

Pleasing God

By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death, and was not found, because God had translated him; for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

– Hebrews 11:5 –

We do not know very much about the man, Enoch. The Bible has but a few references to him. Of the things we do know, this is perhaps the most remarkable – that he pleased God.

While it is true that most religions aim at this lofty and noble objective – to please Deity – they all nonetheless fall hopelessly short of ever meeting it because of their ignorance of who God is. So, for the Bible believer who has actually contemplated the nature of the Living, Eternal God, this is an astounding statement – one that deserves our thoughtful pause and meditation. There is a substantive way that mortal man can please the Holy, Almighty Creator? And further, God has recorded for us how to do so as well as etched evidence of men and women who have actually held such a testimony in the pages of His Word? And yet further, how do we obtain such an epitaph as Enoch upon our lives – that we pleased God?

The next verse provides us the open secret. Without faith, it is impossible to please Him (Heb. 11:6). It is faith foundationally, faith exclusively, faith comprehensively that pleases God. This type of faith is described further, “For he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.” So, this is more than mere mental assent. That type of faith is elementary. The devils believe in God, and tremble. But the faith that pleases Him is an all-encompassing belief that submits mind, body, and soul to His authority, dictate, and care.

So much spiritual instruction can be gleaned by the careful observation of little ones in a right relationship with a loving father. They trust him implicitly. They are safe when they are in his arms. They know both the love of his heart and the discipline of his hand. They desire unbroken time with him. They delight in his smile and are brought to tears by his frowning displeasure. They feel free to approach him and ask him hard questions. If they don’t necessarily understand his answer or explanation, they nonetheless know it to be true because daddy said so. His word is enough. His promises are good. They love him because they know he loves them. And that prompts them to live their little lives in such a way as to make their daddy proud.

It is no wonder that Jesus used a little child as the object lesson for his disciples in this most important matter of the nature of heaven-aligned faith. This is the faith that Hebrews 11 and the entire Bible is calling us to develop and exercise. Yes, it is childlike trust that grasps the heart of Jehovah and delights His eternal nature. It is this type of faith alone that pleases Him.

We can please God today by doing nothing more than trusting our Abba. Are we prepared to do so? — D. Murcek

Pastor's Thoughts of the Week

*Isaiah 59:19: When the enemy shall come in like a flood,
the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him.*

What a sure defense the believer has on which to rely. The unrelenting mystery of iniquity is constantly reappearing in some delusive form to vanquish the work of the church. It must be that Satan knows "he has but a short time" and so he is about devising his diabolical machinations to thwart the power of the gospel. Our inspired text imbues us with the confidence that the gates of hell cannot and will not stand against us. Be assured that where "*sin abounded, grace did much more abound*".

But what is it that that is in the Spirit's hand that causes the enemy to make so hasty a retreat? The word *standard* refers to the unfurled banner that each of the 12 tribes had around which the various sons of Israel would rally in times of emergency. What courage the wearied fighter would take when in the midst of the grand conflict his eye should spy that standard. Of the myriad of names ascribed to our Lord, *Jehovah-Nissi* might most aptly embraces the prophet's imagery—*the Lord our Banner*. Emblazoned on this sacred cloth we might easily be find the words "*If God be for us, who can be against us*". With a renewed invigoration the warrior advances the cause of Christ with invincible fortitude to "win the well-fought day".

Anarchists have co-opted peaceful and justifiable protests in our country to advance their own evil agenda. These agents of the devil have rioted, burned, looted, and occupied sections of our cities in hopes of fueling an overthrow of constitutional government and the rule of law replacing it with Marxist socialism. True believers must earnestly resist this insurrection by petitioning the Holy Spirit to lift up the standard against them.

On September 13, 1814, Francis Scott Key, aboard a British vessel where he was negotiating for a captured American officer's release, anxiously watched the bombardment of the Fort McHenry through the daylight hours. According to Key, "It seemed as though mother earth had opened and was vomiting shot and shell in a sheet of fire and brimstone." But as darkness descended, Key could see little more of the battle than the "red glare" of the enemy's newly designed gunpowder-propelled Congreve rockets tracing fiery arcs across the sky. "The heavens aglow were a seething sea of flame," he later wrote to his friend John Randolph. In the "angry sea," as Key described conditions on that stormy night, the flag-of-truce sloop was "tossed as though in a tempest." Key was alarmed by the sound of "bombs bursting in air"—British shells detonating short of their target.

It seemed unlikely, Key would later recall, that American resistance at the fort could withstand such a pounding. Not until the mists dissipated at dawn September 14 did he learn the outcome of the battle. "At last," he later wrote, "a bright streak of gold mingled with crimson shot athwart the eastern sky, followed by another, and still another, as the morning sun rose." Gradually he was able to discern not the British Union Jack that he had feared, but still, defiantly, an American flag, enormous in its dimensions, fluttering in the breeze from the flagpole of an undefeated Fort McHenry. The fort had not fallen: Baltimore remained safe. It was, he later wrote, a "most merciful deliverance." And the rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in air gave proof through the night that our flag was still there"

One likewise wonders if our nation can withstand the enemy's assault from within and preserve the freedom that has been purchased and preserved at so precious a price. God owes no nation that "forgets" him any promises of preservation. But to the Church that He has purchased with His own blood, He extends the promise that "*the gates of hell cannot prevail against it*". Let us not be found derelict in our duty as preserving salt. Let us plead to the Almighty to lift His holy standard against the existential evils of our day and preserve the liberties for the coming generations.

Have a blessed day,

Pastor

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

Always Right

Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right, and I have hated every false way.

Psalm 119:128

The Bible is God's inspired word revealing the essence of God and His plan of salvation for all people. It is one hundred percent accurate in its history, genealogies, prophecies, and practical teachings that can be applied to our lives. Some Biblical accounts may challenge what we would expect from the God of the scriptures. For example, King Saul was commanded by God to destroy the Amalekites, which from a human standpoint could seem to be harsh (I Samuel 15). In this case, it becomes apparent that God wants man to exercise faith in Him and trust that everything God says is right. With that trust, we are not to lean unto our own understanding, but acknowledge Him in all our ways (Prov. 3:5,6). God has many secrets that belong to Him alone, but what He reveals belongs to us and is for our benefit (Deut. 29:29).

Because the Scriptures are God's eternal truth, we can confidently believe God is always right concerning any topic. The encroaching spiritual darkness of this hour has caused many to doubt what is right and wrong. Secular reasoning borders the absurd yet has become acceptable. As believers, our Christian lifestyle is often mocked by the general public. We now live in an age when disagreeing with public opinion can earn the reputation of being ignorant or hateful.

With all our country's faults, the foundational Judeo-Christian influence is intertwined throughout our history. Our value system of right and wrong is rooted in the teachings of the Bible. Through the years, especially in the last few decades, pleasing man's carnal nature has become progressively more important than pleasing God. Because pseudo-science has been elevated above faith in God, the influence of the scriptures has greatly diminished in our land. The fallout of this is manifested in people living their lives without divine direction and feeling no accountability for their actions because they have no fear of God. Pride and self-boasting have replaced meekness and humility. Gender confusion has people questioning God's defined boundaries of genders. Once unthinkable behaviors have become popular today. Clearly, such bizarre behaviors validate to us that God was right in telling us that evil men would wax worse, deceiving and being deceived (2 Tim. 3:13). It behooves us as Christians to daily search the scriptures so we hear from God what is right.

The atmosphere of today's world should not surprise the believer, for the Bible has already described what it would be like in the latter days. Many will depart from the faith and give heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils (I Timothy 4:1). We should never forget that we are pilgrims in a strange land. Fortunately, our God is the Rock that never changes, and because of that, we can have the confidence and the assurance that His truth will endure forever.

Remember, what man says may or may not be true; but what God says is always right.

J. Ekis

Frail determination

I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me. I was dumb with silence, I held my peace, even from good; and my sorrow was stirred.

My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned: then spake I with my tongue, LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am.

Psalm 39:1-4

The third chapter of the epistle of James issues numerous warnings about the dangers of the tongue, and we are right to heed those warnings. One way to avoid the sins of the tongue is to avoid speaking. James tells us earlier to be slow to speak and slow to wrath (James 1:19). As this psalm begins, this seems to be David's plan when he found himself in the presence of the wicked. We may also have similar thoughts when we find ourselves in a place where speaking up may draw the attacks of those present, which could eventually lead us into a quarrel with those of a different opinion. This may be an even greater temptation in our current age, when often people are not looking for open and honest discussion, but rather accusation and a reason to "cancel" others.

However, we see David taking this plan to the extreme, where he held his peace "even from good." Although he was steadfast in keeping his promise to himself, he describes his internal response to the situation as stirring his sorrow. When we know the truth, especially the truth that would ultimately benefit for good the life that would receive it, withholding that good from another will bring sorrow within. Yet there are times when we, as David, continue to hold our peace for the sake of peace, at least as we perceive it, and by doing so may end up sinning through not speaking. We withhold good from those that need to hear it, to avoid potential conflict. The reasons we rehearse in our minds may even seem legitimate, especially when based on prior experience with those involved. So how do we avoid stirring such sorrow and also the potential for strife?

For David, he finally broke silence and spoke, not to the wicked, but to the LORD. He needed God to adjust his perspective on his own frailty and vanity. He needed to recognize that time and opportunity were passing him once again, while he seemingly was controlling himself. He finally in verse seven concludes: "And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee." Let us also with him recognize our need for humble prayer to the LORD for wisdom in such circumstances, understanding our own frailty, our end, and the preciousness of the time He has given, both to us and to those needing to hear of the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Then, when He opens our mouth, we can rest our hope in Him for the outcome.

The Dragon and the Woman

And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child.

– Revelation 12:13 –

In the twelfth chapter of Revelation, John captures the prophetic history and future of the nation of Israel in a few verses. Given the past several weeks' headlines and, more disturbingly, the adoption by growing multitudes of the false narrative pushed by the devil-owned media regarding the "Palestinians", it is perhaps a prudent moment for believers to stop and remind ourselves of what the God of men and nations has revealed about His plan and will regarding His nation, Israel.

The nation Israel, the people of the Jews, are the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God made a covenant with Abraham that a nation of people would come from his seed, that that nation would be given a piece of land by God Himself in which to dwell, and that they would be God's instrument through which He would reveal Himself to the world and save mankind. The nation rose just as God promised. They inherited the land as God foretold. By His hand, Israel gave us the scriptures, unveiling the mind of the Living God. Ultimately and despite their centuries of disobedience and God's chastisement, they ushered a Babe into the world in the little town of Bethlehem.

But in 70 AD, the nation's rejection of Christ at Calvary decades earlier and their subsequent rejection of the gospel message of the apostles brought another centuries-long divorcement of their status as God's nation amongst the nations. They became a people without a home, without a temple, and without hope. During their exile, the devil made certain to persecute this people. But despite his best attempts, from Stalin's pogroms to Hitler's ovens, the words of the Lord Jesus that this generation (of people, i.e., the Jews) would not pass held miraculously true.

Then, in 1948 the land of their pilgrimage which had laid waste for so long was suddenly re-gifted to them by God. Since that time, the nation has been surrounded by her enemies. The news media and our modern global oligarchs have fabricated a narrative of an "occupation" of Israel in the land of the "Palestinians". (There is not, and never has there been a "Palestinian" people. They are displaced Arabs from neighboring Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria, as well as infiltrating Iranians (Hamas), who are all used like pawns in a game by Muslim totalitarians to carry out the devil's persecution of God's covenant nation. The land – all of it – belongs to Israel, and woe be to the politico who thinks he can subdivide God's inheritance!) The events of the last several weeks are the latest resurgence of the Dragon's violent persecution of God's (estranged) nation. The Serpent is perhaps raging because he knows he has a short time?

As Christians, our job is to pray – for the peace of Jerusalem, for the salvation of the Jews, for the salvation of their enemies, for the thwarting of the devil's plans, and for the advent of the Kingdom. For it appears that perhaps soon, Jesus will show Himself as He that was wounded in the house of His friends, and there will finally be peace on earth and good will to men. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

— D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

JActs 2:23-24: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.

Sin brings with it an accompanying bondage and with this bondage an accompanying pain of death. The Master, being the creator of life, had to come to our rescue and loose us from it's inextricable captivity. The titanic struggle of the cross found our Savior in direct conflict with the contradiction of our sinful nature. He willingly adopts that nature in becoming "sin for us who knew no sin", earning him the right to the keys of death and hell with which he could liberate all those bound by sin.

The miserable internees of Hitler's hideous concentration camps could not restrain their emotions when they witnessed the American liberators storming the death camps and scattering their conscienceless captors. Like walking skeletons, the emaciated captives embraced their emancipators falling into their arms with irrepressible gratitude. These who were but days from the inevitable fires of the hellacious ovens, were now saved from, what seemed to them to be, an inevitable fait accompli.

Believers in Christ likewise embrace their Great Savior, seeing that He alone possesses the power to loose us from our iniquity and save us from our inexorable damnation. The process whereby this is accomplished remains shrouded in spiritual mystery. No human mind can plumb the depths of this divine transaction that accepts the death of the "just for the unjust". I Peter 3:18: For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:

Death could not deny our glorious champion His victory. In sublime and almost simplistic explanation, the text explains that the demons of hell and their perverted prince of darkness had no authority to thwart the overcoming power of His resurrection over death. It simply "was not possible that he should be holden of it."

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

Always the Same

And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail

Hebrews 1:10-12

Everything seems to change with time. Simply retrieve some old family pictures from the attic to confirm how time changes things. While looking at old photo albums, we immediately notice how everything changed over the years - faces, hairstyles, clothing, furniture, cars, even landscapes. Or consider the Industrial Revolution that occurred from 1760 to 1840 drastically changing the world. From mass production to transportation, the world's nations were launched into a frenzy of continual change because of these advancements. In the twentieth century alone, the world witnessed the first successful flight of the Wright brothers, and then just sixty-six years later watched man land on the moon. Ponder the vast resources of information that are at our fingertips with the internet. We now can instantly communicate face-to-face with someone on the opposite side of the globe. In this world of constant variation, there is one constant- God!

From the outset of creation to the consummation of the ages, God is the same. He is the same in His existence and the same in His personage. Today's verses in Hebrews are also found in Psalm 102, confirming other scriptures throughout the Bible that God never changes. With Him, there is neither variableness nor shadow of turning. God's truth endureth forever and applies to men and women of every generation. The attributes of a rock are used multiple times metaphorically to describe God's immutability. He's the Rock of Horeb that refreshed the Israelites on their journey through the wilderness, and today He continues to provide salvation, as well as quench the thirst for truth and longing for purpose in every soul who comes to Him. God is the foundational stone on which to build our life, and no matter what storm of life assaults us, our Foundation is unmoved. When our hearts are overwhelmed, He is that high Rock to which we can retreat for safety and consolation. In the Book of Malachi, He is the LORD (Jehovah, the self-existent one, or the Eternal) that changes not.

Knowing that God is always the same should be a great comfort to us. He is totally unlike mankind who can be prone to unpredictable mood swings. When we kneel in prayer and come before His throne of grace, we need not fear that God is having a bad day. We can rest assured that the Lord is always faithful and just, and His ears are open to our cries. His Word enlightens us when we first believe, and His Word will continue to lighten our path as we pursue His will. Heaven and earth will one day pass away, but the Word of the Lord shall never pass away.

As we continue to walk with the Lord, we will be confronted with the ever-changing tests of this life, so take time to meditate on this thought: Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

J. Ekis

Understanding praise

*Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises. For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding.
Psalm 47:6-7*

The emphatic command here is to sing praises to God. The reason is that He is the great King of all the earth. While we can contemplate many reasons to praise God, the very fact of who He is provides sufficient cause. Although much could be enumerated about the many wonderful works He has performed, these are possible because of who He is. There is none like Him, therefore He is holy. As King, He rules over all in sovereign majesty. He exercises authority over all creation because He is the Creator. He provides redemption and salvation because He is righteousness and mercy, our Savior and Redeemer. To know and consider these things provokes our souls to agree with the exhortation of the psalmist to praise Him. And while there are various ways to praise, the most common is to sing praises.

The mechanism of human music was born in His creation of the voice. Man has invented instruments for making music, yet the genuine sound comes from the voice. Then the combination of voice in tune with the heart that understands who He is provides harmony. Although men have the capacity to make musical harmonies that inspire, impress, or pacify, the most significant harmony is created between the understanding and the expression of praise. So, just as a carefully constructed musical harmony is pleasing to the ear, the praise that is expressed consistent with spiritual understanding is even more pleasing to the soul, as well as honoring the Lord we praise.

Therefore, as we sing praises to God our King, let us do so with understanding, from knowing Him and His truth revealed through scripture. In so doing we will guard against the danger of worshiping only the sound or the emotion, instead of the One we praise, and then promote harmony of souls and voices united in the truth of His holiness.

Fruit Inspection

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

— Galatians 5:22-23 —

Here is another one of those Bible texts with which we are likely so familiar that we are prone to pass over it without serious thought or pause. Let us buck that fleshly, hurried tendency for a moment and meditate upon its meaning and application in our lives...

Fruit is something that can be seen, handled, and tasted. This passage is telling us that God's Spirit can be observed and felt by others through our lives in this nine-fold harvest. Does my life exhibit in tangible ways and plenteous quantities the fruit of the Spirit of the living God?

Love – this is the divine love that Christ's life displayed, and it is supposed to be resident within as well as flowing out from me. Is my life characterized by a burning love for God, a sincere and earnest love for my spiritual brethren, and a broad and real love for all men? Anything less is a fleshly, carnal counterfeit.

Joy – Am I a generally joyful person, or do I permit the things of the world to dictate my mood? Do others desire to be around me because the joy of my salvation is infectious?

Peace – Do I place my cares in my Father's omnipotent hands? Am I uptight, worried, anxious, or am I at rest in the knowledge that He is working even this present distress for my good?

Longsuffering – How is my patience? Do I act before I permit God to do so? Do I wait for him? Am I patient in listening to others? Am I alright with meeting people where they are?

Gentleness – Am I abrupt and abrasive, or kind and compassionate in my dealings with people? Jesus never broke a bruised reed or quenched a smoking flax. Do I follow His example?

Goodness – Do I reflect God's goodness to others? Am I a vociferously grateful person? Do others know me to be a good person (because they see God in me)?

Faith – Is this a defining characteristic of my person and being? Am I known to be a person of faith, and a faithful person?

Meekness – Am I easily imposed upon? Do I harbor any kind of resentment towards those who have wronged me?

Temperance – Does my life exhibit restraint in the areas of emotional engagement and subjective moral issues? Is the good of others more important to me than my personal liberty?

May the Spirit of God have His way with us today. --- D. Murcek

A Very Temporary Reward

Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

Matthew 6:2

Recognition has its place and can be very important in the developmental years. Earning a smile of approval from a father or mother or any authority figure can be a great encouragement to children. Doing right or accomplishing a level of achievement should be commended, but there comes a time when we need to be weaned from needing the praise of men and spiritually mature with a desire to know the praise of God. Unfortunately, the praise of men is audible and tends to cater to our pride, while the praise of God is often silent, and bypasses fleshly desires to rejoice our spirit.

In today's text, Jesus was addressing the situation of men performing good deeds so that they might be seen by men and receive their praise. These earthly praises cater to man's pride, yet will never satisfy the insatiable lust for more self-recognition. The glory that such men receive will be their reward, but that reward will be short-lived. This work of the flesh only serves to glorify the flesh. God would have us grow in faith so that our greatest desire will be to earn that invisible smile of approval from heaven. We should walk as if the King of the universe is walking right beside us seeing our every deed and hearing our every word. He sees the acts of charity we perform when no one else is around. The Lord knows the intents of our hearts and is best glorified when we serve HIM with all our soul, spirit, and heart. Just as our most intimate time of prayer is when we are isolated from others to spend time with the Lord; so, our charitable works should be rendered as if no one else is present other than the Lord.

As we serve the Lord, He will guide our steps so that every circumstance can be used for His glory, which is our ultimate purpose. John the Baptist had the reputation with our Lord Jesus of being the greatest man born of woman (Matthew 11:11), and this greatness was demonstrated by his desire to decrease so that the Lord might increase (John 3:30). When we can push ourselves out of the way, we allow more room for the Lord to increase in our lives. Remembering that the Lord is with us, for the Father hath not left us alone, therefore, we should do those things that please Him (John 8:29). Though God's praise is often silent to our ears, it rejoices our hearts; let us then esteem the eternal praise of heaven more than the temporary praise of men.

J. Ekis

Peace and thanks

*And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.
Colossians 3:15*

There is a simple connection implied in this exhortation between peace and thankfulness. The cluster of verses that precede this imply the need for the believers to put away normal human characteristics like anger and wrath, which also seem by implication to be tied to the natural divisions among them, which stem from their ethnic, racial, or social class differences, for example, Greek or Jew, Barbarian or Scythian, bond or free. Instead the apostle inserts the remedy of the rule of God's peace, which He brings to the hearts of all who have hidden their life with Christ in God. Putting off the characteristics of the old man and being renewed in the knowledge that He supplies through the new man of the Spirit, each disciple can tap the source of holiness, visceral mercies, kindness, and meekness that can overcome those old tendencies. With this backdrop, we can see that the final point in our text to be thankful is no afterthought, but instead sums the attitude that recognizes the miracle of the shared calling into the body of Christ for all the "elect of God" (v. 12).

Dwelling in thankfulness for His grace to all who call upon Him enables the action of His peace to overcome the world's temptations to divisions and enmities, intended by the tempter and his emissaries to instigate wars and fighting among men. A thankful spirit is a peaceful spirit. There is no room for envy or selfishness in the thankful heart, because it is satisfied with all that has been supplied and abundantly bestowed. Therefore, let's recognize this connection and allow God's peace to rule as we give Him thanks for His exceeding bounty, both temporal and eternal.

How to be Happy

Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and hear thy wisdom.

– 2 Chronicles 9:7 –

Our text is the inspired record of the observation of the Queen of Sheba who came to verify the glory and wisdom of King Solomon. After exploring the riches of his kingdom and testing the scope of his knowledge, the queen was undone by the splendor, honor, and blessing bestowed by Jehovah upon the King of Israel. The half had not been told her! In the course of her verbal adoration of God's establishment of this son of David, she notes the happiness of Solomon's servants. When we stop for a moment and think about it, it must have been quite an occupation – to wait on the bidding of this wisest of them born of women. To stand in his presence and hear his inspired utterance in all matters of judgment and state was a unique opportunity afforded relatively few individuals. And can we imagine what it might have been like to be the king's amanuensis? To pen the Proverbs, or Ecclesiastes, or even the intimate record of the Canticles? Happy indeed would be anyone in such a position...

But as believers, we actually enjoy access to an even greater opportunity and occupation. King Solomon in all his glory was but a shadow of the greater Son of David who was to come. Indeed, a greater than King Solomon is here in the person of our Lord Jesus. We are happy to be His servants – awaiting His commission, tending to His business, carrying out His orders. And what a joy it is to stand before Him continually, for nothing can break our fellowship with our King. When we open daily the pages of His sacred Word and consume His instruction, be it in the form of proverb, narrative, or command, we marvel at His wisdom. This delights our hearts like nothing else on earth can and recalibrates our course to align with His will, whose objective is our highest good. What a treasure He has encapsulated for us from Genesis to Revelation! What a happy place to be, finding both sustenance and eternal pleasures in His written Word! What a privilege to commune daily in these pages with the eternal Logos, the living Word of God!

In 2023, soon to be 2024, folks are clamoring to be “happy”. But enduring happiness in this world is as elusive as it is vaporous, and at least as much so today as it ever has been. It is easy in our culture to fall into the trap of seeking pleasures from temporal things. But true and lasting joy is found only in communion with our Savior. He has promised to meet with us in the great repository of His wisdom, the sacred Scriptures, until the day when His Kingdom comes, and we are forever in the physical presence of our good and wise King. Until then, let us commit increasingly to enjoy the privilege of knowing Him more through the conduit of His eternal Word. — D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Gathered Together

And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them. Acts 14:27

"We Gather Together" is a Christian hymn of Dutch origin written in 1597 by Adrianus Valerius to celebrate the Dutch victory over Spanish forces in the Battle of Turnhout. At the time the hymn was written, the Dutch were engaged in a war of national liberation against the Catholic King Philip II of Spain. "We gather together" resonated because under the Spanish King, Dutch Protestants were forbidden to gather for worship.

*We gather together to ask the Lord's blessing;
He chastens and hastens His will to make known;
the wicked oppressing now cease from distressing.
Sing praises to His name, He forgets not His own.*

The importance of the church being "gathered together" must never be minimized. The Lord said "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. Matthew 18:20. There is a promise of His special presence when the saints gather and this is perceived by those who walk closest to the Master. Misanthropes prefer to live apart from society, but such isolation is unnatural and contributes to a pessimistic outlook. Mankind is innately social. Despite the many pitfalls that social interaction inevitably brings, there is a benefit that cannot be had apart from gathering together.

Consider the amazing unity that the new birth creates through the Holy Spirit. This nexus binds the believers one to another despite the diversity of social background, aptitude, culture, or economic disparity. This unity cannot be replicated by political parties, secret fraternal societies or pseudo-religious denominations. The Lord said, "I will build my church (greek: *ekklēsia*= a gathering of people); and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." This assembled aggregation of God's people is a formidable force when seen standing together against the forces of evil. Let us not forsake "the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

Jesus is coming soon and at that "glorious appearing of our great God and Savior" He will call us up in that great gathering together day! I Thessalonians 2:1: Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him.

Have a blessed day,

Pastor

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

Saving Us from Ourselves

And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones.

Mark 5:5

Today's passage is from the account of Jesus' encounter with the Maniac of Gadara. The Bible describes the tormented man's bizarre and abusive lifestyle but does not tell us how the man became demon-possessed. Two things are apparent; he was mentally conflicted and he was physically self-abusive. This condition prevented the Maniac from fulfilling God's purpose for his life until the hero of all mankind came and touched him with a Divine Hand. After Jesus healed him, the maniac sits at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. Not only did this man find salvation for his soul, but he also had his mind and actions divinely impacted. Being delivered from the evil power of the devil, he pursued what God meant him to be.

God's salvation is twofold; it secures the forgiveness of sins so that one may enter heaven, and it has the power to change our lives while we live in this world. Satan, the enemy of our soul, is a defeated foe. The only power he has over the believer is the power we allow him to have. In some ways, our greatest enemy is ourselves. Our old nature is not eradicated at the time of our conversion, but must be surrendered to the leading of the Holy Spirit that now dwells within. Sometimes we exercise our self-will, hindering the Holy Spirit from having full reign. Possibly unbecoming personality traits or just holding on to something that satisfies our carnality may hinder our spiritual progress. God has *given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue (2 Peter 1:3)*. These exceeding and precious promises need to be utilized so that we might be partakers of the divine nature and escape the corruption that is in the world through lust. Galatians reminds us that the *Lord Jesus Christ gave himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world (Gal. 1:4)*. The subtle evils of this world are still present to pull us in the wrong direction. By hiding God's word in our hearts and using the light of the Word to guide our steps, our path can shine more and more until the day God's work is completed in us.

In many ways, we were and sometimes still are like the demoniac. As it states in *Romans, to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace (Romans 8:6)*. Before he called out to the Lord for help, the demoniac was not in his right mind, which affected his lifestyle and even brought harm upon himself. When we are carnally minded, we often make wrong choices that have negative influences on our lives. But also like the demoniac we can call out to the Lord and sit at His feet to hear His voice and heed His counsel. It is there that we find peace and restore our minds. Take time today to sit at His feet.

J. Ekis

Gracious blessing

Iniquities prevail against me: as for our transgressions, thou shalt purge them away. Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple.
Psalm 65:3-4

The beatitude announced here springs from the realization of the manifold power and grace of God in providing the only remedy for the chronic iniquity that plagues mankind. As the psalmist David proclaims first his utter loss against prevailing iniquities, he describes the problem using two distinct words. Iniquities here refers to “a result of twisted action,” or “perversity.” This aims at a basic characteristic of sin, which is the pursuit of satisfying a human desire by means that are contrary to the legitimate plan of God. This stems back to the origination of human sin in the garden, where the woman saw the tree to be “good for food,” “pleasant to the eyes,” and a means to “make one wise” (Genesis 3:6), all which could be deemed as legitimate desires, and proceeded to yield to the temptation to satisfy those desires in a manner directly contrary to the expressed word of God.

Thus, by perverting the path to the result, the iniquity yielded transgression, which is crossing a line that God has clearly drawn, also representing trespass and rebellion. As David expresses the pain of transgression, which keeps him from the fullness of the LORD’s presence and is caused by inherited sinful human nature that banished our first parents from God’s presence in the garden, he comes to the logical conclusion that the only way to victory is that the LORD Himself must purge away the resulting transgressions. It is not sufficient for men to attempt to establish their own perverted paths to reconciliation for transgressions, through systems of religious works, as iniquities will continue to prevail through these prideful human efforts. Only the grace of God through His chosen means is able to purge them away.

Although David exhibits understanding of the need for such grace, that chosen means would be later revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who gives us the victory (I Corinthians 15:57) over iniquity and its consequences. The blessing to approach unto the LORD and be satisfied with His goodness, signified in type by the temple cloud, is fulfilled in reality in the invitation to enter the holy presence of God by a “new and living way,” established by the blood of Jesus so that “their sins and iniquities will I remember no more” (Hebrews 10:17-20/Jeremiah 31:34). This promise prevails for saints of all ages, for the confidence of both His spiritual presence and His eternal glory (II Corinthians 5:5-8).

Faith and Aging

And he went out to meet Asa, and said unto him, Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin; The LORD is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you.

– 2 Chronicles 15:2 –

Tucked here in the middle of the account of King Asa's reign is a warning from the prophet Azariah that proved to be a prescient descriptive of Asa's life. This godly King of Judah started well. As a relatively young man, Asa took the throne of Judah and commissioned a plethora of civil and moral reforms that sparked a revival amongst the people and gained the attention of Heaven. He zealously aligned his rule with Jehovah's righteousness, might, and power. God performed special favors for this faithful young king and brought him heaven-borne victory over Judah's enemies in response to Asa's faith and prayer. Unfortunately, however, we see that at the end of his forty-one-year reign, Asa actually acts more like a worldly potentate than a humble son of David. He is angered by the words of God's prophet and imprisons him, and oppresses some of God's people at the same time (2 Chronicles 16:10). How the mighty fell!

All of this is recorded for our learning. The critical characteristic of faith is that it needs to remain active to prosper. The God in whom we have placed our faith is the only constant in the equation. The remaining variable is the exercise of our trust in Him. Reliance upon yesterday's answered prayers will always prove to be a spiritual mistake. While they may bolster our confidence and encourage our hearts, past victories are nonetheless no guarantee of future success. Just as knowledge does not immediately translate to wisdom unless assimilated and acutely applied to life's shifting situations, so also faith does not increase our peace, security, and victorious living unless activated on a continuous basis. Just because we have seen God move on our behalf in our previous exigency does not mean He is going to intervene in the same way in our current distress. He is waiting to hear from us, currently. He is testing our hearts, right now. He is awaiting our obedience to Him at this moment. This is true whether we have known him for one year or walked with him for seventy years. This reality of a vibrant, ever-working faith is the essence of what the apostle Paul meant when he said, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:12-14).

Let us carefully heed the warning from Asa's life. Yesteryears' answers to prayer and exploits of faith were wonderful, but they are in the past. Today is a new day, with new challenges that require actively obedient faith. Let us shun the temptation to be lazy in this most critical matter of trust, and haste again to the throne of grace, pressing Heaven for even greater and mightier things which we have yet to secure. And may we be thus active in heart until the day our faith becomes sight. --- D. Murcek