

## **New things**

*And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.*

*Revelation 21:5*

There are surely many things in the past that we each would like to return to and change if it were possible. As we live and learn, in both our natural and spiritual journeys, hindsight is typically much keener and clearer. Yet reality prevails as we leave those things behind and continue to march forward in time, often accompanied by consequences of that past. We are thankful for an omnipotent Lord who upholds us through this journey navigating cluttered, or uncharted, waters. He has given us the map of His word and the comfort and conviction of His Spirit. Yet, beyond these waters, we are also thankful for that day when the true and faithful words of our text will become our present and everlasting reality – “all things new.” When He makes all things new, faith will no longer be required, there will be no second-guessing, and there will be no looking back. The Lamb will be our light, and the “no mores” of verse 4 will be accomplished. All will be right in His presence.

In the meantime, as we journey here, we have that hope for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness (II Pet. 3:13), just as those faithful saints sought in Hebrews 11:16. While a new year along this present path, in human terms, means throwing away the old calendar and hanging a new one, it does provide an opportunity for reflection, re-assessment, and resolution. As we take those opportunities, let us remember to focus on the prize set before us. “And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again,” so that with an eternal forward focus, we can walk in newness of life now, as “all things have become new” (II Cor. 5:15, 17). May His promises and sustaining power bring a truly blessed new year.

# *Pastors Thoughts of the Week*

## A Lamentable Departure

*Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.  
Revelation 2:4:*

The Lord was the initiator in the relationship between fallen man and an aggrieved God. We, as sheep gone astray, had as soon fatuously remained estranged from God if it were not for the Lord sending His Spirit to draw us to His saving proposal. I John 4:10: Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. But after the marriage of our soul to Him, we can so easily leave our "first love". And unless rapid repair of this estrangement occurs the believer will lapse into spiritual apostasy. Whence comes this estrangement?

Man was created to be dependent on his Creator. This symbiosis was disrupted when Adam imprudently broke his fellowship with the Lord. We find him, who once walked in the full light of His presence in the cool of the day, now cowering and hiding in the shadows from that same "voice of the Lord".

Lot determined that living the nomadic life was too straight for him and made his fatal choice to separate from the godly Abraham and to dwell with the wicked men of Sodom. The remainder of his days were spent in self-recrimination for that ill-advised decision.

Under the concupiscent influence of his heathen wives, Solomon casts aside the sacred bond he had established in the outset of his kingdom and institutionalized paganism amongst the chosen people. He died a caustic, disillusioned man.

A single phrase encapsulates the plight of all apostates : "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world". He started well. One wonders who did hinder him that he "should not obey the truth."

Many a young prodigal has decided to decamp to a far country and waste his substance with riotous living only to find out that the wholesome environs of his boyhood upbringing was a much "better and enduring substance".

Let us learn from these tragic lessons and tenaciously cling to the our first love and thus avoid the calamitous results of a misspent and apostate life.

Have a blessed week,

*Pastor*

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

## Planted and Flourishing

---

*Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God.  
– Psalm 92:13 –*

---

It is clear that local assemblies of New Testament believers and the worship services that take place in such congregations (churches) are not distinctly the same as the prescribed sacerdotal worship of the Old Testament Temple. Yet Jesus told us that where two or three are gathered in His name, He is in the midst. Therefore, when such gathering is done regularly with the express purpose of systematically and collectively worshipping Him, we can be comfortable with deeming “church” as “the house of the Lord”, in the spiritual (and perhaps fullest) sense of the phrase.

Faithful churchgoing has become *passe* for much of modern Christendom. Many professed believers regard it as an optional add-on to their salvation. But as sincere as one may be about their belief, it is impossible to find either biblical or historical support for spurious or scant church attendance. From the days of the Apostles and throughout the history of the Church of Jesus Christ, collective worship on the Lord’s Day has been Her distinctive hallmark. Martin Luther once said, “To gather with God’s people in united adoration of the Father is as necessary to the Christian life as prayer.” And Frances Havergal noted, “An avoidable absence from church is an infallible evidence of spiritual decay.” In every age except ours, Christians have universally understood the importance of “being planted in the house of the Lord.”

I recall as a youngster going to church almost weekly. Being raised in a mainline denomination, the liturgical service was many times an excruciating thing for a young boy to endure. Being analytical from my youth, I would “measure” the sermons from my pew (a “long” week exceeded twenty minutes). I got very little spiritually out of those weekly services, to be sure. But what I did obtain from the repetition of weekly attendance was the indelible impression that something was very important about this exercise (at least at one point in time), I just was not certain what. It was only once I was truly redeemed as a young man that I understood. After my conversion, churchgoing was no longer merely a dutiful obligation but became more of a robust opportunity – a weekly celebration of gathering with believers of like mind and like precious faith, collectively adoring the Savior who died and rose again for us. Singing His praises, hearing his Word, encouraging and being encouraged by the fellowship of the saints – this was exactly what the Apostolic church did. And all true believers and ardent disciples of Christ in all ages since have engaged in the same godly practice and will do so until Jesus comes.

So regardless of where Christendom may be headed, let us resolve to continuously carry out a heart-felt commitment to the local assembly of the saints. There is a special blessing attached to consistently gathering with a right and ready spirit. For those that be planted in the house of Lord shall doubtless flourish in the courts of our God.

-- D. Murcek

## In Between

*For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.*

*Philippians 1:23,24*

Everyday life presents us with concurrent opportunities that force us to make difficult decisions. Those decisions can have impactful consequences, such as being offered several desirable job opportunities at the same time; or they can be something more trivial like being offered free tickets to a ballgame that is scheduled on the same day you were planning to go to the amusement park. There are also innumerable times when our plans are interrupted by unforeseen situations that arise demanding an immediate decision.

In today's text, the Apostle Paul presents a situation with which we can all somewhat identify. At the time of writing his epistle to the Philippians, Paul was facing adversity due to his imprisonment. Though his faith and contentment were strong throughout his circumstance, a part of him longed for deliverance and to be in the eternal presence of the Lord. Paul says *to live is Christ and to die is gain*, which is something we must often remind ourselves. We must never allow the attachments of this life to overshadow the significance of what we gain when we step on heaven's shore. We gain everything and lose nothing of true value when we are finally home in the presence of the Lord. To balance out that longing to be delivered from the burdens of this life, the Lord reminds us that He has purpose for us to remain in the flesh. Paul understood that his purpose was to be involved in the lives of others, and the same is true for us today. God has given each of us varying degrees of opportunity to touch the lives of others for Christ. Whether it be a protracted time of intercessory prayer or simply giving a cup of cold water in Jesus name, each and every thing we do for others in Jesus' name serves an eternal purpose.

During this difficult pandemic year, I am sure believers have often thought how wonderful it would be for our delivering Lord to return; but it is important to never forget that until He calls us home, it is needful for us to be in the flesh. Today, let us decide to do what we can for others in Jesus' name.

J. Ekis

## Pressing On

*... forgetting those things that 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.*

*Philippians 3:13,14*

It has been said that it is better to aim for the stars and come short than to aim for nothing and get it. A person who dedicates themselves to perfecting a skill may never accomplish their desired level of achievement, yet through their dedication and effort they still will have gained some level of improvement. As believers, we each have a different path that God has willed for us to travel, yet our most important goal should be the same. As the apostle Paul said, we should be *pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*.

Looking back to the time of our conversion, we should remember the relief we felt after being delivered from the guilt of our sin and the joy of having a new life in Christ. It would have been easy to stay in that spiritually infant stage enjoying our newfound faith and having little sense of spiritual responsibilities; but the Lord had plans for us to grow in His grace. The lessons we learned at that time would serve us well as we moved upward through the incremental steps of spiritual maturity. As important as each of those lessons were, they would not be enough to carry us through the rest of our earthly pilgrimage. New lessons, new experiences, and new blessings designed by God would be necessary to help us conform to His image. If we were to coast on the memories of past lessons learned and past blessings received, we would eventually stop moving upward. Paul's example was to not only move on past his sinful life before conversion, but also not to stagnate by resting on the laurels of what the Lord accomplished through him. With heaven as the ultimate goal, he also leaned into being crucified with Christ and allowing the Lord to work out God's perfect will in his life.

The cry of John the Baptist should also be ours: *He must increase and I must decrease as we press toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*. Press on today!

J. Ekis

## Snares

*They shall not dwell in thy land, lest they make thee sin against me: for if thou serve their gods, it will surely be a snare unto thee.*

*Exodus 23:33*

Early in their journey from the bondage of Egypt, God delivered His preserving law to the Israelites from mount Sinai. In this chapter He begins to describe to them how He will deliver the promised land to them through the defeat of their enemies in it. Accompanying these and other similar promises of deliverance are warnings about their attitude toward the inhabitants of Canaan, as they would be gradually driven out of the land by Israelites who would obey the Lord. In this instance, yielding to temptation to serve the gods of their enemies marked for defeat is described as a snare.

There are about seventy references to snares in the Bible. The use of snares in that day was common enough that the picture would be effective. For us today, there are probably few of us who have ever employed a snare. We may gloss over this word as we read, yet we would do well to understand the spiritual illustration. The snare is a unique trap that initially entangles the animal in a manner barely felt; yet, as it moves to release itself, the slip knot grasps more tightly around the animal's leg. Thus, as the bait lures the animal into a seemingly harmless position over the hidden snare, the animal is soon entrapping itself more securely as it strives to be released.

The warning is still appropriate. We should heed the historical account of the effects of the unconquered culture on the Israelites and realize that there was evidently much about the idolatrous practices of the Canaanites that was alluring and eventually entrapping. The idols that surround us today may not be embodied in wood or stone, yet the danger of similar entrapment remains. As our culture plunges into acceptance of sin and godlessness, we must be careful to view the world's philosophies through the lens of God's word and not through the snares of media and opinions of "nice folks." These influences often insidiously seek to call evil good, and good evil (Isaiah 5:20). The world needs His light to see the way out of the snare. We need to shine that light on the snares, both to avoid them ourselves and to help others escape them.

# Pastors Thoughts of the Week

## Apotheosis

*And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. Acts 12:22:*

I am certain that most of us look at ourselves as being rather insignificant. We tend to assess our impact upon the world around us as being imperceptible, if not entirely inconsequential. Our perspective is skewed by the perverse way in which lives are evaluated in our modern culture. We have fabricated a fallacious definition of greatness and have devalued any life that falls short of that false standard.

Although Alexander "the Great" was not the first human to receive divine honors, his self-deification set an example for Hellenistic kings, Roman emperors, and other rulers including our own. Visible through the oculus of the dome in the rotunda of the United States Capitol Building one may gaze 180 feet above and behold The Apotheosis of Washington. This art work unabashedly portrays George Washington presiding as chief above six pagan deities. It is a vain, if not blasphemous, attempt to elevate a man in honor of the greatness of his achievements. It is impossible to determine how Washington would have reacted to the fresco since it was painted in 1865, but far too many political saviors become intoxicated with power and are loath to forbid such public adulation. Outwardly they may demur but inwardly they relish the effusive worship.

Our text describes the reaction of the commoners who, by exalting King Agrippa, vicariously transformed their own mundaneness. Often there is a kinetic energy that is conveyed through the megalomaniac to his adoring acolytes. That old serpentine lie "ye shall be as gods" is a beguiling temptation.

In light of this the Bible repeatedly asserts that the Lord has no patience with lesser gods. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me", be it silver, stone, plaster or flesh and blood. How comforting to know the the Good Shepherd "putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers."

Have a blessed week,

*Pastor*

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

## The Shadow of the Almighty

---

*He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.  
– Psalm 91:1 –*

---

Most of us likely do not harbor many vivid recollections of our earliest childhood years, particular from prior to five years old or so. Of the ones we do, they are usually of either extremely traumatic or euphoric events. I personally possess just a handful of recollections from that period of my life, but one of them in particular helps me to appreciate the spiritual lesson of our text.

I have always hated the open hot sun. From my earliest recollection, I remember seeking ways to avoid being in direct contact with its ubiquitous rays, particularly when temperatures rise north of eighty degrees or so. I have a very early childhood memory from perhaps around four years of age of walking through Kennywood Park on a hot summer's day, holding my father's hand. Though excited about the enjoyments of Kiddie Land, I recall being excessively uncomfortable and miserable because of the hot sunshine. I was purposely trying to place myself in my father's shadow as we walked along so as to avoid the torment of direct contact with the blistering rays of our solar friend. What trauma – that I still possess this recollection some forty-plus years removed of tracing my dad's footsteps in an attempt to be sheltered from the scorching heat that sunny afternoon!

The ninety-first psalm is an ode to the protective custody of our God. The psalmist exults that of the myriad of tormenting dangers surrounding him – be it the snare of the fowler, the noisome pestilence, the terror by night, the arrow that flieth by day, the pestilence that walketh in darkness, or the destruction that wasteth at noonday – he remains safely tucked away under the shadow of the Almighty. Though God's keeping of His own is a general product of His gracious character, the nature of this special preservation appears to be causative. In other words, distinctly and precisely because the psalmist has willfully chased his Father's footsteps, as it were, making God his ever-present dwelling-place and habitation, he possesses the sweet peace of the sheltering care of the Almighty. And this security is his possession no matter the size, preponderance, or longevity of the threat before or behind him. The psalmist has made himself so close to his God that angels have been dispatched to protect his every footstep for the duration of the long life that God will grant him.

Let us strive to dwell in the secret place of the Most High. We can do so by walking closely with our Father, holding His hand and tracing His steps, much like a little child trying to escape the sun's fury. Our God has a tall enough shadow under which each of us can abide.

## Morning and Night

*It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High. To shew forth thy lovingkindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night. Psalm 92: 1,2*

As God's children we possess certain similarities and differences. Our main purpose is the same in that we are to glorify God with our lives; and yet how we do that differs because of our gifts and circumstances that God has ordained. The length of our days on earth differs, but while we live, we all have twenty-four hours each day in which to glorify our God. The second verse of Psalm 92 tells us of a good pattern to establish while we are living out God's purpose every day.

First, we are to show forth his lovingkindness in the morning. We are prone to get caught up in the routine of life and forget about the power of God's lovingkindness. Earlier in the Psalms, David tells us that it is better than life. The varied situations that may arise in a day can produce, joy, hope, appreciation, fear, doubt, discouragement, and a host of other emotions. God's lovingkindness reminds us of His presence and purpose in *every* event that occurs. One of David's prayers was that God would cause him to hear His lovingkindness in the morning, which would profit him throughout the day.

Also, we are to show forth God's faithfulness every night. When we reflect on the activities of a day, we can usually see more clearly the Lord's guiding and protective hand. God's faithfulness is demonstrated not only in the great deliverances, but also in the simple things that we experience each day. Our daily bread, our homes, our friends, our freedoms, and a host of other things we regularly enjoy because of God's faithfulness should produce in us a thankful spirit. Sadly, we may not realize that we have taken many things for granted until we lose them. If we are honest, we will admit that through the course of every day God has been faithful even when we are not.

Prayer: Lord, help me every morning to be reminded of your lovingkindness as I live out your will, and when I retire at night may I always praise you for your faithfulness throughout another day.

J. Ekis

## Shadows borne

*And thou shalt put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim; and they shall be upon Aaron's heart, when he goeth in before the LORD: and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel upon his heart before the LORD continually.  
Exodus 28:30*

In this chapter we find, in the midst of the work orders for the tabernacle worship under the first covenant, the details of the holy garments for the priests of the Lord, Aaron and his sons. We do well to appreciate the place of these instructions as explained to us by the New Testament writer to the Hebrews, particularly in its eighth through tenth chapters. In Hebrews 8:5 and 10:1, we are reminded that these earthly implements serve as shadows of heavenly realities. So in Exodus 28 we see the garments made such that Aaron would bear upon himself these holy shadows. In verse 12, "Aaron shall bear their names before the LORD upon his two shoulders for a memorial" as he carries their names engraved on the shoulder stones. In verse 29, "Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel in the breastplate of judgment upon his heart, when he goeth in unto the holy place, for a memorial before the LORD continually." Then in our text we see the combination of the names of the tribes of Israel engraved on the stones in the breastplate, along with the curious Urim and Thummim, allowing Aaron to bear the judgment of the Israelites upon his heart in his service before the Lord.

As we see these weights and memorials being borne by Aaron the high priest, we can't help but look through the shadows to see the heavenly great high priest, Jesus the Son of God (Hebrews 4:14), who bore our sins and iniquities, and carried our sorrows, to satisfy the holiness of God on our behalf (Isaiah 53:4, 11-12). He fulfilled these upon the shoulders of His broken body as well as within His broken heart of love for us, as He who knew no sin became sin for us, to impute unto us the righteousness of God (II Corinthians 5:21). Our Great Shepherd of the sheep knows His sheep by name (John 10:3) and bears them in His heart eternally. The shadows that needed to be borne continually by Aaron were fulfilled by Jesus' once for all eternal sacrifice (Hebrews 10:10-14), which is able to save us to the uttermost, seeing that He lives eternally to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25). As we read through His living word, let us unceasingly look beyond the shadows and be thrilled with His eternal glory.

## Shadows of holiness

*And thou shalt make a plate of pure gold, and grave upon it, like the engravings of a signet, HOLINESS TO THE LORD...And it shall be upon Aaron's forehead, that Aaron may bear the iniquity of the holy things, which the children of Israel shall hallow in all their holy gifts; and it shall be always upon his forehead, that they may be accepted before the LORD.  
Exodus 28:36, 38*

Continuing in the vein of yesterday's meditation, we come later in this chapter to the literal crowning touch of the priestly attire. Upon the front of Aaron's mitre, or head covering, would be the proclamation of "holiness to the Lord." This signification upon the representative of the Lord's holiness was a reminder to Aaron and all that saw it that both the work that he did and the sacrificial gifts that they brought to the Lord were tainted with iniquity by association with sinful humanity, as revealed by the utter holiness of God. While many related qualities are poured into the concept of holiness, and rightly by association in the scriptures, its basic meaning of being "set apart" is fundamental here. The Lord is holy because He is extremely set apart, far above all, in every attribute of His being and nature. Therefore, as the text explains, the high priest would need to bear the iniquity associated with the sacrifices away from them, through the intricate ceremonial shadows, so that those sacrifices set apart by the offerors would be made truly acceptable before the Lord.

As we again look beyond the shadows, we see our great eternal high priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and higher than the heavens (Hebrews 7:26); "who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth" (I Peter 2:22). He needed no mitre with an engraved gold plate, as a shadowy representative, because He was and is in truth the holiness of God, the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1:18). Therefore, he needed not, as Aaron did, to make any sacrifice for Himself, who knew no sin, but through His own holy sacrificial atonement removed the iniquities of us all, that we might be accepted in the beloved (Ephesians 1:6). So we, as partakers of *His* holiness, are exhorted, "but as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy." (I Peter 1:15-16). Seeing beyond the shadows, should we desire anything else?



# Pastor's Thoughts of the Week

## Send the Fire

*I am come to send fire on the earth Luke 12:49*

The superstitious Romans alternately worshipped Vulcan, the god of fire, as a benefactor, while at the same time fearing him as a malefic destroyer. Their deluded worship did little to prevent Vesuvius from spreading its lavatic destruction to the libidinous citizens of Pompeii.

From childhood we all beheld fire with a mingled reaction of fear and fascination. Fire is a phenomenon created by God to serve both positive and negative functions. By fire we heat our homes, light the darkness, cook our meals and drives the engines of machines and vehicles. But unconfined fire presents the possibility of irreparable damage. In a spiritual context we must consider the awesome power of fire and its frequent use in scripture.

The first mention of fire is seen in the flaming sword that sealed the entrance to the edenic paradise lost. Fire and brimstone issued forth from the Almighty in consuming judgement at Sodom and the cities of the plain. Moses received his commission as the emancipator of the exiled Jews while God spake to him through the burning of an unconsumed bush. That same devouring fire sat atop Sinai as the Lord wrote the engraved law in tables of stone. The pillar of fire provided light, leadership, and protection as the children of Israel traversed the wilderness. At Carmel, Elijah summoned fire from on high to consume the sacrifice. When Daniel receives his glimpse of glory he said God's "throne was like the fiery flame" Truly our God is a "consuming fire".

God promised Noah that the world would never again suffer a diluvial cataclysm. The second destruction will be conflagratory. "The heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat." And worse than the destruction of the material earth is the "everlasting destruction of the spiritually lost. We must be solemnly reminded that the unsaved will meet with a fiery eternity.

But fire also has its positive connotations. The Holy Spirit descends at Pentecost in cloven tongues of fire. It was an outward attestation to an inward baptism of fire that exhilarated the inert disciples to go forth and fulfill their great commission. Jeremiah's heart burned with the unquenchable flame until he could no longer stay. He burst forth the chamber with heart aglow and lips bursting with the prophetic word of God. The two Emmaus disciples felt that same heartburn.

God's Soldier is how they referred to William Booth. He earnestly prayed:

To make our weak hearts strong and brave,

Send the fire!

To live a dying world to save,

Send the fire!

O see us on thy altar lay

Our lives, our all, this very day,

To crown the offering now we pray,

Send the fire!

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

## A Faithful Messenger

---

*But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer; for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you...*

– Acts 27:21-22 –

---

In the days preceding our conversion, did we not find ourselves in such a predicament in the spiritual realm as these men in Acts 27 did in the physical? Some godly sage voice had forewarned us of the foolishness of our intended course, yet his inspired utterance had fallen on willfully deaf ears. And so we set out, only to find ourselves ultimately in the midst of some Euroclydon that threatened to destroy us. Exceedingly tossed, we lightened the ship, confessing our sins. Perhaps the tempest was so sore that we even with our own hands cast out the tacking of the ship, with great exertion striving to make amends for our sinful ways. And yet, no matter the number or earnestness of our attempts, neither sun nor star appeared for many days, and all hope of our salvation dissipated. Blessed were we in that hour when we found that faithful friend, whose warnings we spurned, finding his place again steadfastly by our side, holding out hope for our gainsaying hearts. We gave him audience once more, but this time heeding his godly counsel. And though the tempest had to finish its course, we found at evening's end an escape safe to the shores of peace and the isles of security.

And blessed are we now, if we learn to don the mantle of that steadfast friend and soul-winner in the lives of others. Let us take solace, brethren, that those with whom we speak, exerting our godly influence and reasoning with them of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come while sincerely loving their lost souls with the *agape* that only the risen Christ and Holy Ghost can place within our hearts, shall by and by inevitably experience the tempest that is so clearly on the horizon of their self-will. May we resolve in that hour to possess the gracious demeanor of the Apostle, who neither lectures nor gloats, but kindly and confidently extends the hand of friendship, the favor of prayer, and the message of mercy again to the hopeless, helpless, and hurting soul, thereby ushering them to the very precipice of life eternal. This is why the Lord has left us here. Consistency of our example, continuance in our witness, and the sincerity of our care means more to our friends and acquaintances than we often realize. May we be a faithful messenger and friend to many until He calls us home.

-- D. Murcek

## Nowhere to Turn

*And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will shew to you today...*

*Exodus 14:13*

What do we do when we are confronted with a difficult situation and there seems to be no where to turn? Whether having to face a life altering dilemma, or being hemmed in by the varying forms of life's pressures, we all need something that goes beyond our earthly resources. When our wisdom, our strength, our influences, and our finances are exhausted and there seems to be nowhere to turn for help- *there is, has always been, and always will be... God!*

After Israel's miraculous deliverance from the bondage of Egypt, they find themselves in a most fearful and hopeless situation. Pressed against the Red Sea, surrounded by Pharaoh's army and having nowhere to turn, Moses instructs them to stand still and see the salvation of God. The Lord, who is always in control, arranged for the Israelites to be in dire straits and know that saving themselves would be impossible, so they would clearly see God's salvation.

Like the Israelite's deliverance, our spiritual salvation has many of the same characteristics. We must come to the point of realizing that eternal life is unattainable by utilizing our own resources. Our goodness, our knowledge, our religion, and our feeble attempts of "trying" are not enough to enter our name in the Lamb's Book of Life. When we finally stand still and trust God, only then are we able to see His salvation through the substitutionary death of Jesus on the cross. The same pattern is true for other trials that will arise as we travel the Lord's path for our life. Because we tend to look to our own resources, God will allow for trials to come our way, so that we may realize that we must stand still and look to Him. Hopefully each new trial will strengthen our faith and free us from self-reliance.

Let us pray that today there will be another opportunity to see the salvation of the Lord.

J. Ekis

## Life Above

---

*The way of life is above to the wise, that he may depart from hell beneath.*  
– Proverbs 15:24 –

---

We are all living in Paradise Lost. The difficulties and challenges this life present are ultimately due to sin and the curse. Life is hard. It tends to be even harder when our driving principle is self. Additionally, we are all subject to the ramifications of others' choices. This adds to the complexity as well as the perplexity of life under the sun. All of this can create a variety of nagging attitudes within our hearts, including but not necessarily limited to bitterness, cynicism, apathy, discontent, and such like.

As Christians, we need not be bound by any of these ensnaring parameters. Being born again of the Spirit of God, we are actually freed to live out our days in a new and higher existence, regardless of any current circumstance or the shifting sands of time and "chance". The way of life for redeemed sons and daughters of the living God is "above". We simply need to wisely choose consistently there to dwell.

The epistles speak frequently about this victorious reality that ought to characterize our pilgrimage. We know that Christ is seated far *above* all principality and power, in both this world and the world to come (Eph. 1:21). From that position, Jesus awaits to do exceedingly abundantly *above* all we could ask or think (Eph. 3:20). We are reminded that our God and Father is *above* all, through all, and in us all (Eph. 4:6); that Christ has been given a name that is *above* every name in heaven and earth and under the earth (Php. 2:9); and that every good and perfect gift is from *above* and cometh down from the Father of lights (James 1:17).

Friends, our lives are to be lived neither in defeat nor retreat. We can and should be meeting out our days triumphantly, soaring over top of the complexities and problems of this world. This is the reality and witness of the Christian life. Political winds change, rulers rise and fall, friends falter, people disappoint, and fortunes vary wildly from day to day. But if our affections are properly set on things *above* and not on things on the earth, we find tremendous victory in the transcendent reality that our life is hid there with Christ in God (Colossians 3:2-3).

Let us live today above the clamor and din of this cursed world, that others may see and know that there is hell beneath to be shunned, and a heaven above to be gained.

## Blessed ignorance

*And it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him.*

*Exodus 34:29*

Moses has returned from a second period of forty days and nights communing with the Lord and receiving the second set of the commandments from Him. Moses had previously broken the first set of tables when he had come down from the presence of God to find the Israelites breaking the commandments that they had heard from the mount (chapter 32). God punished the people as a result of that sin, yet the nation as a whole was spared through Moses' intercession. In chapter 33 God pronounced the consequence of the removal of His presence from the midst of them, although still promising to deliver the promised land to them. At this point in his experience, Moses pleaded with the Lord to not remove His presence from him or His people. He did not want any less of God's presence in his life. At the height of that exchange, Moses reached the point of humble boldness to request, "I beseech thee, shew me thy glory" (33:18). Amazingly, the Lord granted this request, in part, and so the beginning of chapter 34 describes the event in human terms.

The effect of this inconceivable privilege, to experience the glory of God and attend upon it for that whole time, was that his face shone as a result, although Moses knew it not. It's important to observe that Moses didn't go up to the mount so that he could shine and be known for it. He went to know the presence of the Lord, and His word and will for himself and his people. The reflecting glory was the byproduct.

The apostle tells us that the people of God now have the liberty, given by the Spirit of God, to see and know His glory, although now as in a cloudy reflection, and be affected by it (II Corinthians 3:7-18). He continues, "For God...hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face [presence] of Jesus Christ" (II Corinthians 4.6). Yet we must also yearn with Moses, not to be seen, but simply to know and abide. So Paul observes that we have this treasure in earthen vessels. The excellency (glory – see chapter 3) is of God, not of us.

If we seek to be known for glory, we receive nothing. If we seek God, we enjoy His glory; and we will radiate glory, though we won't care to know it.



# Pastor's Thoughts of the Week

**Newspeak: propagandistic language marked by euphemism, circumlocution, and the inversion of customary meanings.**

*They also that render evil for good are mine adversaries;  
because I follow the thing that good is. Psalms 38:20:*

The dynamic tension between good and evil hails back to the tree in the garden whose consumed fruit jettisoned our primal parents out from the halcyon days of Eden. They mistook evil for good and in so doing plunged their progeny into the incumbent miseries of the curse. Innocency was lost and Adam's race inherited a corrupted propensity to justify evil.

The Bible is a binary book. The matters of right and wrong are not left to some arbitrary, nebulous conception, established by the whimsical fancies of an unstable mind. Moral relativism encompasses views and arguments that people in various cultures have held over several thousand years. Baruch Spinoza notably espoused that nothing is inherently good or evil. If this be true one can easily envision Isaiah's prophecy of the last days: "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil".

When the devil seeks to pervert the ethos of any culture, he must first disable the infallible inner witness of conscience, which is the innate gift of God to all of humanity. Sinful minds are at all times rearranging the moral order to sate their guilty consciences; often having to disguise the evil by employing euphemistic phraseology to cloak their moral perversity. Sin is relabeled "sickness", pornography is "adult entertainment", aborting a baby is now "reproductive services", sodomy is a "sexual preference", terroristic threats are considered "free speech", rioting and looting have become "peaceful demonstrations". In Karl Menninger's seminal writing he laments "Whatever became of sin?" and the answer might well be that it still exists but that men have changed its name.

In stark contrast to these unsubstantiated notions is the concept of moral absolutism, which affirms that there are fixed moral ethics immutably ordained by divine edict. There is therefore an absolute good and an absolute evil. And thankfully, God has not left us to decipher the difference without providing His inspired written law, as well as a conscience within, to lead us to right choice making. Though all of Adam's children have inherited a degenerate mind, the Lord, in His mercy, has promised to reinvigorate the "spirit of our minds" through the "washing of regeneration and renewing of the spirit" making it possible to "follow that which is good".

Have a blessed week,

*Pastor*

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

## Counseling the Lord

---

*The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die.*

*– John 4:49 –*

---

Many commentaries, homilies, and sermons have been penned extolling the desperation of this nobleman's plea and rightly magnifying the necessity of urgency and importunity in intercession. But while this man's request may have been borne of faith and positively laden with these virtues, it nonetheless also exhibits an immature or scant faith in its directive nature – "Come down." The very fact that Jesus did not physically accompany the nobleman to his home but simply advised him to "Go thy way, thy son liveth" is itself a mild rebuke of the man's self-will in his request. There was no need for Jesus to be physically present in Capernaum to heal his son. He could do it from Cana. And He chose to do just that.

We can no doubt identify. How frequently are we guilty of foolishly trying to counsel the Lord as to how to answer our prayers instead of just simply trusting Him to answer them in His way and in His time? The reason we do this is nothing short of pride. We are unfortunately full enough of ourselves to believe He does not know every detail of our situation, that we have a more unique perspective than He possesses about some incident, or that we understand the ramifications and fall out of plausible endings to our predicament better than He.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus rhetorically inquired, "Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?" (Matthew 7:9-10). The answer is as convicting as it is obvious. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matthew 7:11).

God knows our every need and He has a sovereign purpose in all of our challenges, concerns, and afflictions. Like the nobleman, we know that we cannot solve the problems besetting us or the perils surrounding those we love. We need Him to intervene. This is good, for it is the beginning of faith. Yet many times our faith falters in the very act of beseeching Him. Specificity frequently marks heartfelt prayer, but if we are not careful, we can succumb to morphing that specificity into instruction. Think a moment upon our audacity – that instead of simply begging bread, we tell Him what kind we want as well as how we would like Him to bake it!

Brothers and sisters, let us mature in our prayer lives. Our Master is good. His call for us to pray is just as much about calming our hearts as it is about moving His hand. Let us cease to think so highly of ourselves that we dare to counsel the Almighty. Rather, let us ask as children, knowing that our Father in heaven will give us the very best quality of bread in the exact measure required, the moment it is needed, and in the packaging He has chosen out of an overwhelming love for His dear child.

*-- D. Murcek*

## **A Two-Sided Coin**

***For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord  
Romans 6:23***

When comparing the Old and New Testaments some have wrongly concluded that there are two different Gods. The God of the Old Testament is viewed as harsh and judgmental, while the God of the New Testament is viewed as kind and loving. They fail to recognize that it is the same God who demonstrates both His goodness and severity. Like flipping a quarter, whether it lands heads or tails, it is still worth twenty-five cents; God is still God whether executing His justice or extending His love and grace.

The first part of today's text testifies of the righteousness and justice of God. From Moses' encounter at the burning bush to John's heavenly vision, the Lord God is revealed as the Creator- holy, eternal, invisible, righteous, pure, undefiled, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, and exceedingly more. He is the just Judge who demands payment for the breaking of His law. This side of God should produce in us a conviction and fear causing us to seek true reconciliation with Him.

The second half of the verse shows us the mercy and love of God. Because of His love, the Heavenly Father provided forgiveness and eternal life for us through the sacrificial death of His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus. We should behold the manner of love He hath bestowed upon us. Truly, God is a God of judgment; but praise His name, He has cast His judgement on our Sinless Substitute, the Lord Jesus.

Very early, before sunrise on a cold morning, we can sit by a fireplace and enjoy the flickering light and gentle warmth of a fire. We position ourselves to maximize the full comfort of the fire's benefits. Yet that same fire, if not respected has the potential to burn us. So it is with the Lord. We can reject His gift of forgiveness and face His just judgment, or we can receive His unspeakable gift and enjoy the warmth of His love.

J. Ekis

## **A Warning from Saul**

***And Samuel said, When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the LORD anointed thee king over Israel?***

### **1 Samuel 15:17**

It is important to never assume that we are above the traps that ensnare others. The accounts of biblical characters provide a wide variety of things to emulate but also to avoid. We can add confidence to our faith in God when we read about the exploits of the saints of God, or we can learn to avoid the traps that ruined the lives of others.

The nation Israel rejected a theocracy and desired a king to rule over them so that they would be like surrounding nations. It was this back-drop that would bring Saul, the son of Kish, to prominence. The young Saul is described as a choice young man, whose goodness rose above all his peers, and he was well recognized because of his physical stature. All of Israel desired him to be king. When the prophet Samuel came to commission Saul, he displayed at least an outward form of humility by hiding himself and confessing his unworthiness. As king, Saul quickly gained some military victories and rose to the height of popularity. But as pride crept into his heart, self-importance surfaced and eventually brought his downfall. After several acts of pride and disobedience, the prophet Samuel reminded Saul that he was anointed king when he regarded himself as little in his own sight. Pride had claimed another victim.

So, the question is, how do we view ourselves? If a mirror could reflect beyond the outward to the depth of our inward person, what would we see? The crippling effects of self-importance can plague each of us causing us to desire the praise of people and thereby chasing away the power of the Holy Spirit. God's design is for us to be emptied of our self-pride so that we may allow the fulness of His Spirit to energize us for His work and glory. Paul's admonition in Galatians can help us stay grounded- "For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself."

May the Lord help us to see ourselves as He sees us, that we may remain little in our own sight.

J. Ekis

## **As the LORD commanded**

*According to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so the children of Israel made all the work. And Moses did look upon all the work, and, behold, they had done it as the LORD had commanded, even so had they done it: and Moses blessed them.*  
*Exodus 39:42-43*

At the end of five chapters describing the details for the crafting and building of the tabernacle, we read this satisfying commendation of how the inspired craftsmen of Israel had performed the work: *as the LORD had commanded*. The prescription for each part had been provided in a prior set of seven chapters, including the admonition: “And look that thou make them after their pattern, which was shewed thee in the mount” (Exodus 25:40). Not only had God provided the plans, but He had also provided the materials and the artisans, not from some hired source, but out of all with which He had equipped His people by His Spirit. They brought the materials with hearts that were willing, wise, and stirred (Exodus 35:5, 10, 21). They executed the work under the direction of Bezaleel and Aholiab, all by the wisdom and understanding that He provided (Exodus 36:1-2). In the end, Moses inspected the work and blessed them. It does not say that he blessed them because of the workmanship, or beauty, or quality of their work, but because they had done it as the LORD had commanded. As a result, we have no reason to doubt that the work also exhibited all of these other attributes.

What an example for us of how the work of the LORD is to be done. We can attempt great works for God by employing the best or most valued materials and the most skilled workmen. Yet, if the work is not done according to His commandment, there is no blessing in or from it. The ruling Jews in Jesus’ day apparently employed the best and perhaps valuable items for what they deemed worship. They even meticulously developed “sub-laws” to supposedly define detailed applications of God’s laws, even going to the extent of tithing from the storehouse of their spices. Yet Jesus did not bless, but condemned the emphasis on their self-prescribed manner of worship that omitted the weightier matters of judgment, mercy, and faith taught by God’s law (Matthew 23:23). We have the capacity to follow either example. So as we seek the work and worship of the LORD, let us seek first to do it as the LORD commanded, also with willing hearts stirred by His Spirit, and wisdom and understanding gleaned from His principles and precepts. Then we can know the blessing of obedience as we bring our best for His service.

# Pastors Thoughts of the Week

## The Straight Course

*"Straightway they forsook their nets, and followed Him." — Mark 1:18*

The temporizing spirit of the adamic nature is all too willing to defer to a *"more convenient season"*. How evanescent is that moment of inspiration that quickens the soul with divine urgings. If we do not act decisively, that moment will so rapidly dissipate. Desire must be met with resolution; and resolution with action. The love of many will *"wax cold"* and so it is best to act while the heart is hot.

The Roman poet, Horace, coined the aphorism *"Carpe Diem"* (seize the day). The opportunity may never present itself ever again. Bartimaeus knew he had but one moment to beg for his petition. He forcefully, obtrusively cried out and His plea was received and duly rewarded. The kingdom of God is taken by *violence (Matthew 11:12)* not inertia. How many intentions are left withering on the vine of inactivity. What for the moment was a fervent resolution so soon degrades to a task best left to another time.

The thought may come at an inopportune time, but there is no mistaking that the call is from the Lord. Some kind act or thoughtful word needs to be discharged. Go at once for the king's business requires haste! By tomorrow the prompting may not strike your heart with same urgency. There is a soul in eternal danger and the Lord has given you the burden. Discharge the commission posthaste for the next week may bring an untimely death. There is the peculiar sense that some loved one is in need of protective prayer. Straightway to the closet and offer up the needed intercession though you may never learn the outcome of that petition until that eternal day of discovery.

That old serpent, the devil is the grand procrastinator. He populates the realm of the damned with the foolish who hear the Master calling *"Follow Me"* but they with one consent begin to make excuse. How eternally vital it is to *"seek the Lord while He may be found"* and make a *"straight course"* to His receiving arms *"while it is called today"*.

Have a blessed week,

*Pastor*

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