

# Pastors Thoughts of the Week

## Liberation

*And when Jesus saw her, he called her to him, and said unto her,  
Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. Luke 13:12*

But now see here a sudden interruption to His lesson. Jesus spies a woman in dire exigency. It is so much like the Savior to prioritize this woman's need and thus puts the sermon on pause as His great heart of compassion draws him towards this pitiable victim of Adam's curse. No question passes the lips of the Heavenly healer as was sometimes the case. He needn't ask "What would you have me to do?". It is not in response to her petition for a blessing for she is there for no other reason but to absorb the ministry of His teaching. She is resigned to living with a burden she has borne for 18 years. But the Master came to set at liberty those who were bruised and so He lays His hands upon her and dispenses the healing while dispersing the curse! Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. In a word her body liberated, her life was changed.

We must pause here and take in the spiritual implication of this miracle. Here we have a woman bearing a heavy burden for many years. She is stooped and bowed down. Every day the burden seems heavier and harder to bear. This bespeaks the burden of sin that weighs us all down-which innervates and vitiates and so saps us of the joy of life. Jesus knew that man living under the weight of sin needed a deliverer and so he exclaimed "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest". Sisyphus, a figure of Greek mythology who was condemned to repeat forever the same meaningless task of pushing a boulder up a mountain, only to see it roll down again. Life without Christ and the hope of heaven is a burdensome weight. In 1949 The French existentialist Albert Camus wrote the Myth of Sisyphus in which he compares the absurdity of man's life with the situation of Sisyphus. That life is inherently devoid of meaning and consequently absurd, but humans will forever search for meaning. From a Christian perspective, John Bunyan in his Pilgrim's Progress depicts the burden of sin by describing a load on the back of his protagonist Christian

"Up this way, therefore, did burdened CHRISTIAN run; but not without great difficulty, because of the load on his back. that just as CHRISTIAN came up to the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and began to tumble; and so continued to do till it came to the mouth of the sepulchre, where it fell in, and I saw it no more. Then was CHRISTIAN glad and lightsome, and said, with a merry heart, "He hath given me rest by his sorrow, And life by his death."

And so in our text, the woman who bore the heavy burden was loosed by one touch from the Great Physician Psalm 55:22: Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee:

For every Christian, the sin burden was lifted at Calvary. Our soul has been liberated from the ill and odious effects of the curse though the flesh remains subject to the corruption of Adam's sin. The glad day is coming for complete deliverance from this corruptible carcass that still must bear up under the onslaught of the devil's curse.

Woman thou art forever loosed and now empowered to live that straight life of godliness! Overcoming, victorious living is the birthright of every believer. We are not to cower and wither under the seductions of the evil one as some pusillanimous weakling. Be Strong in the Lord and the power of his might!

Have a blessed day.

*Pastor*

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

## *Have Ye Never Read?*

*And He said unto them, Have ye never read what David did, when he had need, and was an hungred, he, and they that were with him?*

*Mark 2:25*

One of the simple tools a teacher uses to help their students learn is to ask them questions. A question by design should cause a person to think. Too often students tend to take a cursory glance at instruction material to pass an exam. Questions are purposed to stimulate the hearer to contemplate what they have read and know the essence of the information. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus questioned His followers as well as His detractors to cause them to examine the motives of their actions and the foundation and substance of their faith. *Where is your faith? Why call ye me Lord? Wilt thou also go away? Art thou a master in Israel and knowest not these things? Is it not written? Lovest thou me?* Those questions that our Lord asked need to be answered by every believer.

In today's text, Jesus asks the Pharisees, who were the religious leaders in His day, if they had never read what David and his men did when they ate the priest's shewbread because they were hungry and desperate. The Pharisees were so strict concerning the outward performance of the letter of the law that they failed to see the spirit of the law. He reminded them that *the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath*.

As our Lord inquired of the Pharisees if they had *never read*, we should ask ourselves the same questions when various situations arise to test our faith. When the storms of life overwhelm us and we feel as though we are sinking to the depths of the sea, have we never read about the One who walked upon the water and reached down to pull Peter up to safety? When our cupboards are bare and our reserves are exhausted and the fears and worries come upon us of how we will make ends meet, have we never read how the widow of Zarephath's barrel of meal was replenished? When our spirit is crushed by the curse of this world and we feel overwhelmed, have we not read about the Rock that is higher than us? When our discouragement has reached its lowest point because of the indomitable barrier before us, have we not read how the walls of Jericho tumbled down? When things are not going the way we planned, and we feel as though we have no purpose, have we not read about the One who told us to take up our cross and follow Him? When we are tired of seeing, hearing, and feeling all the problems of this world, and we wonder when this will ever be corrected, have we not read that there is coming a day when there will be no more curse? And when the king of terrors, the fear of death threatens us, have we not read about He who is the Resurrection and the Life, and that they that believeth in Him, though they were dead, yet shall they live?

May we be reminded throughout every day that no matter what comes our way, there is something in the scriptures that can produce hope in the darkest situations. When our faith seems weak, and our prayers seem unable to penetrate the heavens, may we hear that still, small yet powerful voice reminding us with those words: Have ye not read?

J. Ekis

## Exceeding righteousness

*Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.*

*For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

*Matthew 5:17, 20*

To appreciate the full weight of Jesus' assertions here in this thesis statement of the Sermon on the Mount, we must step out of our position of hindsight, having a completed New Testament with plenty of apostolic teaching about the need for the imputed righteousness of Christ to enter the kingdom of heaven. Instead, we need to hear these words as an early first century Jew in that crowd, whose main source of religious teaching would have come from the scribes and Pharisees. It is a fair assumption that most of those listening would have had limited formal education and would have viewed these teachers as their ultimate authority for interpretation of the scriptures and application for daily living, as well as eternal justification. Into this setting has come this new Rabbi, telling us that we must be more righteous than our revered teachers if we want to be worthy of the heavenly kingdom. We would also note that He had already intimated some disagreement with these teachers of the law of God, yet no one to this point had found Him guilty of breaking the commandments of Moses. In fact, most people were awestruck by His powerful acts of mercy and healing, and admitted that His teachings made a lot of sense.

Now He was clearly stating that His aim was not to make void the law, or the teachings of the prophets who had historically upheld it, but to fulfill it. Jesus continued in His sermon to elaborate each point of His outline with examples of how to understand the true intent of the law, with respect to murder and anger, adultery and lust, divorce, oaths, retaliation, and the obligation of love. In each instance He compared the common teachings of the scribes and Pharisees, which attempted to make adherence to the law attainable, at least to themselves, through their system of prescribed external acts, clarifications, and exceptions, to the deeper internal intent of those laws. Where would this leave the common Jew? In understanding His points, each person in the crowd would have to adopt a much higher view of the law of God, and exclaim his utter inability to attain it. What this man taught would require the supernatural. And that is precisely what those Jews, and we today, need – that indwelling Holy Spirit of God to write His law in our hearts (Hebrews 8:8-13), that we might find His merciful forgiveness and know Him and His resurrection power, to practically pursue that righteousness for which He has apprehended us (see Philippians 3:9-14). That righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees.

## Some... Others... Ye

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*And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias: and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?*

*– Matthew 16:14-15 –*

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There are many people of whom we hold no opinion at all. These are folks we may see on occasion, but with whom we do not interact. They may work where we work, or live in our neighborhood, or shop at our local stores. We recognize them, but we don't really know them, so we hold them in neither good nor bad esteem. Then there are others with whom we have some limited engagement who we are quick to judge by a single act or thing spoken, whether good or bad, extrapolating that word or deed to be predictive or representative of the whole person. A server at a restaurant, a cashier at a local store, or a neighbor four doors down can leave us with a positive or negative impression that lasts for quite some time. And then there are the famous – people we do not know personally, but whose popularity does not permit us to be neutral about them. In these cases, their high profile forms the basis of our perspective. Names like Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates, “The Rock”, Ellen DeGeneres, etc., most likely evoke from us some stance on who they are and what they are about because of some kind of consistency in their public behavior and speech.

If we lived in Jesus's day, it would have been impossible not to form an opinion of the carpenter from Nazareth turned itinerant Rabbi. His miracles drew the attention of the crowds, spawning the paranoia of the religious oligarchs. His teaching held the common people spellbound, permitting them to see God in ways would never have imagined, while it simultaneously removed the thin shawl from the hypocrite, exposing both Pharisee and Sadducee as pretentious frauds. Though there was no television, social media, or internet, literally everyone was buzzing about Jesus. Everyone was forming their opinion based on the facts that they knew, the filtered perspective of others' opinions, or, in most cases, probably a little of both.

When Jesus had some isolated time with his disciples, He specifically asked them of the rumors. “Whom do men say that I am?” It wasn't that He didn't know what was being circulated. As always, Jesus was teaching. The Twelve needed to filter it all out. They could cite all the rumors quite easily, “John the Baptist...Elias...Jeremias...one of the prophets...” “But”, continued the Master, “Whom say YE that I am?” What do YOU think? You have been watched me closely. You have investigated My life. Are you swayed by the multitudes? Or do you hold a unique perspective that no one can influence?

Over two millennia have not changed the circumstances. Everyone has an opinion about Jesus. Rumors still swirl, misconceptions abound, and heresies run rampant. Today, the devil has so many channels through which he can malign the Lord and influence public opinion away from Christ. But we have been with Him. We have seen Him work. We have partaken of His Spirit. We KNOW Him. Let us be unabashedly forthright and uncompromisingly bold to publicly align ourselves with Him. He is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, our Savior, and our Lord.

— D. Murcek



# Pastors Thoughts of the Week

## Is That All There Is?

*Ecclesiastes 9:5: For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten.*

The Lord included these ramblings of Solomon's fevered mind so as to illustrate the bitter consequences of a man who forsakes his Lord. The book of Ecclesiastes appears to be Solomon's diatribe with himself as he vacillates between the polar opposites of unbelief and faith. The toxic remonstrance that our text puts forth provides insight into the worldly mind that views life as transient and meaningless. Paul succinctly states the lost condition of the unsaved as "having no hope, and without God in the world".

If life is just "an unpleasant interruption to a peaceful non-existence" as Jean-Paul Sartre once sardonically wrote, then our days are evanescently spent in a vain quest for meaning in an otherwise meaningless existence and death presents the dreaded *ne plus ultra* (no more beyond). Torch singer, Peggy Lee distilled Sartre's musings in her lament "Is that all there is?". After several stanzas of morose, melancholic musings she ended her song with the following :

If that's all there is my friends  
Then let's keep dancing  
Let's break out the booze and have a ball  
If that's all there is  
I know what you must be saying to yourselves  
If that's the way she feels about it  
Why doesn't she just end it all?  
Oh, no, not me  
I'm not ready for that final disappointment  
Because I know  
Just as well as I'm standing here talking to you  
That when that final moment comes  
And I'm breathing my last breath  
I'll be saying to myself  
Is that all there is

For the unbeliever, death wields the Damoclean Sword over their heads ready at the slightest movement to thrust its victim into the eternal realm of nothingness and by so doing give proof to their assertion that life is meaningless and absurd. Believers in contrast understand that death is a portal that leads to two everlasting paths heading in opposite directions: eternal bliss or eternal destruction.

Sadly, Peggy Lee departed this world in 2002. She most assuredly found an answer to her musical question.

*He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him. John 3:36*

Pastor

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

## **Vanquishing the Darkness**

**For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.**

**Luke 2:30-32**

**It is from the gospels of Matthew and Luke that we glean the events surrounding the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. Through the centuries, various Christmas customs and traditions have developed, but the center of it all remains the entrance of the Christ child into the world. Though the actual date is not known nor is it important, the accepted date of December 25<sup>th</sup>, can have some spiritual significance. Jesus, the Light of the World, was born in Bethlehem at the darkest time of the year as well as a very dark time in history. The Roman Empire, who ruled the Mediterranean world, declared the Pax Romana or the peace of Rome, although it was anything but peaceful. Rome dominated and subjugated countries to their seemingly invincible might. God's chosen people had come under this oppression at the time of the birth of Christ. Though they were the people of the true and living God, most had strayed far from the pure faith in Jehovah, while the rest of the world was in bondage to other forms of idolatry. In the middle of this gross darkness, the Light of the Word lay in a manger in Bethlehem. Though He entered in obscurity, His life and light began to enlighten the world.**

**While reading the narrative of the Gospels, one will witness the powerful effect that Christ had on mankind. For those who embraced His message, His words and actions released them from the spiritual darkness that bound them. Love would replace hatred, spiritual wealth would replace earthly greed, contentment would replace endless unfulfillment, and a personal relationship with God would replace ignorant worship and blind idolatry. The ruling leaders chafed against the changes that were caused by the Savior. Being filled with anger and jealousy, they devised a plan to extinguish the Light of the World. By crucifying Jesus, they reasoned that they could rid themselves of His influence, but after three days, the light that was born in Bethlehem burst forth from the tomb. Because He is the Savior of the world, the effulgence of the light of the resurrected Savior emanated from the Holy Land and shone throughout the world. Not only individual lives were changed, but entire cultures and nations were mightily impacted by the light of the Gospel.**

**As we enter the Christmas season with all the decorative lights, we are reminded of the Light that God sent into the world so long ago. At this dark time of the year with all the darkness of evil that permeates this present time, may the Lord shine His light on us. As the light of the sun penetrates the blackness of space to lighten this world, may the light of Christ continue to lighten our lives and, thereby, the lives of those who are still in darkness throughout this season and in the years to come.**

**J. Ekis**

## Rules

*Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.*

*Matthew 7:12*

The first part of this statement has been perpetuated in many forms for centuries. It has been commonly called the “golden rule.” It is interesting that in this context Jesus uses it to summarize His previous teaching here in the famous Sermon on the Mount. Through much of this sermon Jesus has condemned hypocritical self-righteousness in its many different expressions, especially among the religious elite. In the most immediate context, the teaching regards the proper application of righteous discernment for the purpose of helping another and not hypocritically condemning another. In other words, if you don’t want to be judged unrighteously, then make sure you judge righteously, which requires self-examination and humility (e.g., Galatians 6:1). Thus, the golden principle stated is a consistent conclusion.

However, Jesus continues in this instance with an addendum, declaring that this rule is an apt summary of all the laws and prophetic commandments of the Old Testament scriptures. In light of that declaration, especially in the company of Jews who should know those scriptures, the honest hearer can do nothing more than stand condemned. Who of them (yea, who of us) could rightly discern either the whole of God’s law or this simple summary and claim to have truly kept it?

Yet there were those Pharisees, who were probably within earshot and were generally revered as holy men by the “common” people, that went about to justify themselves by replacing the precepts of God, as well as this simple summary, with lists of their own rules of the minutest detail. These rules were attainable, at least in their estimation. Yet Jesus has in this sermon exposed many of their self-serving practices as hypocritically empty of any true holiness. Now He simply states a truth that has the power to lead even them to repentance, should they face it honestly. This truth reveals that I am in need of help outside myself, which can only come from God Himself. Hence the open heart repents of self-justifying rule-keeping and instead trusts the only Just One for forgiveness and impartation of His Holy Spirit. He then becomes our only source of power to follow the one rule fulfilled by His nature. Where this is realized, we are free to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God.

## The Kingdom Come

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*And the seventh angel sounded, and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign forever and ever.*

*— Revelation 11:15 —*

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The glad anthem of our text shall emanate from the halls of heaven, echoing through the corridor of the universe and resounding throughout the earth, causing the gates of Hell to crumble. Demon hordes will wail in horrific defeat and all of God's enemies will shudder as they realize their impending doom, while the people of God will look up with the most excited anticipation as their redemption not only draws nigh, but finally arrives. What we all have been praying for and earnestly awaiting will unfold in real time. "Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." What a moment! The internally abiding peace, security, contentment, and truth that reigns within our hearts as born-again children of the Most High will finally become the universal and external environment of the globe. Let us lose ourselves for a few moments envisioning the kingdom our victorious Christ is going to bring to earth...

There will be no more bad news! Fox, CNN, MSNBC, ABC, CBS, NBC, et. al. will have no woeful and sobering message for us any longer. Nothing will bleed, so there will be no lead! Gone will be the reports of stabbings, shootings, tortures, rapes, domestic disputes, and police standoffs. These Christ-hating enterprises that today monetize our fears and capitalize upon our insecurities will be put out of business. The Good News will be the only news!

There will be no more war. Not only will the nations beat their swords into plowshares, but they will not even learn war any longer. The necessity of standing armies which today are vital to national security and international interest will be a thing of a bygone era. Mankind will possess neither need nor desire to learn or practice warcraft. Terrorism will be annihilated, megalomaniacal dictators will be non-existent, and venal politicians won't have the slightest shred of credibility, voice, or power. Jesus will be seated on David's throne in Jerusalem, and none will dare challenge His authority and jurisdiction while the nations clamor to pay the homage due Him.

Natural disasters will not be "a thing" in the Kingdom. No one will be able to sell any snake oil like "Climate Change", and there will be no real cataclysms like floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, or tsunamis. The trees will clap their hands and the oceans will applaud our King. There will be no need to take the kids to the zoo to see the ferocious animals, because all of God's creation will live in harmony. The lion will lay down with the lamb, and the child will play without any hesitation or danger by the hole of the asp. The curse will be eradicated and paradise will be restored. A pristine earth will be our playground because the Last Adam has restored its intended Edenic status.

Our food – all of it – will be tasty and good for us – at the same time! No more cancer, stroke, or heart disease, either. The things that now divide us – "race", political alignments, foundational ideologies, socio-economic status, etc., will dissipate into nothing. Tearful goodbyes will be unknown. Love will be our ether and truth will be our atmosphere. And so much more...

Even so, come, Lord Jesus. Thy Kingdom come. --- D. Murcek



**O come, O come, Emmanuel O come, O come, Emmanuel**

*Luke 2:25: And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him.*

In the halcyon days of childhood, waiting for Christmas morning was one of our chief delights. The weeks before that glad day seemed to move by at such an insufferably slow pace. All of the preparations that had to be put in place including the decorations, the gift purchasing, the dispatched greetings, the extra baking all leant to the anticipatory build-up of that coming day. All of that flurry of activity reminded us that this was indeed a uniquely special event that was well worth the wait.

In like fashion, the Jews of the first century had long awaited the arrival of their promised Messiah. Four hundred years of cruel bondage at the hands of strangers made them long for the glad day of liberation. The hymn I chose to expound is not listed with the glad carols that normally introduce the season of good tidings of great joy. Those anthems revel in the king who has come, who was born, in the promise fulfilled and the curse removed. But this hymn is written in a minor key and speaks more to the people who waited in darkness to see the long anticipated Light of Life appearing with healing in His wings. It captures the pining spirit of an oppressed people who longed for liberation from Satan's bondage.

**O come, O come, Emmanuel,**

**And ransom captive Israel,**

**That mourns in lonely exile here,**

**Until the Son of God appear.**

**Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel**

**Shall come to thee, O Israel.**

**O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free  
Thine own from Satan's tyranny;  
From depths of hell Thy people save,  
And give them victory o'er the grave.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel.**

**O come, Thou Dayspring, from on high,  
And cheer us by Thy drawing nigh;  
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,  
And death's dark shadows put to flight.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel.**

**O come, Thou Key of David, come  
And open wide our heav'nly home;  
Make safe the way that leads on high,  
And close the path to misery.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel.**

**O come, Adonai, Lord of might,  
Who to Thy tribes, on Sinai's height,  
In ancient times didst give the law  
In cloud and majesty and awe.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel.**

The music has an ethereal, haunting quality about it and it is of little wonder that it's composer remains anonymous to us. The somber melody is perfectly wedded to the melancholic lyric expressing the deferred hope of a captive nation. Even with the jubilant repetition, Rejoice Rejoice there seems to be a muted if not altogether subdued elation. The faithful are encouraged to patiently wait-wait through the bitter years of bondage, for He that shall come, will come and will not tarry. Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward.

**Christmas blessings,**

**Pastor**

## Bountiful Blessings of the Trinity

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.

### 2 Corinthians 13:14

God is immutable! In the Old Testament, he is the LORD, that changes not; while in the New Testament, he arrives as God in the flesh as our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. The Holy Spirit is also referred to in Hebrews as the eternal Spirit. God is eternal and immutable, but His interaction differs between the two testaments. In the Old Testament, God the Father is primary in the Godhead for his interactions with man. In the gospels, the Lord Jesus Christ comes to us as God in the flesh and dwells among men. In the Book of Acts and the epistles, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within every believer. All three personages of the Holy Trinity, separate yet equal, play a part in the divine plan of salvation for mankind.

In John 1: 17 For the law came by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ, designates the difference between the Old and New Testaments. The law of Moses and worship based on a system of sacrifices was fulfilled and replaced by the sacrificial death of the Son of God. Being saved by grace through faith, every believer now receives the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The divine Spirit is The Comforter abiding within and willing to guide believers into all truth. The New Covenant era opens to us a new level of intimacy with God. What a privileged position believers enjoy being referred to as saints, friends, dear children, heirs, and joint heirs with Christ.

The Apostle Paul concludes most of his epistles with the benediction “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you”; however, in today’s verse, he incorporates all three persons of the Trinity in his benediction. The apostle highlights our experience with each person of the Trinity. As believers, we have been and continue to be the recipients of an amazing grace. For ye know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). The riches of His grace continue to flow down to us every single day. We experience the epitome of love because God gave His only begotten Son to die for the sins of the world. God’s love is everlasting and His lovingkindness is better than life (Psalm 63:3). Because the Spirit of God lives within the Christian, believers can have a close and personal relationship with God. His Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are sons of God, and it is His Spirit that makes intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered (Romans 8:16, 26). The child of God can sense the Spirit’s guidance, grieving, conviction, and comfort. The more one walks with Him the more intimate they become with Him.

Today, like every other day, is another opportunity to experience fellowship with God. We can have our minds stayed on Him as we contemplate His grace and love. Even after leaving the closet of prayer, we can continue to commune with Him as we walk in the Spirit through every situation of the day. In truth, God designed this day for us to grow in His grace, love, and communion.

J. Ekis

## **Purpose of defeat**

*That men may know that thou, whose name alone is JEHOVAH, art the most high over all the earth.  
Psalm 83:18*

As the psalmist contemplates the schemes of the enemies of Israel before the LORD and pleads for His help against them, his imprecation includes a rehearsal of the history of help that God had provided for His people in the past. While he names the typical nations that had come against Israel, he also recounts those that had been miraculously defeated by the LORD, particularly as recorded in the book of Judges. The enemy nations had one aim, which is expressed in verse four: "They have said, Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance." This cry of their enemies seems to echo through the corridors of time. In some respects, it may continue to reflect the desires of many to eliminate people who, at least for that time, were a reminder of the God of creation.

However, in addition to merely crying out for deliverance, which is a natural human desire, the emphasis of this psalmist's prayer is the identity of Israel with the Lord Jehovah, even to the extent of referring to their enemies as His enemies (vv. 2, 5). This makes a marked difference in the impact of the defeats recounted here. He appeals to a higher purpose than the saving of a nation (which by itself is no small aim). In our text, the stated purpose for desiring the enemies' defeat is that they would understand the supreme identity of Israel's LORD. He is the Most High, the Almighty God, over all the earth and not just one nation. With defeat resulting in this knowledge, they may find reason to seek Him, a related request in verse sixteen (see also Acts 17:27).

For current application, we ought to recognize that the design of many in the world is to eliminate those who would represent and remind them of their accountability to the LORD, who has in these last days spoken unto us by His Son (Hebrews 1:1-3). As we pray for our brethren who represent Christ across the world, and many that suffer severe persecution, let us remember the emphasis of the psalmist, and desire that those who oppose us and our fellow disciples would instead be defeated in their purpose, that they might know Him, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent (John 17:3).

## Wonderful

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*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.*

*– Isaiah 9:6 –*

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Wonder is something that inspires awe. Our Lord Jesus was presciently characterized by Isaiah as Wonderful – i.e., full of traits and qualities that make us stand in awful reverence of Him. Let us worshipfully meditate upon just a few instances outlined by the Gospel writers as to how this prophetic appellation was more than realized in our Christ...

Jesus is wonderful in His miraculous entry into the human race, stepping out of eternity into time and donning the mantle of human flesh in the humble environs of Bethlehem Judah...

“And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.” (Luke 2:18)

Our Lord is wonderful in His identity and seamless nature as the hypostatic God-Man...

“And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son?” (Luke 4:22)

Christ is wonderful in His radical, life-transforming power amongst men...

“Insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel.” (Matthew 15:31)

Our Savior is wonderful in His absolute and uncompromising authority over Hell...

“And he was casting out a devil, and it was dumb. And it came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb spake; and the people wondered.” (Luke 11:14)

The Master is wonderful in His sovereign command over the forces of creation...

“And he went up unto them into the ship; and the wind ceased: and they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered.” (Mark 6:51)

Our Christ is wonderful in His irreversible triumph over death and the grave...

“Then arose Peter, and ran unto the sepulchre; and stooping down, he beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves, and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass.” (Luke 24:12)

“And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat?” (Luke 24:41)

Jesus is wonderful in His ongoing working power by His Spirit through His body, the Church...

“By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.” (Acts 4:30)

All praise and wisdom and honor and glory and power and blessing and might be unto our wonderful Lord and King! --- *D. Murcek*

# Pastors Thoughts of the Week

## **Joy Unspeakable**

*Luke 2:10: And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.*

Four hundred silent years passed since the last words of the prophet Malachi were heard in the land. They had all but forgotten that word of promise "the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple". Even the priests, those stalwart stewards of the mysteries of God, went about their assigned duties in a heartless, perfunctory manner. A spirit of gloom and pessimism pervaded the people of the covenant. Spiritual apathy added to resigned complicity to the customs of their Roman captors deflated any hope of a Messianic deliverance. Into this miasmic atmosphere of despair was the angel sent to the temple wherein Zacharias, the priest performed his liturgical obligation. Suddenly his service was interrupted by a divine intruder who greeted him with this unexpected salutation "thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John."

Gabriel expected his words to be met with the same enthusiasm with which it was delivered, but instead, Zacharias remained incredulous and could not muster the faith to believe the seeming impossibility of the promise. In petulant response, the angel smites the faithless priest with speechlessness until the days of accomplishment would be fulfilled. And then, as predicted, "thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth."

Now consider the utter frustration that beset the old priest. The angel vanishes as suddenly as he appeared, and Zacharias is left with the impossible task of communicating what had just transpired to the waiting people who, by now, wondered why the appointed ministration had taken so long. We can imagine his excited (though silent) retelling of this divine event using gesticulation in place of articulation. The pantomime was so animated with joy that they deduced that he had seen a vision- a vision that bore glad tidings for the nation. It would be nine months that the old priest would have to serve his sentence of silence, but then with the birth of John, his tongue was given rebirth and he could finally express, by the fullness of God's Spirit, that God "hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us."

Peter, in his epistle, reminds us that there is a "joy unspeakable and full of glory". This joy is worn on the countenance and has no syntax with which to communicate its presence. All believers who have received the hope of God's promises will have that same unspeakable joy until that day when we stand "faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy" and our faith is rewarded with reality. Then shall our tongue be released and that which was heretofore inexpressible will find utterance and eternal praise in our Living Lord.

May His choice blessings be yours today,

*Pastor*



## Not There Yet

*And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you for an heritage: I am the LORD.*

### *Exodus 6:8*

Looking back on our school days, we realize how much learning resulted from repetition. Inculcating multiplication tables and mastering spelling words was often accomplished only by repetition. The start of each new year in school involved a review of previous lessons thereby laying a firm foundation for the next level of learning. Studying history reveals that though the locations and people change, events are strikingly similar. Leaders rise and fall, nations go through cycles of war and peace – thus the adage of history repeating itself. The Bible also uses repetition to reinforce spiritual lessons derived from great deliverances. Abraham, Moses, Gideon, David, Daniel, and a host of others had their times of trial before eventual divine deliverance came.

Many accounts in the scriptures picture the trials that believers go through on their journey of faith. In Exodus, the Hebrews, after the delight of being rescued from bondage in Egypt, found great difficulties to be overcome before entering God's promised land. Often their trials were of their own making because of unbelief, yet Jehovah consistently proved true and faithful. When David descended into the valley of death to face the Philistine giant, and faithful Daniel spent a night in the den with ravenous lions each experienced that the Lord is a great deliverer. In New Testament times, those who personally received special healings from the Lord Jesus would have many trials ahead of them before they would stand on heaven's shore. Even Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead, must one day die again before entering paradise. In Acts 14, the early converts were exhorted to continue in the faith and reminded that they must go through much tribulation to enter into the kingdom of God. The Book of Acts and secular history testify to the troubles that have plagued believers through the ages. But none could ever compare with our Savior whose birth we celebrate on Christmas Day, who humbly entered this world as the heavens proclaimed His glory, yet embarked on a life of bearing our griefs, carrying our sorrows, being stricken and smitten of God, afflicted, wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities. *All of this* for the joy that was set before Him- the purchase of our salvation and opening wide the gate to eternal life for all who believe!

When we first embraced Christ and trusted Him for salvation, we received eternal life; but that salvation is not consummated until we are finally rescued from the curse of this world. Our tribulations come in different forms and fashion, at times arriving like waves of the sea in overwhelming succession. Health issues, financial troubles, and varying levels of persecution have plagued saints through the ages and will continue until heaven is gained. Amid life's storms, believers learn to master their spiritual skills as they are reminded of the truth in the words of our Lord *"In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."* The One who stilled the waves, our God who is always faithful to fulfill His promise, has pledged eternal life to all who truly believe. With our focus on the hope of heaven, there is limitless encouragement and motivation for believers. When the trials of life assault and faith wavers, believers must remember that we are not there yet. ~ J. Ekis

## Wondering and pondering

*And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.*

*Luke 2:18-19*

Although Matthew and Luke give various details that have become well-known to us, the events surrounding and culminating in the miraculous incarnation of the Lord Jesus continue to leave much for wondering and pondering. One of the marks of authenticity of the scriptures is once again displayed in the Christmas account: that if any mortal had determined to make up a fable of how God would reveal Himself to humankind by entering the world, it would not come close to resembling the actual account that is given. Man's natural inclinations for envisioning the ways of God would not allow for such elements in the plan. The secret announcement to the virgin, the shaming of the betrothed couple, the arduous and untimely journey to the birthplace, the poverty of the actual birth, and the heavenly appointment of lowly shepherds as witnesses would no doubt be left out of any man-made story. Yet the actual events that were heralded by the shepherds to those in the Judean countryside around Bethlehem and abroad left them wondering what all this could mean. At the same time, we don't know if anyone went searching to authenticate the story, or if they simply stayed home and wondered – again consistent with human nature.

On the other hand, this young girl holding the child whom the angel had called the Son of God had even more to not only wonder about but to ponder. Her own angelic visitor, Joseph's confirmatory dream, and Elizabeth's testimony and probable recounting of the angelic visit to Zacharias would be the few supernatural communications she had. We see no more details of the plan being provided to her personally to this point. The visits of the shepherds and later the wise men would likewise be confirming, yet remain mysterious. And it is not likely that the past nine months had allowed her to develop a systematic theology. There was much to ponder. The little eyes she now beheld had in some way beheld the glory of eternity. How could it be that this One could be now so tiny and seemingly helpless? Only a heart of faith could be sufficient for pondering these mysteries, as she beheld the reality of what had been told her in the midst of such unexpected circumstances. Let our hearts be as faithful as we again contemplate the wonders of His love.

## Reflections on His Comings

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*And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.  
– Revelation 19:16 –*

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We celebrate the incarnation annually during the Christmas season, while its truth is a daily reality for every born-again child of God. Our Lord's first coming and His triumphant return are so strikingly contrasted in the New Testament scriptures that it makes us stand in awe of the Spirit's exquisite artistry. Comparing Revelation 19:11-16 with the gospel accounts will lead us to worshipfully adore the Babe of Bethlehem turned Victor from Heaven...

In Luke 2:7, there is no room in the inn for our Lord, no place to host Him. In Revelation 19:11, the skies open up to prepare His entrance. The Heaven of heavens cannot contain Him!

In Luke 1:17, He is carried in a Virgin's pure womb. In Revelation 19:11, He rides upon a pristine white stallion.

In Matthew 1:23, He is Immanuel – God with us. In Revelation 19:11, He is called Faithful and True.

In Luke 2:14, the angels herald His advent with a message of peace and good will to men. In Revelation 19:11, He Himself returns to judge and make war.

In Matthew 2:10, a brilliant star illuminates His cradle for those seeking to worship Him. In Revelation 19:12, His eyes are a dazzling flame of fire, burning through all rebel excuses.

In Luke 2:7, He is laid in a lowly manger. In Revelation 19:12, He is adorned with the many crowns of a conquering potentate.

In Matthew 1:21, Joseph is instructed to call His name Jesus. In Revelation 19:12, He has a name written that no man knows but He Himself.

In Luke 2:7, He is wrapped in swaddling clothes. In Revelation 19:13, He is clothed in a vesture dipped in the blood of His enemies.

In John 1:14, He is the Word made flesh. In Revelation 19:13, He is the consummate Word of God.

In Matthew 2:11, He is worshipped by kings. In Revelation 19:14, He is followed by armies.

In Luke 1:68, He is the Desire of Nations come to visit and redeem Israel. In Revelation 19:15, He smites all nations and rules them with a rod of iron.

In Luke 1:35 and 47, He is quietly revealed as the Son of God and the Savior of men. In Revelation 19:16, He is universally proclaimed and honored as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Look up, brothers and sisters. Our King is coming again soon! --- D. Murcek

# 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*