

Warning Signs

Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.

Galatians 5:26

In daily life we are presented with a wide variety of warnings signs. Warnings are presented in different forms and in different ways. They can be written on a label or a billboard; they can also be signaled by bells, sirens, or whistles. Physical pain can be a warning sign that something is wrong with our health. The Bible is also filled with warnings concerning our eternal destiny as well as our current overall spiritual well-being.

One of the purposes of the book of Galatians is to show that the law is our schoolteacher to show our need of a savior. When a person places sincere trust in the finished work of Christ on the cross, the Holy Spirit indwells and seals the new believer, and it is also by the direction of the Spirit that believers are to live their lives.

The behaviors designated in today's verse are indicators that we are not walking in the Spirit as believers. Verse 26 is connected and contrasted with the preceding verse. Hence verse 25 states: *If (since) we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.* By walking in the Spirit, we are yielding ourselves to the prompting and leading of the Holy Spirit so that we become more Christlike. The Spirit will teach us by bringing things to remembrance from God's word, and also convict us when we walk contrary to His word. Because believers are all baptized by one Spirit into God's family, a common bond of unity should prevail even while we still retain individuality. Vain glory, provocations, and envy are warning signs of not conducting ourselves in a Christlike manner. An amplification of verse 26 says: *Let us not become vainglorious and self-conceited, competitive and challenging and provoking and irritating to one another, envying and being jealous of one another.* Our old life was self-centered, whereas the new life is to be Christ-center. Self-glory, envy, and a provoking spirit demonstrate a diminished presence or maybe even an absence of the Holy Spirit in our life. Not only are these characteristics detrimental to the cause of Christ; but they also greatly hinder the spiritual growth of individual believers.

Just as it is important to observe the warning signs of danger in our everyday life, we should also pay close attention to the characteristics and behaviors that indicate we are not walking in the Spirit. May God remind us as we start every day to empty ourselves that we might walk in the Spirit.

J. Ekis

Seeking

But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

– Hebrews 11:6 –

There is no such thing as an atheist. To clarify, there are people who have convinced themselves that they do not believe in God, but this self-proclaimed “atheism” is at odds with what Scripture tells us about the hearts of men. The fool has said in his heart that there is no God. Most “atheists” are fairly intelligent people, not fools. So how do we understand the increasing number of self-proclaimed and practical “atheists” in our modern world?

“Atheism” is not really a disbelief in God. It is more a bitterness or anger toward Him, and subsequently a cessation of the natural search for Him. If you listen to them long enough, self-proclaimed “atheists” will disclose when they stopped seeking God. Perhaps it was an abusive situation they witnessed or worse, one they experienced first-hand. It could be when a dear family member that died despite their earnest calls out to the God they weren’t sure was listening. Regardless of specifics, it remains true that men naturally want to find God, but have a will that can be exercised to stop seeking Him.

God intends for us to seek Him, and to do so diligently. Jesus is the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. That light shines deep within and draws us toward reconciliation, restoration, and relationship with our Creator. Seeking God begins in childhood, the conscience driving us to find its Source. But living in a cursed world creates obstacles. The devil delights in his Adam-authorized authority to interfere in man’s search for his Maker. And interfere he does. The more mankind takes his bait and collectively rebels against God, the more confused grows each individual heart.

Isaiah exhorts mankind to seek the Lord while He may be found (Isa. 55:6). Jeremiah reminds us that that search must be all-consuming, “And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart” (Jer. 29:13). And Jesus promised that if we seek, we will find (Mt. 7:7). Blessed are those of us who have experienced the verity of these words! But we only sought Him because He was first seeking us. There are many about us whose search has been maligned and molested by the Enemy, but God is still waiting to be found of them. We can be a disruption to Hell’s plans in those lives today by showing them that there is a treasure in our Lord Jesus that’s well worth the search. Throughout this week, may our Lord graciously grant us such opportunities to assist souls that are seeking as well as ones who may have stopped their search prematurely.

Kindness of God

And the king said, Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may shew the kindness of God unto him? And Ziba said unto the king, Jonathan hath yet a son, which is lame on his feet.

II Samuel 9:3

The scene in this chapter displays the result of the work of God in the heart of man. David had been hunted and chased by Saul without legitimate cause, and then after Saul's death in battle with the Philistines, he had to contend with Saul's loyalists in the split kingdom. He had now reigned over the united kingdom, expanded its borders, and subdued other enemies. In addition, the ark of the covenant had been successfully brought to Jerusalem, and the Lord had graciously established His covenant with David for an everlasting kingdom of his posterity. At this point, it would have been easy for David to leave all of the difficult memories of the house of Saul behind him and move on with life. Yet there was one part of Saul's family he could not forget. That was his covenant of true friendship with Saul's son Jonathan, who had stood in defense of David, even to the jeopardy of his own life (I Samuel 22:33). This is evidenced by David's words in the first verse of this chapter. He wanted to honor his deceased friend Jonathan by seeking out someone from Saul's family to show him kindness. Human nature left to itself would not exhibit such a spirit toward the household of one who had treated him as Saul had. Therefore, within his question, David reveals that this kindness was not of himself, but of God.

This is an example for us as the people of God to follow. There may be occasions of hurtful, and perhaps unfounded, treatment from others in our experience. Our human nature would prefer to forget and move on. But in the economy of the family of God, where His covenant of everlasting life binds us one to another, there is a basis for seeking opportunity to show the kindness of God. Thus, we see the admonitions to overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21), to seek opportunity for reconciliation (Luke 17:3-4), and to be kind and forgiving for Christ's sake (Ephesians 4:32). None of this can come from the natural man. It must be the implanted kindness of God.

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Divine Consolation

*Psalms 30:5: Weeping may endure for a night,
but joy cometh in the morning.*

On that fateful day when Adam turned his back on God and defied His holy edict, mankind was destined to endure the painful consequences of the curse. The unabated, Edenic joys of paradise now lost, the fateful couple experienced for the first time human tears. John Milton captured that moment in his poetic tour de force, *Paradise Lost*:

*Of Paradise, so late their happy seat,?
Waved over by that flaming brand, the gate?
With dreadful faces thronged and fiery arms:?
Some natural tears they dropped.*

Life in a fallen world will present many occasions for the shedding of such tears, be it from physical pain, emotional distress, personal loss, the loss of loved ones. None of this goes unnoticed by our gracious Lord who Himself wept at the loss of a dear friend. We can be assured that there shall be a day of final resolution. Some theologians argue for the impassibility of God; meaning that God cannot be subject to suffering, pain, or passion. Any scriptural passages indicating God's emotion is considered to be an anthropopathism(a literary device ascribing human characteristics to God). I cannot believe that God doesn't really care. He may be impassible, but He is not unemotional. *Psalms 56:8: Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book? Apparently, He cares enough to collect every tear we shed and to one day wipe those tears from our eyes.*

The Lord will provide divine consolation to His own, though, for a season, we may endure manifold sorrows. The season of great tribulation will find God's people in severe distress but "joy cometh in the morning". *Isaiah 51:11: Therefore the redeemed of the LORD shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.*

To punctuate this truth, as Jesus dies on the cross, the daylight is smothered with impenetrable darkness. The light of the world being extinguished, it was only fitting that the sun provides no light to display the cruelest miscarriage of justice the world has ever known. Since angels experience joy "over one sinner that repenteth" it may be deduced that they likewise experience sorrow. In which case might it have been so that copious tears coursed down those seraphic faces for the three days of Christ's interment. Of this we can be certain, the disciples spent those three days experiencing inconsolable grief. Since Peter went out and wept bitterly, we may assume that the others were suffused with similar sorrows. But then came that glorious morning when the joy-bells pealed from the hallowed halls of heaven and the angels sang the triumphant strain: "He is Alive Forevermore!". And with them all, we, the redeemed, join that glad chorus.

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

Able To Do Both

For thou hast delivered my soul from death; wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?

Psalm 56:13

David, as a shepherd and as a soldier, experienced the divine deliverance and protection of God. Both tending sheep and leading soldiers presented dangers that exceeded David's physical abilities, requiring assistance from God. Successful encounters during the assaults of wild beasts or enemy soldiers proved that God is more than able to save and preserve His children. God's power that saved us from eternal death because of our sins is the same power that can save us from the pitfalls of daily life.

It is inevitable that after a new believer experiences the exhilarating relief of being freely forgiven by God's grace, they will be confronted with the trials of life. When the devil loses the bid for our soul, he strengthens his resolve to trip us up and consume us with life's burdens. God never promised the Christian life would be free from troubles, instead Jesus stated that in the world we will have tribulation (John 16:33). Just as we have placed faith in Christ to save us from our sins, we must also have faith in Him to sustain us through every spiritual battle. Staying focused on the promises of God's word we can find the strength and encouragement to combat the multifaceted attacks of Satan. Temptations are never permitted to be stronger than the God-given power to escape them. Physical enemies, though strong, only have power to afflict the body, but have no power to touch the soul. Both discouragement and disappointment are erased when we remember and focus on God's eternal promises. When we start to feel weak and weary in well-doing, the Lord will renew our strength as we wait on Him. Quitting and turning back should never be an option, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not.

There are many who have fallen away from following Christ after making a profession of faith. By trusting the One who has saved us and Who is also able to keep us from falling, may our resolve be strengthened to continue pressing forward.

J. Ekis

By the Will of God

*Paul, and apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, ...
– 2 Corinthians 1:1 –*

The treasure we hold in the Pauline epistles is of unparalleled value. Not only do we receive voluminous amounts of Spirit-inspired doctrinal establishment, but we also gain a window into the transformational workings of the Spirit of God in the heart of a man who was once an enemy of the cross of Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul was someone who could have let his Christ-less past shame him into inertia. In his zealous hatred of the gospel, driven by his haughty Pharisaical training, he had actively hailed innocent men and women to prison, and in icy silence consented to the stoning execution of the Lord's first martyr, Stephen. His pre-conversion self-righteousness became a thing to be despised and eschewed with the utmost of holy disgust. Those things which had been gain he now counted as dung. He considered himself the chief of sinners, base in appearance, and the less than the least of all saints. With such a history and revealed self-perspective, we can be sure that the Apostle's conscience was frequently the target of Satanic attacks, poking and prodding him toward believing he was the most audacious of hypocrites. Can you not hear the hellish voice? "You ought to sit down and shut up, Paul, and let the real apostles do the work."

But Paul knew something that would rebuff the Enemy's strategy of discouragement and shame – the will of God. By the grace of God, Paul was who he was, and God's grace is not bestowed in vain (1 Cor. 15:10). Paul's favorite addendum to his title of Apostle of Jesus Christ was "by the will of God" (2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 2 Tim 1:1). He knew that Christ had called him. He knew that the Spirit had equipped him. He knew the Gentiles were to be reached by him. He was an apostle, indeed, but only by the will of God. And that drove him to align with heaven and to tirelessly do the work of an apostle by the Spirit of God.

Do you know who and what you are? Do you remember from whence you came, and where you have been called to go? Your sanctification is the will of God (1 Thess. 4:3). He has set you apart for a determined purpose. The devil wants that thwarted, halted, or side-railed. You can listen to his whisperings, regretting the past and dwelling upon your shortcomings, or you can remember that you are called and ordained by the will of God to live every one of your remaining moments to His honor and for His glory. Choosing the latter, as Paul did, just might give Hell a migraine.

-- D. Murcek

Satiated

*For I have satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul.
Jeremiah 31:25*

The prophetic declaration of the Lord in this verse was a welcome turn for the prophet in the midst of many other utterances of God's judgment and chastening upon the disobedient remnant of Israelites, to whom Jeremiah had been sent. It is a reminder of the abundant mercies of the Lord, even when His supreme righteousness must be vindicated with the execution of justice. Such oases that emerge in the prophetic books that abound with judgments accentuate the sweetness of God's mercy. So the parallel clauses of this verse reflect the nature of that mercy in the description of the satiating and replenishing of the soul from weariness and sorrow, respectively. While satiated implies satisfaction, its essential meaning emphasizes the aspect of filling. The soul that is weary such that it is ready to faint is typified by one who is physically in need of a thirst-slaking filling with water. In a similar way, the soul that is emptied by the pangs of sorrow may be refilled with the joy of the Lord. As Isaiah called everyone spiritually thirsting to the waters of the Lord (Isaiah 55:1), so Ezra, Nehemiah, and their companions reminded the sorrowing remnant of Israel that the joy of the Lord is your strength (Nehemiah 8:10). Thus, the promise of restoration to those who are faithful, yet may be impacted by the judgments upon the nation, refills the souls that hope in His mercy (Psalm 33:18-19).

The promise of such filling is echoed in the words of Jesus to the Samaritan woman, "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst" (John 4:14). He was and is the embodiment and fulfillment of not only the promise in our text, but also the promise that follows in this chapter of the new covenant, where God will fill their hearts with His law, that they might know the Lord and His forgiveness, and be led from within by His Spirit. He therefore promised to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness that they shall be filled (Matthew 5:6). Based upon these promises, the apostle prays for the believers, "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost" (Romans 15:13). Let these promises satiate your soul today.

Meekness of majesty

And David said to Abishai, and to all his servants, Behold, my son, which came forth of my bowels, seeketh my life: how much more now may this Benjamite do it? let him alone, and let him curse; for the LORD hath bidden him. It may be that the LORD will look on mine affliction, and that the LORD will requite me good for his cursing this day.
II Samuel 16:11-12

As king David experienced one of the fourfold consequences that he pronounced upon himself, as the man accused earlier by Nathan the prophet, he exhibited in this statement an exemplary attitude of meekness. Although still officially the king of Israel, David was fleeing from his throne in Jerusalem to escape the mob that was coming to overtake the throne for his rebellious son Absalom. While he could have used his regal authority to fight against the rebellion, he decided instead to flee, accompanied by many of his faithful servants. As they ascended the mount of Olives in mourning, passed the top of the hill, and reached the place called Bahurim, Shimei the Benjamite, a relative of the former king Saul, came out cursing and throwing stones and dust at David, attributing his situation to retribution for taking the throne from the house of Saul. While David still had the authority to defend himself against Shimei's inaccurate accusation, as Abishai David's cousin and soldier was ready to violently execute on David's behalf, David again allowed his enemy to continue, putting also this situation into the Lord's hand, with respect to either allowing the offence or to come to his defense.

This is not the response of the natural man to such situations. Most of us would have stood to defend ourselves, with or without the authority or power to do so. Yet David understood his plight, and his complete dependence upon the mercy of God, ever since he confessed his sin and its deserts before Nathan and the Lord. We might attempt to attribute his situation to weakness. But, in fact, king David had the authority and power in both situations to defend himself, yet chose not to, exhibiting not weakness but meekness. So the great Son of David and Son of God fulfilled this type when He took upon Himself the form of a servant and willingly succumbed to the consequence of, not His own sin, which did not exist, but the sins of rebellious mankind. He had even greater authority and power to destroy those cursing executioners, yet in the greatest show of meekness the world has ever known He laid aside that power for that time. As a result, He conquered the power of death and hell forever, in meekness and majesty.

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Little Things:Great Matters

James 3:5: Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!

A fanciful tale has passed as a plausible reason for the Great Chicago Fire that incinerated nearly 4 square miles of the city, ravaging 17,000 structures and leaving 100,000 residents homeless. The blame for this devastation was laid at the feet (or shall we say hooves) of a cow owned by Mrs. Catherine O'Leary who inadvertently kicked over a nearby lantern while being milked. The milk cow, affectionately known as Daisy, never testified in open court as to the veracity of the charge. Apparently, she was in no mood (sorry couldn't resist) to speak of the matter. Mrs. O'Leary pled the fifth and the cause of the great conflagration remains unsolved to this day. Whatever the initial cause, it most certainly began with what was an insignificant spark or contained flame that somehow ignited nearby combustibles and rapidly spread a menacing swath of destruction and chaos in its wake.Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!

Adam and Eve must have reasoned that the tasting of the forbidden fruit would be a trifling matter. The tree was pleasant to behold and the fruit delicious to the palate. But it caused a foul aftertaste that jettisoned them from their paradisaal home and plunged their progeny into the ill-effects of the curse.Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!

When the cup of God's wrath reached its brim, He sent two angels to Sodom to extricate Lot before the fire fell. Lot begged a boon of mercy and pled for the sparing of one of the five cities slated for destruction. "Behold now, this city is near to flee unto, and it is a little one: Oh, let me escape thither, (is it not a little one?) and my soul shall live." But Zoar was as wicked as the other four cities that were destroyed with fire and brimstone. Lot trivialized the evil by suggesting that it was but a little city and yet it was here that his daughters contrived an incestuous plan that would spawn a generation of evil doers known as the Moabites and Amorites. Both were a source of constant agitation for the children of Israel. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!

Solomon writes of "the little foxes, that spoil the vines". Paul warned of the little leaven that leavens the whole lump. These warnings should put the soul on alert to weigh the potential dangers that may be lurking behind seemingly insignificant temptations. But there is a positive aspect to our text that should be considered. There was, after all, the seemingly insignificant birth of a child to an unassuming peasant girl in the humble city of Bethlehem. His first thirty years were spent in the obscurity of a village in the remote territories of a subjugated province of Galilee. Yet the voice of the prophet would warn the people that this obscure son of a carpenter was about to burst upon the scene with a winnowing fan and unquenchable fire in his hand. Those who wisely heeded that warning would be baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire. That fire was ignited and then spread from heart to heart through the ages to follow and even now is aglow in the zeal of God's true believers.Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

The Miraculous Ordinary

Are not Arbana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage.

– 2 Kings 5:12 –

The account of the cleansing of the Naaman, the leprous Syrian captain, yields multiple lessons. A full reading of 2 Kings 5 shows that the man heard of the hope of healing from his wife's Jewish servant girl, a reminder that God uses the weak things of the world to confound the wise. He then traveled a great distance, seeking a healing that he thought he could buy with silver and gold. He grew incensed at Elisha's simple directive to wash in the Jordan, exhibiting for us that man is pitifully disposed to believe that he has some significant part to play in his salvation. Finally, after reconsidering, he obeyed the prophet's word, washed, and was healed, the Spirit thus illustrating that which He spells out doctrinally throughout both the Old and New Testaments – the simplicity of salvation; "Wash and be clean", "Believe and be saved", "Look and live".

The larger doctrinal themes in this account notwithstanding, there is a secondary albeit vital practical truth revealed in Naaman's cleansing. It is found when we consider Naaman's initial incredulous response to Elisha's directive of washing seven times in the Jordan. "Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of ...his God, and strike his hand...and recover the leper...?" Naaman's expectation of God's working was that of pomp and circumstance. This desire to see something spectacular to gain something special is the antithesis of faith, and is common to all false religion. Man believes it would be easier to believe when supernatural results are the product of extraordinary mediums.

But our God does not so normatively work. While He can and does at times circumvent natural law to accomplish His will, it is far more common for the Lord to provide His answers to our faith through ordinary means. Money does not fall from the sky to pay our bills, but He provides occupation or benevolence to accommodate legitimate needs. He typically heals the body through an intricate balance of biological predisposition and scientific discovery. He does not personally appear to the subjects of our intercessory prayers, but works through natural events in the lives of the lost people we love to lead them to salvation. Faith is frequently rewarded more in everyday occurrences than by rare and severe exigencies.

Yes – God loves to do His miracles in the ordinary. He is likely working some wonderful answer for us in the Jordan of today's routine, if we have the faith to believe Him.

-- D. Murcek

His Example of Sacrificial Love

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

John 15:13

History is filled with accounts of men and women who have bravely sacrificed their lives so that others could live. The highest award bestowed by the military is the Congressional Medal of Honor, which recognizes extreme acts of valor. Some of the recipients of the medal were awarded it posthumously due to sacrificing their lives to save others. The scriptures remind us that there is no higher form of love than sacrificing a life.

Although it is only His precious blood that can purchase our salvation, every aspect of Jesus' life is an example that we should aspire to follow. From His humble entrance at Bethlehem to His sacrificial death at Calvary, the Lord Jesus' life is the pinnacle example of sacrificial love. Sacrifice is defined as the giving of something highly valued for something having a more pressing claim. Our Savior Jesus Christ is our ultimate example of true sacrifice.

When we meditate on just a few of the things Jesus sacrificed, we have the opportunity to behold the embodiment of His consummate love. When Jesus left the glories of heaven to come to this corrupt world, although He was rich, He became poor for us. He was Lord of Lords and King of Kings, yet He became a servant to man. He was the living bread from heaven and the living water, but He walked among us and experienced hunger and thirst. All things were created by Him, but on different occasions while sojourning on this earth, He chose to borrow food, a donkey, an upper room, a coin, and a rich man's tomb. Instead of summoning twelve legion of angels to secure His deliverance, He submitted to the illegal verdict of evil rulers. And though He knew no sin, He willingly became sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

Because God first loved us, we now can offer our lives in sacrificial love to Him. As Christians, we should consider what we can do to return the love to God that He so infinitely showed to us. Any sacrifice we make is not counted as earning His favor, but is rendered from a heart that longs to express appreciation and love. God is well-please with any genuine sacrifice, whether seemingly small or great, when offered from loving hearts.

As we observe the example of Christ's sacrificial love, may our souls be energized to love Him with all our heart, soul and mind, and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

J. Ekis

His Example of Humility

And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Philippians 2:8

Pride has been the bane of all of humanity. It was what produced the first sin, which brought the curse into the world, and it continues to plague all of mankind to this day. Pride precedes every contention and argument, and it goes before the destruction of mighty empires. Humility is what lifts us up, while pride interrupts intimacy with God.

Self-exultation and self-promotion have permeated every level of our culture. The saturation of public media coverage causes many politicians, movie stars and athletes to have a level of self-importance that leads them to assume that their opinions are deemed as instructional to the general populace. Today, humility is viewed more often as a weakness instead of a strength. The Lord Jesus is not only the Savior of the world; He is also the example of every virtue for which we, as His followers, should strive. His humility stands in stark contrast to what we see in today's world. Exchanging royal robes for swaddling clothes, and pearly mansions for a shepherd's stable, Jesus' entrance into this world was draped in humbleness. The fact that He was accused of being a friend of publicans and sinners indicates that He mingled with the common people. The washing of the disciple's feet was not an isolated event, for He constantly humbled Himself to serve every level of society. Beggars, lepers, centurions, and Pharisees were able to approach Him. When questioned about His deity, instead of elaborating the details of His mighty miracles, Jesus simply stated that men should believe Him because of His works. In the beginning of His earthly life, he humbled Himself to become man, and at the end of His life He again humbled himself by becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Finally in His resurrection, instead of proving Himself by visiting the religious leaders, the Lord Jesus chose to reveal Himself to His common followers.

As believers, we should follow our Lord's example in humility. Our pride is what alienated us from God, and as believers, it is pride that will hinder us in a closer walk with Him. By hiding in the shadow of the cross may we not seek our own glory, but that of the One to whom all glory belongs. May our resolve be to *do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:8)*.

J. Ekis

He is nigh

*The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.
Psalm 34:18*

This statement is found within a cluster of verses that describe the relationship of the Lord to various types of people in various circumstances. His eyes and ears are open to the righteous, and He hears and delivers them out of troubles and afflictions. His face is against evil doers, and He cuts off their remembrance. He keeps all the bones of the righteous from being broken, which we know from the apostle John refers directly to the perfectly righteous One (John 20:36), as do these other references to the righteous. He redeems the souls of His servants that trust in Him. Most of these verses describe what the Lord actively does in each situation. Yet our text describes what He is unto the broken-hearted. He is nigh. Have you known the pain of a broken heart? The broken heart can be the result of many external circumstances that affect us, which may be mentioned in these surrounding verses, or may be from other situations. But in this broken situation, the response of the Lord is to be nigh. There are many circumstances that may break our hearts for which there is no action to reverse the situation. Our hearts may grieve a loss, or a rejection, or the demise of one we love, none of which can be changed. In these times we may be tempted to question where the Lord is. Our answer is here. He is nigh. He is the God of all comfort (II Corinthians 1:3-4). When God the Son cried out in His passion, yet the plan continued to put Him to grief and make His soul an offering for sin, He was yet nigh in the plan for His satisfaction and the righteous justification of many (Isaiah 53:10-11). So, the whole of our text contains two parallel thoughts, and the second seems to connect the supreme reason for the broken heart that the Lord comforts. It is perhaps the most personal realization that breaks our hearts – that of our own sinfulness – that results in a contrite spirit and salvation. As Jesus described the poor in spirit that mourn over their sin as possessing the kingdom of heaven and the comfort of God (Matthew 5:3-4), James exhorts us to draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you (James 4:8). Therefore, whatever the circumstance for your broken heart, He is nigh, so draw nigh to the God of all comfort.

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

The Half Has Not Been Told

II Chronicles 9:5-6: And she said to the king, It was a true report which I heard in mine own land of thine acts, and of thy wisdom: Howbeit I believed not their words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and, behold, the one half of the greatness of thy wisdom was not told me: for thou exceedest the fame that I heard.

The Queen of Sheba had her doubts about the glories of Solomon's kingdom. She assumed that the accounts were too effusive to be true and so decided to brave the 1500 mile trek to see if the fanciful rumors held any credibility. Each arduous mile through the unforgiving Arabian wilderness tested the determination of the skeptical sovereign. Would the exposure to such hardship be worth the effort, once arriving at the gates of Jerusalem? From the Biblical description of what presents she brought to Solomon, it is certain that she wasn't coming for financial enrichment. She endured the journey for the promise of a treasure that surpassed the riches of the south- "*the greatness of thy wisdom*". Her sacrifice was well rewarded as she entered the city of God and beheld the splendor and glory of the kingdom of the son of David. No longer did she merely hear with the ear but now her "*eyes had seen it*" and the half had not been told.

Those who have believed the "*true report*" of the word of God have a sure and certain expectation awaiting them after exiting this temporal existence. Our faith journey here will end when we see, firsthand the quintessential pleasures awaiting those who wisely trust the promises of God's word. We shall most certainly rejoice when our faith becomes sight. The present obscurity of this world limits our ability to appreciate the supernal realms now being prepared for our everlasting enjoyment. For now we "*see through a glass darkly*", but then we shall "*see the king in His glory*".

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

His Example of Purpose

To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth.

John 18:37

People who excel in their various fields of accomplishment are said to have fulfilled their purpose in life. Concerning their area of expertise, it is often said of people of great achievement that “they were born for this.” Sometimes, we may ask ourselves “what is my purpose in life?” We may be endowed with talent in a certain area, but is that the ultimate reason for which we were born? God truly made us for His glory and He has a purpose for each of us in this life. Our greatest example to study and follow in this is the Lord Jesus Himself.

From the very moment of His earthly walk, Jesus’ life demonstrated a divine purpose from which He never strayed. When Mary and Joseph found Jesus after thinking He was lost, He responds to them by saying that He must be about His Father’s business. Later, as an adult in the midst of His ministry years, Jesus responds to the seeking Zacchaeus by saying “For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” As the Son of Man, He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give His life as a ransom for many. Every act of kindness, every miracle, and every lesson that proceeded from Jesus, was designed to open men’s eyes to seeing the great truth that He was indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world. Setting His face like a flint, our Lord accomplished and fulfilled His purpose for entering this world.

Following His example, our life can be satisfying as we fulfill the true purpose for which God has made us. Just as Jesus came to bear witness of the truth, He has also declared that believers are His witnesses. After embracing Christ as Savior, everything we do should be done for God’s glory and with the purpose of bearing witness to the truth. With our diversity of interests and our individual scope of contacts, God will use who and what we are to shine forth the knowledge of His truth. Jesus preached to the multitudes, but some of the most impactful accounts in scripture are the ones recounting His interactions with individuals. Clearly, a conversation at a well not only influenced the Samaritan women, but also spread the knowledge of Jesus to the rest of the community when she joyfully shared the experience of her encounter with Him. At the conclusion of any day when God has given us an opportunity to bear witness to His truth, we can know the satisfaction and joy of fulfilling the purpose for which we were made.

J. Ekis

Refuge and strength

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Psalm 46:1

This very familiar passage provides sustenance and encouragement for our attitudes in multitudes of situations. Although the context of the psalm points to earthshaking events, both literally and figuratively, its central theme can be applied to global, local, and personal situations. Three times in the psalm we are reminded that God is our refuge. A refuge is a shelter and place of protection. In Psalm 61:3, the psalmist David says, “For thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy.” He clarifies this after crying out unto God that his heart is overwhelmed, and that he needs to be led to the “rock that is higher than I.” In this case his situation is not particularly described, other than recounting his shelter from the enemy. Thus, no matter what enemy, circumstance, event, or even personal troubling situation may come to overwhelm us, we have this promise that God is our place of protection. As disciples of Christ, we are reminded that our eternal position is “in him” (Ephesians 1:4, 10; Philippians 3:9; Colossians 2:7, 9). As we ran to Him for our eternal salvation, we can with the psalmist continually run to Him for refuge.

In addition, we are reminded that God is our strength. Not only is He a place to hide and be protected, but as we come to Him, take our focus off the circumstance, and remain still before Him, we can be reminded of that knowledge that He *is* God (v. 10). That knowledge provides strength of heart and spirit, which can in turn even provide bodily strength in many circumstances. With this combination of refuge and strength, we then can realize that He is, not only our help, but our *very present* help in whatever trouble we face. In Psalm 18:2 David cascaded these thoughts, “The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.” As we apply this truth with him, let us also say with him from Psalm 18:1: “I will love thee, O LORD, my strength.”

I AM

And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.

– Exodus 3:15 –

God's covenantal name I AM revealed to and through Moses is a wealth of deep spiritual instruction and comfort. Consider that His revelation of this sacred aspect of His character came very quickly on the heels of Moses' question, "Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh...?" (Ex. 3:11) Who indeed. This eighty-year-old regal-Egyptian-fugitive-turned-Midianite-hosted-shepherd had been chewing on his past and (lack of) purpose for the last forty years. The backside of the desert brought no answers, but it did prove a very suitable venue to empty the man to the point of usefulness.

There were no doubt significant challenges for Moses if he were to carry out God's command to return to Egypt. He was eighty years old, after all. His Egyptian linguistic skills were more than rusty. And he had a family here in Midian. What of them? Not to mention the very real likelihood of assassination or execution once he came within the confines of Pharaoh's jurisdiction, let alone his very court! All of these must have flooded the man's heart and mind, giving rise to objections born of deep apprehension and legitimate fear.

But all of this could be quelled in the revealed character of God – I AM. He was no less present when He spoke the world into existence than He was at this moment. He was just as immutably active in the life of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as He had been in Moses' life. When Moses was born in violation of the King's edict, God was there. When he was placed in ark of bulrushes, skirted down the Nile, and subsequently "found" by Pharaoh's daughter, God was there. When he was schooled in Egypt, and when he killed the Egyptian, God was there. When he fled to Midian, married, and had children, God was there. In the howling winds and the steady bleating of the flock over the last forty years, God had been ever present. And now here at this bush, the same God Who had governed Moses' life to this point was revealing Himself in miraculous fashion in order to steel his servant against the unknown future that was haunting Moses' present with overwhelming concerns.

While we are bound by time with its irrevocable history and its future all unknown, our God is the great I AM. He knows no bounds and His desire for us is to rest in His transcendent Person. If we do this, we will find the most overwhelming peace that the great I AM Who was, and is, and is to come holds us tightly in the palm of His omnipotent hand, and no man can pluck us therefrom. -- D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

When the Books Are Opened

Job 31:35: Mine adversary had written a book.

The word satan appears fourteen times in the book of Job where it is employed as a proper name, but in its disambiguation means adversary, accuser, or disputer. Though our text does not here employ the word satan it is apparent that the oblique reference of *adversary*-“*ish rib*” “the man who causes dispute”, namely Job’s three friends, draws his inspiration from the enemy of our soul. In Revelation 12:10, Satan is denominated as “the accuser of our brethren”. There is no doubt of his malicious intentions in bringing accusations against the redeemed in a vain effort to bring us to eternal condemnation. Apparently, our adversary is keeping a record book on our many failings and intends to produce the evidence before the judgment bar of God. Sins, long forgotten, will be admitted as exhibits A, B, and C to the court in hopes of rendering a justified guilty verdict. Be sure that if our sin didn’t find us out in this life it will be sure to find us out in the world to come. Our mouths will be stopped and confession made. Our accuser is well-schooled in the law and has successfully prosecuted many cases to the damnation of multitudes.

This would be a dismal, hopeless portrayal if it were not for that salvific passage found in Revelation 20:12 “and another book was opened, which is the book of life”. In it are written the terms of justification that mitigates the claims of the adversary’s charges. This book is written with the iron pen of love and dipped in the inkwell of the precious blood of Christ. In this book, sins and iniquities are remembered no more for “the former things are passed away”. What a sigh of relief will be elicited from the redeemed in that gladsome moment when our merciful advocate opens His book for “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.”

The joy-bells of heaven will peal forth the anthem of the saved and the adversary’s book will be closed, the charges dropped and the case dismissed.

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

His Example of Vision

But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.

Matthew 9:36

A thirty-year-old rust-bucket of a car sits in the front yard so passers-by can see the sign declaring *For Sale*. The majority of those who pass by choose not to even give it a cursory look. Dents, rust, and a windshield with spider-webbed cracks are the most obvious of the countless flaws in the worthless jalopy. But, when the man with a passionate hobby for restoring old cars passes by, he immediately stops to make an offer. His perceptive eyes can see beyond the crude exterior to envision a beautifully restored classic car added to his collection.

What do we see when we look at people? Most often we see only the external, but Jesus was able to look past the temporal and external to see the eternal needs of the multitudes and the purpose for the life of each soul. When looking past the outward appearance, our Lord sees the hurts, fears, and worries of everyone. Even the people who appear to be purposeful and directed in their lives are often trying to navigate through this world using their own limited strength and knowledge. In the Gospel of Mark, while dealing with the rich young ruler before telling him some hard things, the scripture says, “Jesus beholding him loved him”. Our Lord looked beyond the appearance of the young ruler and saw a man struggling with his ignorance about eternal life. Jesus saw a troubled world where men loved darkness because their deeds were evil, but He also saw the value and potential of people who were ripe for a spiritual harvest. Before conversion all men, whether morally good or extremely evil, are lost and wandering and in need of the Savior. Jesus looked beyond Nicodemus’s religiosity, Zacchaeus’s greed, and the Samaritan woman’s sinful past and saw future trophies of His redeeming grace.

With the Holy Spirit filling us and bringing the truth of God’s word to our remembrance, we can start to see our world from a vastly different perspective. The harvest fields of today are still ripe for a harvest, and every soul without the Good Shepherd is still wandering about. Pray that the Lord enables us to have the same vision as He did.

J. Ekis

Proper hate

*Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way.
Psalm 119:104*

The ode to the word of God in this psalm presents many consistent contrasts. The psalmist begins this stanza with his love for the law of God (v. 97), and ends it in our text with his hatred for every false way. This consistency is a necessity. To love the law, statutes, commandments, testimonies, judgments, precepts, and ways of the Lord is to hate all those ways that are opposed to His. While love and hatred can both be associated with emotion, neither is defined thereby. Each is an attitude of regard based on a common standard. This is not a matter of emotion but of logic. To regard the law and precepts of God as true must result in opposition to those ways that are false, because they are the opposite of the true. Thus, to stand against the wrong and false is consistent with a love for the true, with or without any accompanying emotion.

Many in our present culture would prefer to define any kind of hate, or what they would define as hate, as a crime. Yet they would also prefer to deny that the crime that they define is also an object of their own hatred. However, by their own definition, they are guilty also of the same crime. Therein lies a clear inconsistency. Whatever people claim to love will also define what they hate.

The statement of the psalmist here also includes an explanation for his conclusion. Not only do God's precepts define right and wrong, but they also provide understanding. Though many things that we learn from God's word require faith for apprehension, it is not a faith without understanding. The axioms laid down by scripture that teach us the ways of our glorious Lord provide the understanding needed to discern what is true and false. We therefore have a basis to know and love what is true and right, and to define and hate what is false and wrong. He equips us then to heed the command, "Ye that love the LORD, hate evil" (Psalm 97:10).

The Trembling of Devils

Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.
– James 2:19 –

Dualism is a theological belief maintaining that there are two equal and opposite forces constantly at work in the universe. Zoroastrianism, popular amongst the Persians, paid homage to Ormazd and Ahriman as co-regent deities engaged in a continuous struggle with neither ever really winning. Taoism's recognizable Yin Yang emblem symbolizes an Eastern philosophy that universal balance only exists because of the equal presence of both light and dark, good and evil. And the cross-generational "Star Wars" saga has popularized and embedded the error of dualism into the Western psyche with its "Light Side" and "Dark Side" of "the Force".

In thinking on the God of the Bible, however, we must be careful not to entertain dualistic notions. God is the transcendent Creator of all things. He is completely outside of His creation in His essence. He exists in an "otherness" that makes Him wholly unique and unchallenged. He permits evil to exist, but only for a time and to His eternal purpose. Knowing this, it should influence our perspective on the devil as well. Lucifer, while both proud and powerful, is as helpless before this transcendent God as the weakest of all creatures. The devil does not and cannot threaten Jehovah. The arch-enemy of mankind and his demonic hordes fear the Ruler of the Universe with a palpable horror. Read the gospels and you will find the hosts of Hell always shrink and shrivel in every face-to-face encounter with the incarnate Son of the Living God. The devil and his minions' power with men is really all smoke and mirrors. Their challenge to the Almighty is one that wages in the clouded hearts of men, not on any absolute stage. They know full well that their time is short, and that a day is soon coming when their knees will bow and their tongues confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

If the devils tremble at our God, why should we shrink at any of our enemy's devices? In truth, if we walk closely with our Father, it will be Hell upon its heels, not the Church of Jesus Christ. Let us live boldly today in the protective shadow of our transcendent God, and watch Hell recoil. -- D. Murcek