

Complaint Department

And when the people complained, it displeased the LORD: and the LORD heard it; and his anger was kindled.

Numbers 11:1

One of the tenets of the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights is freedom of speech. As Americans, we have the right to freely speak our minds and express our opinions without fear of governmental restriction. This freedom allows citizens to even complain about the ruling members of our nation. Modern technology has created multiple venues where one can post a full range of criticisms and complaints. Some complaints can be of value when ascertaining the quality of a product or service, while others seem to be merely the venting of bitter people. Having this great freedom, we should be aware that complaining can affect our attitude toward God and others. It may warp our judgment, loosen our discretion, and affect our attitude, causing us to be frivolous with our opinions and complaints.

On their journey to the Promised Land, the newly emancipated nation of Israel had much for which to be thankful. Experiencing God's deliverance from four hundred and thirty years of bondage while witnessing His mighty signs and miracles on their behalf should have developed in them the deepest sense of gratitude. Yet the sinful nature caused God's people to again complain about their circumstances. Their selfish and complaining spirit even blinded them to the bondage of Egypt, and they began to long for the minimal existence they had there. Had they forgotten the harsh labor of Pharaoh's endless building projects? Had they forgotten about the Egyptians tossing their male newborns into the Nile River? Was the miracle of the Passover no longer awe-inspiring to them? The dividing of the Red Sea, the manna from heaven, the refreshing water from the Rock of Horeb, and the giving of the Commandments on Mount Sinai should have convinced them that God is always good and that He would faithfully provide all their needs. Selfishness, complacency, hardness of heart, and an insatiable desire for something new could have been contributing factors to their complaining spirit. Whatever their reason, God was not pleased with their complaining. The Book of Jude speaks of murmurers and complainers who walk after their own lusts and can offer us some insight into why complaining is so prevalent. The desire to immediately fulfill some craving can erase the spirit of gratitude.

As believers, we are not immune to having a complaining spirit. Like the Israelites in the wilderness, we have much for which to be thankful. We have had our own miraculous deliverance from the bondage of sin and we have been witnesses of miraculous answers to our prayers, and recipients of divine provisions. We have the indwelling Holy Spirit to convict us when we are tempted to complain and to remind us of God's Word and His eternal promises. Pray that God would give each of us the discernment to know the difference between a legitimate complaint concerning some earthly matter and our chafing against the situations that God is allowing in our life for instruction and edification. Our trials, though troublesome to the flesh and spirit, are designed for His purpose to eventually work all things together for our good and God's glory. Try to live this day without complaining, and it may reveal how often we moan. When tempted to complain, may God give us the grace to praise Him for what He has done and what He continues to do. - J. Ekis

Reconciliation

Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.

Luke 17:3

There is much talk about forgiveness both inside and outside the church, yet it seems that often the actual meaning and application of the concept and its related terms are not clearly understood. Jesus' statement here is quite terse. There are two actions to be heeded here, and both are conditional. The first condition is the initiating action, the personal trespass or sin of one person against another. The first action commanded is rebuke. In another similar teaching (Matthew 18:15-20), Jesus says to go and tell him his fault between the two of you – alone. The second condition is repentance on the part of the sinning party, after having been told by the affected one about the trespass. The second action in response is to forgive. We clearly see that forgiveness is predicated upon repentance, and repentance necessitates awareness of the sin by the offender. By the context here, and precisely in Matthew 18:15, the goal of both parties in this transaction is reconciliation (“thou has gained thy brother”).

We hear at times in the news about people proclaiming forgiveness to perpetrators of crimes. While this sounds like a noble sentiment, the biblical transactions necessary for forgiveness may not have occurred. The forgiveness must be recognized and received based on repentance. Without repentance, the transaction of forgiveness cannot be completed, since the conditions have not been met.

We can draw a parallel to the greatest transaction of forgiveness – the eternal forgiveness that God grants to the repentant sinner. God, who is the offended party, has provided forgiveness for sinners, first by telling us of our offence through His word, then by paying the price of redemption, by becoming a man and suffering for that sin through Jesus Christ. Every sin requires a payment. The payment is either made by the offender, or through forgiveness the offended makes the payment himself. He bears the loss, as illustrated by the parable in Matthew 18:23-27. The apostle Paul describes this in II Corinthians 4: “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.” Yet after this, he still makes the plea: “we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.” So then we see here and in the balance of scripture that forgiveness from God requires repentance on the part of the sinner.

As we contemplate this week the Lord's words from the cross, “Father forgive them; for they know not what they do,” where He committed to the Father the means of forgiveness that He was accomplishing, be sure to recognize that the sinner's part is to receive that purchased forgiveness through true repentance of mind, heart, and life in surrender to His mighty work. “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (II Corinthians 5:21).

Gladness

And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord.

– John 20:20 –

The day's events must have been dizzying for the disciples when Christ arose. The reports were coming in waves – Mary, Peter, John, Cleopas, all attesting that the tomb was empty, and even that some had actually seen the Lord. As incredible as it all seemed, the fear and despair that had held them in a vice-like grip the past few days was beginning to abate as the embers of hope began to kindle. Could it be? Could it possibly be? In the evening, they were all (sans Thomas) gathered in one place. The doors and windows were shut and locked. (They knew that with the Lord's crucifixion, they were the obvious next targets of the power-mad Sanhedrin – and despite the rising hope in their hearts, prudent measures were still followed to mitigate what appeared to be, up to that point, the likely fallout to Calvary's events.) Then suddenly, without warning, in the blink of an eye, there He was, standing in the midst of the room, bestowing His blessings, "Shalom." If a camera had been available, one can but imagine the looks upon those faces! But He saw well beyond their countenance, as He always had, right down into the depths of their hearts. He knew His dear ones better than they knew themselves. He understood their paralyzing astonishment, and graciously offered His hands and His side, not as evidence, but as a reward to the faith that began to stir within them earlier that day. This was enough to snap them fully into the moment. All of the trauma of heart and torment of mind from the past hours completely evaporated, replaced by the most profound joy they had ever yet known. "Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord."

Can this not be said of us as well? Are we not His disciples, too? Our pre-conversion wandering of soul produced a full range of negative human emotion – irritability, dissatisfaction, loneliness, sorrow, pain, resentment, despair. But the moment we believed on this One who died and rose for us, it all changed. "Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord."

Then there are the many storms of this life – strivings without and fears within. Days, weeks, and months pass by, with no relief. We offer up our most earnest prayers, but the heavens seem as brass. We cannot tell why this fiery trial continues, yet we cling to His promise. And then it happens. He steps up to our fainting hearts, gently cradling our brokenness, and softly and tenderly revealing His purpose in the pain. We recall, yea, now know in the most intimate of ways, that all things have been working together for our good. "Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord."

And one day soon, whether at the last trump or through portal of death, the last of our tears shall be wiped forever away by His very nail-pierced hand, and we shall know as we are known. The relentless toils and overwhelming cares of this life will wholly and instantly dissolve when we finally behold Him face to face, as it echoes through the halls of heaven for all eternity, "Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord." --- D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Suffering in Silence

Isaiah 53:7: He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.

There are many facets to the suffering of our Lord. In light of the lictor's lash, the ignominious scorn, the thorny crown, the brutal buffeting, and the agony of crucifixion, it is likely to overlook this detail in the catalog of suffering that the Lord was made to endure. We are compelled to marvel at such divine restraint. Lest we forget this was the voice that spake at Sinai: "Whose voice then shook the earth". That same voice that spoke all of creation into existence, from the minutest cell to the prodigious galaxies; that same voice that uttered the sublimest truths that mankind had ever heard, now, before His truculent accusers, is mute.

Luke 23:9: Then he (Herod) questioned with him in many words; but he answered him nothing.

Through it all He spake not a word in His defense! The unjust brutality that He endured gave Him every right to protest and to give articulation to the injustice. It is an innate characteristic for us to justify ourselves. "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes". We are instant in defending ourselves against slanderous accusations and so we marvel at the self-constraint of the Savior who, as the lamb of God, is mute before His inquisitors.

1 Peter 2:23: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously:

A proliferation of false charges were hurled upon the blameless Son of God and yet when Pilate demanded a defense from Him, "he answered him to never a word; insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly". This silence must have had a chilling impact upon the feckless procurator, for from that moment Pilate sought to extricate Jesus from the claims of the rabid priests. But his efforts were futile and though, washing his hands from the sordid affair, he ultimately bows to the wishes of the fiendish mob that insisted that Christ be crucified. And so, silently, He bears the cross and with it the sins of the world and only opens His mouth to impart this final blessing "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do". When insult, injury, and injustice is leveled against us may we have the grace to follow the example of the Lord and commit ourselves "to him that judgeth righteously".

Live in the power of His resurrection,

Pastor

Revived Memory

And they remembered his words.

Luke 24:8

Memory lapses plague everyone to varying degrees. Lack of focus, poor listening skills, preoccupation, traumatic events, and age are a few of the contributing factors that cause us to forget things. Forgetting minor things can be somewhat of a nuisance, but not remembering important things can be catastrophic. Even profound spiritual truths and comforting promises sometimes escape the memory because of Satan's assaults. Hearing the words of our God and allowing them to sink into our hearts is of utmost importance.

When the faithful women came early on that Resurrection morning to anoint the Lord Jesus, shockingly they found the sepulchre empty. The account tells us that they were much perplexed concerning the vacated tomb. Many people, these women included, had heard the Master teach how He *must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day*. Was it because the seemingly more pleasant teachings such as the Beatitudes or some of the parables had more appeal, or was it upon hearing the Lord would be killed that kept their ears from recalling that He would be raised from the dead after three days? Did the disciples not understand, or did they want to hold on to Him so desperately that they selfishly refused to release Jesus to accomplish His mission? Jesus had already raised three people from the dead, yet it did not occur to them that *Jesus Himself* would resurrect. The traumatic effects of Jesus' trial and crucifixion could surely have caused them to forget the Lord's teaching about His resurrection. But seeing the empty tomb and hearing the angel's question of why they were seeking *the living among the dead* stirred their memory of what the Lord had said.

There are times when our faith will be tested by difficult circumstances. During such times, faith in the Lord and His word is our greatest stronghold. For a variety of reasons in times of testing, we may also have some memory loss concerning God's promises. Like the women whose faith was revived when they observed the empty tomb and pondered the angel's question, we also should reflect on our resurrected Savior and all of His promises to strengthen our faith. The power of His resurrection is the power source of our spiritual life. In the Epistle of the Apostle Paul to Timothy, he warns the young follower disciple that he would have to *endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ* and encourages him to always *remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to the gospel*. Let us remember His word today!

~ J. Ekis

Reconciliation Part 2

Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

Colossians 3:13

Last week in Part 1 on this subject, we saw the transactions discussed by Jesus in Luke 17:3 with respect to the path to forgiveness and reconciliation between two parties. We also saw how the supreme example of this process occurs in the reconciliation of sinners to God for eternal salvation, based on our sins (which are all first against Him), His rebuke of them through His word, our repentance in response to His rebuke, and His forgiveness through His own payment for our sin through Jesus Christ.

However, the passages in Luke 17 and Matthew 18, as well as in our text today, are primarily focused on reconciliation between people. We are exhorted to follow the divine example and pursue reconciliation among ourselves, especially in the body of Christ, consistent with the unity that we have in Him (see also Ephesians 4:2-3). This text written to the Colossians provides essential guidance for us to execute these principles in practical living. The apostle adds the action of forbearing one another. Because of our vestiges of sin, still residing in the old man (Romans 7), the actions enjoined in Luke 17:3 would have to be going on constantly if this were the only path to peace. So the apostle starts with the human need for forbearance, to provide practical balance in our interactions.

In the world of finance laws, “forbearance is the intentional action of abstaining from doing something. In the context of the law, it refers to the act of delaying from enforcing a right, obligation, or debt. For example, a creditor may forbear legal action against the debtor if they settle the debt payment with new payment conditions.” How does this translate into human interactions? It allows us to bear with, or tolerate, one another’s petty personal offences, by humbly giving up our right or obligation to rebuke. As we consider our own sins, forbearance ought to be the norm as we seek unity among the body, as both Ephesian and Colossian epistles include humility and longsuffering in the same context.

Note that here the apostle immediately follows forbearance with forgiveness. This is because our humanity can also cause an end to forbearance. In the world, this results in retaliation. In the body of Christ, this should result in the execution of Luke 17:3, with the purpose of creating the opportunity for repentance, forgiveness, even as Christ forgave us, and thereby reconciliation. So how do we know when this is necessary? When you can’t forbear and move on, or tolerate a grudging spirit (Leviticus 19:17-18), it’s time to make an appointment to set up reconciliation. This may not be comfortable for most of us. But He did not ask us to be comfortable; He exhorts us to be reconciled.

The Sanctity of the Body

It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.

– 1 Corinthians 15:44 –

When Jesus rose from the dead, He put a bold exclamation point upon a doctrine the Holy Ghost had been establishing throughout the course of the Old Testament era. This teaching is further elaborated throughout the remainder of the New Testament scriptures, taken up by almost every New Testament writer, with special expatiating attention given to it by Paul in the fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians. We speak of the doctrine of the resurrection of the believer.

Many professing Christians misunderstand this central biblical truth, vaguely envisioning our post-earth life as being one of existing as disembodied spirits floating about in the heavenlies. But the Bible makes abundantly clear that we will not only possess a body forever, but that there will be a direct correlation between our current earthly tenement and our forthcoming eternal tabernacle. Yes, we shall be like Jesus – possessing a unique and recognizable physical, glorified body. It will be quite tangible, though it be not subject to the natural laws we know now, but governed rather by the laws of the spiritual realm. But make no mistake – both our corporeal and our immaterial being (body, soul, spirit) will transfer into the new creation.

While this is all very exciting to muse upon, it also carries some sobering ramifications to the serious believer in this present life. Granted, because the outward man is perishing, our spiritual focus should always be acutely tuned toward the inner man. This concentration, however, must not be to the neglect, or worse, the abuse of the physical frame. There is a sanctity to the human body. This does not mean that we should, like worldlings, worship it with unbridled hours of attention. But it does mean that we should be good stewards of our soul's house by properly maintaining it in terms of diet and exercise, modestly covering it in terms of clothing and comportment, and keeping it free from (revived and increasingly popular) heathen practices such as body marking and mutilation. And when it comes to death, the paradigm of burial is the final expression of a sound biblical faith – the sowing of the seed that we confidently anticipate to rise from the earth at the last trump in newness of glorified life.

So while our expectation of what will happen to our bodies here is one of decline and decay – fully recognizing that that which is flesh is flesh – we nonetheless can counterbalance that disappointing reality with a vibrant knowledge that what right now is corrupting is soon going to be raised in incorruption, and that which currently is quite dishonorable and weak due to the curse will surely be raised in a glory and power that we can't fully imagine at the moment. Let us therefore properly tend to the whole being God has graciously granted us. "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Thessalonians 5:23) – D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Financial Considerations

Matthew 28:12-14: And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept....So they took the money, and did as they were taught

Observe the corruptive influences of filthy lucre. Were not these soldiers eyewitnesses of the angelic visitation that came from heaven's glory to roll back the stone of the empty tomb? Did they not feel the earth trembling beneath their feet and were not their eyes blinded by the dazzling light of shekinah glory that accompanied the liberation of the Son of God from the bands of death? And yet, for a bag of coins, they were willing to deny what their hearts knew to be the incontrovertible evidence of the resurrection.

How many, like Esau, have sold their soul for a mess of pottage? To enrich herself, Delilah would play the harlot with Samson and bring him to a shameful estate. Achan hid his wedge of gold and never lived long enough to see it bring him temporal pleasures. Gehazi thought that a talent of silver would be a worthy price for disobeying Elisha's edict. Judas, for thirty pieces of silver, betrays the One who came to save his soul. The thief on the cross meets with the condign punishment for those that break the commandment. These all, like the soldiers, "took the money" to their own condemnation.

In our current distress, we witness our leaders, both secular and religious, compromised for the love of money. Venal politicians negotiate deals and enrich themselves by selling their influence to avowed enemies. They illegally use their positions of power to gain "inside trader" information and cunningly realign their investments to make a market killing. We lament to see the avaricious "pastors" fleeing their flocks and popes and cardinals living a luxuriant existence at the expense of the widow's mite.

Stephen Vincent Benét's 1936 short story "The Devil and Daniel Webster" sets forth the tale of Jabez Stone selling his soul to the devil. The devil tempts Jabez by magically revealing a hoard of Hessian gold coins, causing Jabez to sign the contract. Benét's premise may have been inspired by *Isaiah 28:18: And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand.* It may be a debatable point whether the soul can enter into such a contract, but one thing is certain and that is that the power of greed can persuade one to forsake their eternal security. Jesus warns us "*beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*" And so let us be "content with such things as we have" for we have yet to inherit heaven's eternal riches.

Blessings to all who read,

Pastor

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

Pressure Relief

And Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they fell upon their faces: and the glory of the LORD appeared unto them.

Numbers 20:6

Pressure has its consequences. Sometimes pressure can produce positive results, but often unchecked pressure has negative results. In the physical realm, too much pressure causes breaks, cracks, and explosions; while in the mental and spiritual realm, too much pressure interrupts peace, obscures our view, and causes anxiety. Just as mechanical systems have pressure relief valves, we also need a way to retreat from the excessive pressures of life. The secular world offers many and varied solutions for relief, but for the Christian, true peace and solace can only be found in spending intimate time in the Lord's presence.

Today's text reveals the difficult position in which Moses finds himself. His position as leader of the Exodus from Egypt was an appointment from God rather than something that arose from his inner ambition. Jehovah called, equipped, and led Moses through the wilderness of Sinai as they journeyed to the Promised Land. Heavenly intervention was needed to confront the difficulties and challenges that occurred along the journey. One of the greatest challenges was to lead and pacify a nation of complaining and ungrateful people. The people's unbelief caused them to forget how God had miraculously produced water from the Rock of Horeb in the past. Accusing Moses of forcefully leading them into the Wilderness, they chided Moses that it would have been better to die than be in their present circumstance. Having no human resources that could satisfy the people, Moses and his brother Aaron retreat to the door of the Tabernacle where they humble themselves by falling on their faces and the glory of the LORD then appears unto them. Away from the murmuring of the multitude in the solitude of the presence of Jehovah, their spirits are refreshed and they receive the instructions that would relieve their situation. Moses knew where he could find relief and the guidance he needed. Unfortunately, he stubbornly resorts to working in the flesh instead of believing in God's remedy.

Though Moses did not follow God's instructions, he knew where to run when faced with life's pressures. As believers, we would be wise to do the same when we are confronted with difficult situations. Occupation, church, family, and friendships can present us with a variety of pressures. There are also times when we are not fully trusting God and thereby create self-imposed pressure which is still stressful. The Lord is our sufficiency for every need in our life. Whenever and whatever pressures confront us, let us be quick to retreat to the presence of Jehovah. There, as His glory appears, we will find direction and relief.

J. Ekis

Greatness

And the LORD gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants, and in the sight of the people.

– Exodus 11:3 –

Fallen humanity fosters multiple fantasies in the realm of purpose and legacy. We laud men of achievement with accolades and permit the most worldly-wise among us both platform and influence in our lives. We tend to think of such men in terms of a fallacious idea of grandeur, and then we unwisely measure ourselves among ourselves with a relative yardstick against that standard. Even as believers, we are prone to forget our Master's admonition that there is none good but God (Mt. 19:17). Surely, if He is the only one Who is absolutely good, there is most certainly no fallen man in any relative sense who is intrinsically great. Mark, however, that God is in some sense willing to share the greatness He solely possesses. This divinely authorized apportionment is available to all, yet is appropriated by very few. Moses serves as a case study in how heaven views greatness among the children of men.

Our text says that Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants, and in the sight of the people. By following the history, we know for certain that there was someone extremely relevant to our account who did not view Moses as great, and that was Moses himself! There was a time, some forty years prior, when he apparently had thought himself to be something. In the prime of life, skilled in both warfare and state-craft, he had nearly ascended to Egypt's throne as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He assumed that he could be the deliverer of God's people, and slew an Egyptian. This incurred both the disdain of his natural brethren and the wrath of the king. Subsequently, he became a fugitive from Egyptian justice and a stranger to his people. In Midian, Moses spent four decades tending sheep on the backside of a desert. This drained the man, as it would any of us, of any and all ego-centric belief in himself, thus making him the right channel through which God could now accomplish His grand purpose.

At eighty years old, Moses was reluctant to return to Egypt due to fear, yet he obeyed by faith. He returned under God's commission to the worldly court that once sought his demise. He was a man of few words, speaking only what God told him, and that through the mouthpiece of his brother Aaron. He was stubborn and unflinching in the conflict of the ten plagues with Pharaoh, insisting upon God's requirements while consistently rebuffing the hard-hearted potentate's proposed compromises. He was a uniquely meek man among men, always seeking the good of his brethren with no thought for himself. Moses was thus regarded with such reverence by the men of his time because he was empty of himself. When a man is so selfless, it is not him, but his God that men see.

We are each building our influence and legacy daily in how we live and move and have our being. If we walk in humility and obedience to God before men, it is inevitable that they will see our Christ, and His greatness. Let us seek with earnestness of spirit so to live. --- D. Murcek

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Perplexity, Not Despair

*We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair.
– 2 Corinthians 4:8 –*

As believers, there is something that becomes increasingly clear the more time we live post-conversion, and that is that we are strangers here on earth – visitors, sojourners, pilgrims. While we were once quite a native part of the warp and woof of this world, we are no longer integrally comprised of its fabric. By God’s wonderful mercy, we have been translated from the kingdom of darkness, and we are being continuously transformed by His marvelous grace into the image of His dear Son. We are sons and daughters of the King, and ambassadors for Him to a devil’s world. Because of all of this, our heavenly citizenry and calling should be the force and focus of our daily living.

Too frequently, especially here in the West, we have assumed that the centuries-long historic advancement of the gospel would continue, and that while individuals are lost and in need of salvation, society at large would remain fairly decent and God-fearing. But we are quite apparently living in the days of mankind’s collective blasphemy of the Holy Ghost. Things are changing at an alarming rate, and while the fields remain white unto harvest, there are devilish storm clouds gathering. Each week seems to bring significant advancement into the darkness, preparing the way for Satan’s Man of Sin. Lost souls are predominantly exhibiting two kinds of reactions to Hell’s encroachments. They are either fully embracing the evil, or they are paralyzed in astonishment, confused by what has happened, and frightened by what may be coming.

But we have come to the Kingdom for such a time as this. It is our gracious opportunity as well as our solemn responsibility to shine brightly in the midst of this increasing darkness, thereby bringing sanity to honest, seeking hearts. While we, too, are perplexed by the devil’s growing delusion, we are not in despair. Only believers hold the perspective to translate what is happening, and only we possess the solution to man’s most desperate need. The gospel that turned the pagan Roman world upside down contains the same life-giving power today as it has for two thousand years. Should we retreat just because the darkness is advancing? We must cease feeding our hopes for this world. The enemy obviously understands he has a short time. We must accept his hatred, anticipate his assaults, and with the power of the Holy Ghost, thwart his progress until our Master comes to catch us away.

There is no reason for us to expect this world to be friendly toward us. It hated our Christ, so it won’t think any more of those who bear His name. But there are plenty of honest hearts out there trying to find their way out from under Hell’s fury. Let us not be ignorant of the adversary’s devices, but boldly hold forth the gospel of salvation and faithfully witness to the reason for the hope that is in us until the trumpet sounds. The gates of hell shall not prevail.

– D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Darkness Which May Be Felt

John 6:17: And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them.

Momentarily bereft of their Master, the disciples launched out into the uncertain waters unaware of the impending tempest that awaited them. As the unruly winds took command of their fragile boat, terror took command of their fearful hearts. Their toilsome rowing was all but in vain as the contrary winds had made a full arrest of the jeopardized vessel. The darkness heightened their anxiety as they "wished for the day". If only the Lord was with them to captain their bark through the unrelenting wind and the thick gloom. And (as the apostle Paul would on a different occasion exclaim "no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away") just then heard they the assuring voice through the raging winds: "It is I; be not afraid". The Master of the sea, whose will the billows must obey, came to them and was readily received into the tortured craft. In a moment the sea was calmed and the boat brought immediately to its desired harbor.

Though seemingly absent from His followers, the Lord's eyes were ever on that vessel and when the testing of their faith reached its zenith, the Lord appeared to mitigate the danger. Isaiah 54:7: *For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee.*

There are times of tribulation where it may seem that the Lord has forsaken us. In the darkness we wonder why He has not come to us. Here is where we, like Moses, must endure "as seeing him who is invisible". One of the ten plagues that befell the recalcitrant Pharaoh and every Egyptian house was a "darkness which may be felt". The faithful Jews had an exemption for "all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings". No matter how impenetrable the darkness that pervades this world, the believer has the promise of His abiding light.

Have a blessed week

Pastor

Pastor

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

Who Is This?

And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also?

Luke 7:49

In today's text and several times through the gospel narrative, the question concerning Jesus is asked- Who is this? Though He took upon Him the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men; He was no ordinary man! From Jesus' birth to His death his life demonstrated a mixture of humanity and divinity. Though born in a lowly stable, He descended from the lineage of King David. He was the virgin-born son of Mary and Joseph while being the Son of God. A carpenter by trade and a Savior by calling. At the tomb of Lazarus, Jesus stated that He was the resurrection and the life and yet He submitted to death on the cross for the sins of the world.

The question posed at the Pharisee's house that day needed not only to be answered by those in attendance but also by all of mankind throughout the ages. If a person genuinely looks into the deeds and words of Jesus, they should be able to come to the logical conclusion of who this person is that is able to forgive sins. Jesus validated who He was by many infallible proofs. He demonstrated His power over nature by just speaking to quell a storm and also walking on the sea of Galilee. Jesus opened blind eyes, restored crippled limbs, erased fevers, exorcised demons, fed multitudes with a few fish and loaves of bread, and even raised the dead. Jesus' words also distinguished Him from being just a common man. Stating that He alone was the Way, the Truth, and the Life and that no one goes unto the Father but through Him indicates that there is only one absolute truth and no other way to get to heaven. In the teaching about the Good Shepherd Jesus also says *I give unto them (his true followers) eternal life and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.* Concerning His existence, Jesus stated that He was before Abraham, who lived about two thousand years prior. In His discourse of the Bread of Life, our Lord says: *I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.* When one hears or reads the words that Jesus spoke, one should concur with the religious officers in His day and say "*Never man spake like this man*".

Believers should rejoice on this day that we have come to the one and only true God and can know Him personally. The awareness of the manner of love He has bestowed upon believers so that we should be called the sons of God can lighten the burdens we carry. His way is exclusive, but His salvation and invitation are for all. If we glory in anything, *let us glory that we understand and know Him and that He is the Lord which exercises lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth.* Therefore, when we hear someone say "Who is this" we can confidently say this is Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, the Savior of the world! J. Ekis

Titles

But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.

Matthew 23:8-11

In the midst of His condemnation of the works, doctrines, and motives of the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus clarifies to the multitude and His disciples the implications of the desire of these hypocritical leaders to be publicly called of men, "Rabbi, Rabbi." In the context, the Pharisees wanted to be viewed before others as the elite religious men of Israel, and esteemed such titles as indicative of that view. In these verses, He warns the disciples, along with the multitude, not to desire this or similar titles for such a purpose, and provides the basis for the warning. He does not necessarily condemn the use of all titles. To call no man your father does not preclude addressing the man who begat you as such. But what is condemned is elevating another human being to some level above other humans, here indicated by means of worshipful titles. This point is made by the comparative examples. In the man to man relationship, "all ye are brethren," compared to Christ, the anointed One of God, who is truly Master of all mankind. In the parallel comparison, the exalted place of the heavenly Father is far above all relationships between men, who are on the same level compared to Him. (It is also notable here that Christ and the Father are in the same instance equally exalted above mankind, implying the equality of Christ and the Father.)

Thus, in the religious realm, our Lord condemns the long held human division between the clergy and the laity, as if somehow the clergy are on some spiritual level higher than their fellow men. He makes clear to His apostles that the responsibility of leadership is to take the place of a servant, and not to follow the hypocritical desires of the Pharisees to imagine themselves as some elite class of religious lords. This attitude of the Pharisees is further evidenced when they condemn the people of Israel as being "cursed" compared to their own ruling class (John 7:48-49). To use titles to accentuate such attitudes is to condone the hypocritical notion of religious classes.

Does this therefore condemn all use of titles? Not necessarily, as long as their use simply associates with a function or a God-ordained position. But we should not bestow or accept titles as a means to elevate one person above another, especially in the direction of God. Therefore, let those who lead remain as equal, yea responsible, fellow-servants, and those who are led be careful to apply titles respectfully, but not in any manner of worship or exaltation, lest it become a temptation to violate this principle.

Not You, but God

So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.

– Genesis 45:8 –

In the broad range of things that humans can suffer at the hands of other humans, betrayal is perhaps one of the most difficult to overcome. If you have lived long enough, you have probably suffered some form of it. As sinners living amongst sinners, it is almost inevitable that someone close will ultimately betray us in some fashion or another. Because betrayal involves established relationship, this particular grievance has the ability to decimate the recipient on many levels. It wounds the spirit and haunts the soul. Betrayal stunts the ability to trust and if not dealt with properly, can create a deep bitterness within the heart that actually inhibits spiritual and emotional growth and well-being in many areas of life.

Joseph stands out as a shining example for us of how to view and handle human treachery. When we consider what he went through due to the envy and hatred of his brethren, we can do nothing but admire Joseph's large-hearted, long-term perspective that ultimately healed not only him, but his entire family. The engaged reader is overwhelmed in the reading of Genesis 45, the account where Joseph makes himself known to those who so unjustly ill-treated him decades before. What relief we find in his succinct and sincere interpretation of those awful events that led to his being wholly alone in this strange land of Egypt. "It was not you...but God." When bitterness could have ruled him, Joseph obviously came to understand that God exercises divine prerogative in the events of our lives, even the most difficult instances when others seek our harm. This focus upon God's superintendence enabled a forgiveness so profound that when presented with an opportunity to exact some form of retribution, such repayment was the furthest thing from Joseph's mind and heart. The family's complete reunion and reconciliation was built squarely upon the foundation of Joseph's faith that it is God that governs in the affairs of men.

What wrong have you suffered, dear reader? Who has hurt you deeply, and what is your attitude toward them? Do you harbor bitterness and anger? Does it eat at you as a canker? Or do you understand that what they meant for evil, God has permitted for good? Do you remember that He works all things – including the hard things – together for good to them that love Him? There is sweet release in recognizing that it is not men than sent us here, but God. May He help us to foster such profound faith, and exercise such Christ-like mercy. -- D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Glorious Differences

1 Corinthians 4:7: For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?

The Lord has incorporated variety into every detail of His handiwork. Even in the case of "identical" twins, we are forced to acknowledge dissimilarity. Each of us is a divinely, unique creation, endowed with gifts varying from person to person. There are those who spend a great measure of their days lamenting what they view as personal defects. "Why hast thou made me thus?" is their constant complaint. Such human frailty is an insult to the One "for whom are all things, and by whom are all things".

Envy is an egregious sin. It is one of Satan's devices designed to engender division amongst us. Instead of rejoicing that, by God's grace, someone is more intelligent or has a better singing voice, or is more attractive, or has skill sets that we do not possess, we are given over to jealousy. Let us instead cultivate a spirit of gratitude for that which the Lord has graciously bestowed and a spirit of contentment for that which He has withheld. We must realize that "God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him".

The text also reminds the believer to be certain to glorify our divine Benefactor who is the bestower of His varied gifts. How unseemly it is to behold our flesh flaunting and parading about with the pride of a peacock as though we made ourselves. The bloviating pharisee prayed "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican." He then glorified himself with a delineation of all of his holy accomplishments. God will most certainly be justified in spewing such arrogance out of His mouth at the last day.

May the Lord help us to walk in humility and dependence. Let us give thanks to Him from whom all blessing, power, and grace emanate.

Blessings to all who read.

Pastor