather, they understood and appropriated the completeness of His nature. They feared Him – showing Him reverence, subjecting their desires to His will, and submitting their "rights" to His authority. They understood Solomon's inspired exhortation, that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. They humbly accepted that there can be no advancing or growth in grace without it. Thus, by fearing the Lord, they aligned themselves with Heaven, thereby opening their hearts to receive an uninterrupted and limitless supply of His Spirit, Who generously shares His nature with His host, filling them with love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, temperance, and faith. And if there can be no law against this, it is certain that the gates of hell must yield as well! Hence, they were "multiplied."

What held true in the infant assemblies of the saints will prove the proper formula for today's believers as well. We must be mindful to walk in *both* the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost. Our God owns the universe and has conquered the grave. We dare not over-familiarize Him. He deserves our reverence and submission. But He is not austere to hearts that hold Him in such esteem. He delights to share the good pleasure of His countenance and the fullness of His Spirit with those that love Him for Who He is and what He has done. This is the tried-and-true pathway to peace and growth, both individually and corporately. Let us ensure that we strive to always stand in proper relation to our Lord.

-- D. Murcek

I Will if God Will

But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem; but I will return again unto you, If God will.

Acts 18:21

No one can refute Paul's place of prominence in the infant days of the Christian church. Touched by the Lord in a special revelation, he demonstrates the energy and imparted divine knowledge to help build the body of Christ. With his own willingness submitted to God's perfect will, Paul travels the ancient Mediterranean World converting and confirming souls for the eternal kingdom. Even with his special revelation, the apostle Paul recognized that he did not possess complete spiritual knowledge concerning God's will. Intending to keep a feast at Jerusalem, Paul promises the Ephesians he will return to them if God wills. Wisely, he submitted his will to God's perfect will.

God has a perfect will for all believers and has given us His written word, which reveals the blueprint for our lives. Coupled with the indwelling Spirit, we have the means to discern the path He wants us to travel in life. Yet with all of that, we still do not have complete understanding of everything He has planned for us. We must be willing to acknowledge our limited understanding and by faith surrender to God's will. Walking awhile with the Lord will teach us that His will is perfect and it is always in our best interest to submit to it. Eventually, time bears out the superiority of God's plan. After a time of struggling to surrender by faith to God's will, many believers find a much better circumstance than what would have occurred had they enforced their own will. With all the promises and possibilities of answers to prayer, we should follow our Lord's example by saying "not my will, but thine be done". Believing that we know what is best for us and demanding to have our way can have disastrous results. One thing we lack, is the ability to see the future as well as resulting consequences of our decisions. It is so much better to surrender to an omniscient God's perfect plan for us. Psalm 106:15 -And He gave them their request; but sent leanness to their soul- should remind us of the wisdom of submitting to the Lord's will.

Today, may the Lord give us the strength and determination to perform what we know to be His will, and in times of uncertainty the willingness to submit to His perfect plan. ~ J. Ekis

The Ripple Effect

And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.

John 1:36,37

There is much potential in a small pebble. Casting a small stone into a placid mountain lake can send a procession of small waves to every inch of shoreline. An almost unnoticeable splash changes the current dynamic of the lake. Quickly disappearing below the surface, the stone's presence is manifest throughout the entire lake. Such is the case in the ripple effect of meeting the Lord Jesus.

In reading the whole account in John 1:35-51 we see an example of the ripple effect of our Lord's earthly ministry. John the Baptist, comfortable and confident in his purpose, fulfills that purpose by pointing two of his disciples to follow Jesus Christ, the true Lamb of God. Upon hearing John's declaration and seeing the Lord, those two followers of John then transfer their discipleship to the Lord Jesus. One of those disciples, whose name is Andrew, then goes to his brother Simon Peter to tell him about the Messiah. The Gospel of Matthew records that Jesus later invites them to follow Him, and He would make them fishers of men. Leaving their earthly profession of catching fish, they would now cast out the gospel net for the souls of men. After Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, He ascends while commissioning His followers to go into all the world to preach the gospel. The book of Acts records the ripple effect of the gospel during the early days of Christianity. Peter who was influenced by his brother, then heals a lame man, who after gaining his mobility, praises God before many witnesses. Later Peter addresses the Sanhedrin about the saving power of the Messiah. In obedience to the Lord's guidance, Peter also preaches in Cornelius' house which is filled with his friends and family. Many of Peter's listeners would then in turn follow his example and continue declaring the gospel. On and on it would go throughout the ages. When we are assembled in church, it is a direct result of those who have traveled this earth before us declaring the salvation message.

Though we might not always see the results of our attempts to share the salvation message, we can be confident that its ripple effect will continue reaching and influencing others for Jesus. Hallelujah! - J. Ekis

Faint not

*I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.
Psalm 27:13-14*

We find many references in the Bible to fainting or being faint. A simple search on the word faint will find around sixty references. In most cases, the expression refers to being weary or exhausted, or without strength of body or spirit. There are many causes associated with these related conditions, such as lack of nourishment or rest, or being overworked or overwhelmed physically, mentally, or spiritually. It is interesting that the first three words of our text in our King James version are italicized, which indicates that there is no corresponding word in the original Hebrew, yet the thought is implied in the context. In this case, a literary device occurs (aposiopesis) where David abruptly omits the obviously painful consequence and state of despair of not believing that he would see the goodness of the Lord while still alive. After contemplating the possibilities of being forsaken by God or by parents, or being delivered over to cruel enemies, he shrinks from expressing the state of a total loss of hope to which a faithless human spirit could drive him. Instead, he draws on the strength that only faith in the goodness of the Lord can bring to his soul. Faith in the omnipotent holy God is the remedy for utter despair.

In a world full of disappointment, discouragement, disaster, and death, as believers we must, with David and others, draw upon the faith that God supplies to wait on Him who can strengthen our hearts in the face of all these things. Solomon declares, "If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small" (Proverbs 24:10). Yet Isaiah echoes David's thought when he declares that "they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength" (Isaiah 40:28-31). When Jonah was knocked to his senses, he said, "When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD" (Jonah 2:7). Paul reminds us to "not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Galatians 6:9). Then, in that marvelous cluster of exhortations to the Corinthians (II Corinthians 4:7-18), where he describes being not distressed in trouble, not in despair when perplexed, not forsaken when persecuted, and not destroyed though cast down, he reminds us that trusting with thanksgiving the abundant grace of God gives reason to "faint not" through our relatively "light affliction," while we look by faith to the unseen eternal purposes of God, and realize that all these things are for our sakes and for His glory. So the second reminder from David, "Wait, I say, on the Lord." May He thus strengthen your heart this day.

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Forgetting the Past

Numbers 11:5: We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely.

God has graciously offered to expunge our sinful past for he says: “ *their sins and iniquities will I remember no more*”. If our omniscient Father is thus willing to forget the host of misdeeds we have commissioned then it ought to be our chief delight to do the same. Once a fire is extinguished there can remain smoldering embers which, if given the right conditions, can reignite and restart the fire anew. In the believer’s life, assiduous care must be taken lest a remaining ember of the old nature suddenly reignite what was thought to be a subdued passion. Rather than delighting in their new found liberty, the children of Israel fell a-lusting after their former diet. The devil inexplicably afflicted them with amnesia in that they had forgotten the taskmaster’s lash, the cruel bondage, and, not to mention, the divine deliverance they had witnessed by the mighty hand of the Lord. O the leeks, garlic and fish had so much appeal. But fish, after so many days, emit an odiferous stench.

Lot’s wife pined for the lascivious life of Sodom. What evanescent thrill could have persuaded her to longingly look back upon the condign judgement of that perverted city of sin? How doth the arch enemy of our soul so often stir up remembrances of a life so ill spent. How does he gild the recollection with fool’s gold. How can it be that we are so easily duped into believing that we have suffered some sort of loss by taking up the cross and following Christ: that Egypt’s fare with Egypt’s bondage was superior to the wilderness manna with God’s glorious emancipation.

Paul reminds us to forget “*those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*”. Let us remember that the Master said “*I have meat to eat that ye know not of*”. Let this be our consolation when Satan excites our appetite for the fish of Egypt.

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

Angelic Perplexity

Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.

– 1 Peter 1:12 –

They were present when God fastened the foundations of the earth (Job 38:7). They continually behold the face of the Father (Mt. 18:10) and with residence in near proximity to His throne, they lead Heaven's worship with the everlasting chorus of "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts" (Isa. 6:3). For the moment, they are higher than man in God's created order (Heb. 2:7). They wage warfare in heavenly realms against the prince of darkness and his minions (Rev. 12:7). They know only to do God's will (Ps. 103:20) and have historically, when commissioned, carried vital messages from God's throne to mankind. Those messages include both the annunciation of the birth of the Savior of the world, as well as the most glorious message man has ever heard – "He is not here; for He is risen as He said." These are but a few characteristics of Heaven's host, the class of created beings we know as angels.

Yet for all of their privileged status, there is something that wholly escapes their sanctified intellect, confounding them to the point of a continuous inquiry. The good news that God has taken on Himself not their heavenly nature, but the seed of Abraham; that He has humbled Himself to the death of the cross; that He rose to conquer a death and hell that all humanity deserved; that He now seeks men and women from every tribe and nation and kindred and tongue to embrace His sacrifice; that to as many as receive Him, He gives the power to become the sons and daughters of God; and that He will one day exalt redeemed sinners, who were made in His image and after His likeness, to a status far above their own – these are the truths that angels simply have no capacity to comprehend. As a song writer poetically captured this profundity...

*And someday I'll sit down with my angel friends up in heaven
They'll tell me about creation, and I'll tell them the story of grace*

It is unfortunately easy for each of us to lose perspective of the greatness of our salvation. Let us pause and revel in the humbling fact that we are the apple of God's gracious eye and the blessed possessors of something so inscrutably precious that even His angels cannot understand it.

-- D. Murcek

The Cure for Anxiety

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6,7

Worry is a common plight for all mankind. Whether founded or unfounded, worry can grip all robbing us of peace. Often, the possibility of an unfavorable future event can imprison the mind with a myriad of fearful thoughts. After a routine physical exam, the doctor orders a test for further clarification and the patient's imagination runs wild with all the negative possibilities. When the test results reveal that all is normal, the patient realizes all their worries were unwarranted.

Today's text is not a suggestion, but rather it commands us to not be over fraught with the cares of this life. It then follows the command with an alternative way to deal with worry and anxiety. Prayer has surely been and always will be one of the greatest resources at our disposal. Prayer is not only for the greater burdens that are beyond our control, but the little nuisances of life are also to be brought to the Lord in prayer. There are varied areas of prayer. Praise, confession, and intercession serve a great purpose in prayer; but so does bringing our daily needs before the Lord. As believers, we are as the branches that are attached to the main vine deriving our life source from the Lord. Prayer is the worshipful act and attitude of bowing before God. Our supplications are those humble requests that we need from the Great Provider. Both prayer and supplications should be tempered with a heart filled with thanksgiving knowing that our great God invites us to have an audience with Him. Brimming with gratitude for His continual care, the confident hope of God meeting our present need produces a peace that can only come from Him. The scriptures are replete with promises and examples of heavenly provision and protection for all our needs. When we lose our eternal focus, times of fear and worry can overtake our thoughts, and we need that divine homing instinct that brings us back to Jehovah-Jireh (the Lord provides).

Everyday we are able to experience the peace that passes all understanding, when we bring both our physical and spiritual burdens to our Lord.

J. Ekis