

Archippus

... and Archippus our fellowsoldier, ...

Philemon 2

Throughout the Bible several thousand characters are mentioned. Some are the subject of lengthy narratives recording their lives, while others are merely a name mentioned in a genealogy. We also cross paths with unnamed people who are recorded as *a certain man*, or *a young maid*. In Paul's epistles he often lists names of people who were a help or comfort to him, or they had accomplished something for the advancement of the gospel. Today, we will take a brief look at Archippus from the book of Philemon, and Epaphroditus who is mentioned in Philippians.

Who were Archippus and Epaphroditus? Both men have Greek names, which would indicate that they came under the influence of Christianity as it emanated from Jerusalem. Both men became acquaintances of the Apostle Paul. They also have one other thing in common; they are the only two mentioned in the scriptures as *fellowsoldiers*.

In addressing both Archippus and Epaphroditus as fellowsoldiers, the Apostle Paul indicates that he views them as fellowsoldiers for the cause of Christ. There are several parallels between soldiers and followers of Jesus. As Christians we are fighting a battle for an eternal cause. Our arch enemy Satan has a numerous and powerful army which he maneuvers in his cause to prevent the spread of Christianity. Our enemy is as bold as a roaring lion seeking to devour us; but he is also stealthy and deceitful as he lies in the shadows waiting to pounce. Fortunately, the Captain of our Salvation the Lord Jesus Christ has promised to always be with us through all of our struggles. Equipping us with the indwelling of His Spirit and the two-edged sword of His word, He has given us the resources to not only withstand the enemy, but also to ultimately defeat him. When we resist the devil in the power of Christ, our enemy will flee from us!

In his epistles to Timothy, Paul reminds us that a good soldier must endure hardness. If we are to engage in this spiritual warfare, we must be free from entanglement in the affairs of this temporal life. There will certainly be difficulties when we enlist in the Lord's service, but we are encouraged as we remember that *this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith* (1 John 5:4).

As fellowsoldiers with Archippus and Epaphroditus, let us continue in our own fight. As General MacArthur quoted in his retiring speech - *old soldiers never die, they just fade away*. Praise God! For as we fade away from this life, we enter into the glories of eternal life. ~J. Ekis

Cunningly Devised Fables

For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

– 2 Peter 1:16 –

The longer we live for the Lord, the more obvious the chasm becomes between the truth and various ways the world packages Satan's lies. There really is no reconciliation between the two. Even those philosophies and bits of worldly wisdom that seemingly hold some semblance of credence, when examined in context and considered at their foundations, will reveal themselves as virulent rivals to the Word of God. And not only rivals, but chimerically ludicrous sophistry that is designed to mock and belittle humanity in the strategy rooms of Hell.

Peter said by the Holy Ghost that we have not followed cunningly devised fables. The gospel components of the sinfulness of man, the need for a Savior, the incarnation of the Son of God, the vicarious atonement of the cross, the resurrection of the dead, the means of grace, eternal bliss or torment, etc., etc. are historically verifiable and deeply evidential truths. Yet the world looks upon them as "cunningly devised fables". Let us take a moment, from the standpoint of belief of God's Word, and examine just a few of the world's more popularized verities and how they compare to the gospel of God.

"You can be whatever you want to be." Really? There are no naturally imposed limits for body, mind, or background? Every single obstacle can be removed? Seems like this may be a fable...

"We cannot define when life begins." Our generation, which has pierced the mysteries of the genome and peered into the sanctuary of the womb, does not recognize that what resides there is human life? Someone is cunningly crafting a tale...

"Gender is a social construct, not a biological fact." This one is gaining a lot of traction these days. The fact that we are even discussing it with any sense of sobriety intimates how much mankind desires to entertain the devil's yarns...

"The universe is billions of years old, and man is the product of the processes of biological evolution." Even increasing numbers of Christians are buying in that there is at least some factual basis to this popularized "scientific" mantra, believing the discussion is too far above their heads to object. All the while we don't seem to realize that there is not a single shred of honest scientific evidence to support this propagandized myth, and that believers' acquiescence helps to undermine the influence of God's Word and prepare the way for Antichrist.

Everyone is following (believing) something. I choose the Scriptures, from Genesis to Revelation, not Hell's cunningly devised fables. How about you?

Provision

And every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him; and he became a captain over them: and there were with him about four hundred men. And David went thence to Mizpeh of Moab: and he said unto the king of Moab, Let my father and my mother, I pray thee, come forth, and be with you, till I know what God will do for me. And he brought them before the king of Moab: and they dwelt with him all the while that David was in the hold.
1 Samuel 22:2-4

As David turned from being a hero to a fugitive from the deranged king Saul's envy, his initial situation after Jonathan's confirmation of his danger left him alone and seeking safety. After he acquired provision from Ahimelech the priest, without revealing his situation, he made the surprising journey to seek asylum with his Philistine enemy king Achish. These actions were obviously motivated by pure fear, as "he fled that day for fear of Saul." He evidently had not considered his reputation with the servants of Achish before making that move, and soon had to reverse the situation by feigning himself mad. He then escaped to the famous cave Adullam, where his father's family discovered his location, and came to him there. From being all alone and afraid, he was then fortified by 400 men, many of whom were facing some kind of trouble themselves. Although outnumbered still by Saul's army, this provision of God for David at that time appears to have bolstered his confidence in the midst of his circumstance.

From that vantage point, and perhaps now reminded by his visitors of his family responsibility, he determined to protect his parents from potential backlash from Saul. (The context of this chapter shows the wisdom of that consideration, since Saul was not even afraid to annihilate the priests of the Lord in his rage against David.) The source of God's provision for David's noble desire for his parents is notable. Although those of Jesse's family that came to David were certain to have had root in Bethlehem, David was not forgetful of his own family roots, which not only stemmed from Bethlehem, but also from the family of great-grandma Ruth, the Moabite convert to Jehovah. Thus, that relationship, established clearly by the Lord three generations before, provided a place of safety for Jesse and his wife through this time. And of course, this reminds us of a far greater provision of God, which is revealed each time we read the opening chapter of the New Testament, that through that family line the Savior of both Jew and Gentile would come to provide eternal safety.

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Hope in the Face of Despair

Psalms 42:11: Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.

A tragic story recently dominated the headlines of the major news outlets. It was the inexplicable suicide of a young woman that possessed beauty, intelligence, fortune and every worldly reason to enjoy life at the age of 30. The mystery of what caused a former Miss USA, graduate law student, who apparently had it all, leaps to her death from her luxury Manhattan apartment was attributed to "high-functioning depression" according to her mother. Sadly, death by suicide is no longer a rare and isolated occurrence. The shocking figure is that one person every 40 seconds decides to end their life! A multitude of reasons are proffered to answer the "why": academic failure, bullying, shaming, or humiliation, including cyberbullying, financial problems, end of a close friendship or romantic relationship, job loss, etc. But whatever the outward, immediate cause might be, the underlying reason is distilled down to hopelessness.

Even King David faced disconcerting times where he was given to the morose feelings of despair. None of Adam's race is exempt from these dark times of depression. Life's challenges can be daunting and one can be easily tempted by the adversary to think that there is no possible resolution from the present distress.

Those as close to God as David and Paul faced their moments of disquietude, but each found solace in their faith. Paul said: II Corinthians 4:8,9: We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed. When faced with a certain shipwreck and impending drowning he boldly asserted to the doomed crew "Sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God". And David, who faced his times in the castle of despair, heard the inward voice of the Holy Spirit speaking with "groanings which cannot be uttered" "Hope thou in God".

Here is an anchor to our soul when all is dismal and dreary and the tempter solicits us with thoughts of self-destruction-"Hope thou in God". He who holds tomorrow will find us a way through the impenetrable gloom. We must be confident that all things will indeed work together for good.

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

Worthy

Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.

– Revelation 5:12 –

“You are worth it!” This codifies and encapsulates the core of current *zeitgeist*. Everywhere we turn we see the messaging. From self-help resources to entertainment to marketing campaigns, we are the targets of an incessant philosophical assault barraging us with the unified message that our value is great and that we must rid ourselves of the archaic notions of guilt and shame and choose to accept ourselves, forgive ourselves, love ourselves, excuse ourselves, pamper ourselves, coddle ourselves, and proclaim ourselves. Man is the pinnacle of all things and we, as men and women, must accept our intrinsic value, so that we may advance mankind’s collective evolution (toward deity).

The Bible believer, however, sees his value through a completely different lens. The patriarch Job articulated the inward conception of every believer when he stood face-to-face with God in the whirlwind. In the relative light of God’s greatness and overwhelming power, he proclaimed, “Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42: 6). For the believer who has met with this thrice holy God (Job met him in the physical whirlwind, but it is more frequently God’s mode to meet us in the tempest of the breast), we understand ourselves to be worthy of but one thing – death (Romans 1:32; 6:23). When that realization takes place, our self-infatuated and self-centered perception begins to change. We cease fixating upon our own value, and begin being consumed with His. We find the unsearchable riches of Christ a bottomless treasure chest that is a joy and rejoicing to mine on a daily basis. Our fleshly nature still believes “we are worth it”, but the Spirit within cries, “Abba, Father”, and motivates us to mortify self and follow our Savior, whose value is far above rubies.

May we resolve that as much as lies within us, even here in this corrupt and strange place in which we find ourselves, to render to him daily all praise from the inmost center of our being. And one day in the not so distant future, in that throng of redeemed souls from every tribe and nation and kindred and tongue, we will at last find ourselves wholly overwhelmed and entirely consumed with the value of Him Who sits upon the throne, casting down our crowns and everything that we are in prostrate worship of Him alone Who can own the title – Worthy!

-- D. Murcek

A Selfish Question

Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?

Matthew 19:27

Questions are a good way of learning, and we should never be afraid or intimidated to ask a question. But there are times when, if we are listening carefully, the question would be unnecessary. At other times, we should first weigh the motives of our heart before we ask something. Some of Jesus' adversaries asked insincere questions in order to trap him. In today's text, Peter asks a question that reveals he still had some lessons to learn.

Peter's question is posed after the Lord interacts with a rich and young ruler. The young ruler inquired of Jesus what *good thing* he might do to inherit eternal life. Knowing the core issue of this young man's need, our Lord instructs him to keep the commandments that pertain to his relationships with his fellow man. After the ruler states that he has kept them all, yet still feels lacking, the Lord tells him to forsake all his earthly treasures that he might gain heavenly treasure. The rich young ruler sadly departs. At that moment, Peter speaks up to ask his question.

It is true that Peter and the other apostles had forsaken much to follow Jesus. But why were they following the Lord? Peter certainly demonstrated zeal for the cause of Christ. He is often the first to speak out. When Jesus is arrested, he boldly tries to defend the Lord. When some disciples turn back from following Jesus after a particularly pointed teaching, Jesus asks Peter if he would also depart. Peter asserts his faith by saying *there is none other to follow, because Jesus has the words of eternal life*. But the path of following Jesus has many bends that reveal our old and selfish ways. At Jesus' trial Peter denies knowing the Lord after he previously said he would never deny Him. Here in today's text, Peter reveals that he was expecting some earthly reward for forsaking his business and following Jesus. The Lord reminds Peter of his misguided focus by saying, *Everyone that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life*.

When we choose to follow Christ there are certainly many things we gain. With old things passed away and all things become new, we experience the wonders of a new life. Experiencing God's provision, both physical and spiritual, as we travel His path for us, we should always keep the true reward in focus. Though we truly gain much in this life, our greatest treasure ultimately lies in heaven.

J. Ekis

Discerning Interruptions

And Jesus went with him; and much people followed him, and thronged him. And a certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve years,

Mark 5:24,25

Many people become frustrated or even angry when their plans are interrupted. Sidetracked plans usually cause us to be late or miss a scheduled event. Because of this, we tend to view the thing that disturbs our plans as bad. But not all interruptions are bad; some can even prove to be the greatest blessing we have ever received. Learning to discern the difference between an opportunity that is from God and one that is not, can open new doors of divine blessing.

Today's verses link separate miracles that the Lord Jesus was about to perform. First, Jairus comes to Jesus and implores him to come and heal his young daughter. Jairus's hopes are raised when Jesus agrees to come, but as the Great Healer goes to attend to the young girl, He is interrupted by a woman afflicted with chronic hemorrhaging. The woman's touch of faith causes Jesus to stop in His tracks as He pauses to attend to her need. Jesus lovingly assures her that her faith has made her whole and she may go in peace. At the conclusion of this seeming interruption, a messenger from Jairus's house arrives to inform him that his daughter has died. Jairus was likely thinking that if only they had not been interrupted, Jesus would have been on time to prevent his daughter's death. Jesus challenges him not to be afraid, only believe. Arriving at Jairus's house, the Lord takes the girl's hand and says "Damsel, I say unto thee, arise" and life and hope are restored! Jairus's request being temporarily interrupted provides an opportunity to see the Divine Healer at work, and Jairus's faith is stretched to an even greater level than had there been no interruption.

It is important for us to remember that some interruptions are planned by God. We can construct our best thought-out plans, but we still don't have perfect knowledge of all that will occur. Trusting that the Lord will guide our steps, we should look for those opportunities that He oftentimes orders to surprise us. Interruptions have the potential to provide opportunities to share the gospel, or to be an agent of help to someone. So often God uses unplanned surprises to teach us a greater spiritual lesson. We should also be aware that the devil certainly engineers some interruptions to divert us from the will of God. God's intervention in our plans will never violate God's word.

Today, be committed to God's leading, yet be flexible when He presents an unplanned opportunity.

J. Ekis

Influence

He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.

Proverbs 13:20

There are two sides to this proverb. Looking from either side, the main message is the power of influence. The primary look is from the influenced side. We must always be reminded that we are influenced by those with whom we surround ourselves. In fact, we are influenced by all that we encounter. But the message here is focused on the influence of those with whom we walk. This can be literal and metaphorical. In the metaphor, to walk is to live in a way that is seeking agreement. So Amos asks the rhetorical question: "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3.3) The language experts tell us this first part means "go with wise men and become wise." The parallel in the second part indicates the idea of companionship. Here the emphasis is on conversation and interchange. This is not referring to mere acquaintance. It speaks of those whose influence we purposefully seek. The obvious message is that we ought to seek such relationships with those who are wise, to avoid the common end of the fool, which is destruction. Since the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord, this is the first characteristic to seek in those that might influence us in relationship.

The secondary look is from the influencing side. If we would seek to honor the Lord with the life and benefits that He has provided us, then we should seek to be a wise influencer of those who would walk with us. Likewise, we should not want to be the foolish friend that breeds destruction to others. So let us seek wisdom from the Lord and from the wise, that we might in turn share that wisdom for the benefit of others, and avoid influencing others with foolishness and its destructive result. In an age where the fear of the Lord and the desire for true wisdom is scorned, we must be diligent in seeking truth, first from the Lord in His word, and also from those who reflect both.

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Beware the Belly God

*Philippians 3:19: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.
II Timothy 3:2: For men shall be lovers of their own selves,*

The Christian life begins with the death of self. Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me". But self is a stubborn, hydra-headed foe and though we may have victory in many areas of our lives, there always remains a vestige of ego to defeat. Death to self is a daily necessity. As the apostle once laconically noted, "*I die daily*".

When Eve was confronted with the option to be content with what God had provided or to eat of the forbidden fruit that was deceptively purported to "*make one wise*", she made the choice that she thought would be in her best self-interest.

All of her children are predisposed to make similar evil choices. The modern ethic is embodied in the phrase "I have to do what is best for me". Self-help gurus and so-called preachers have dispensed this psychological tripe to the itching ears of a waiting multitude that would prefer having their bloated egos pampered than to taking up the cross.

The Belly God can be seen as a metaphor for all the self-centered lusts of the flesh, and be sure there are a host of such lusts to be vanquished. When one yields his will to God, the Belly God will be cast out and in its place, the Lord promised that "*out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake he of the Spirit*". So then, let us be about smashing down this idol with the zeal of an iconoclast. Let us fulfill that ancient imperative of Romans 13:14: *But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof.*

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

Heavenly Vision

And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.

– 2 Kings 6:17 –

Elisha's allegiance to his God and the nation of Israel had brought him into some foreboding danger. He had used his prophetic gift on a series of recent occasions to foil the king of Syria's plans of a sneak attack on the king of Israel. When the king of Syria learned it was likely Elisha sharing the intelligence with Israel's crown, he dispatched his army in siege of Dothan, Elisha's dwelling place. Early in the morning, Elisha's servant peered out the window and saw the city wholly surrounded by the Syrian host, well-armed and chariots ready for war. It appeared to be an utterly hopeless situation. His master Elisha was no man of war. The despair bubbling within led him to cry out, "Alas, my master! How shall we do?"

Elisha was well aware of their precarious circumstance. But men close to God and seasoned in the exercise of faith never focus on the dangers. They are too acutely aware of their peculiar position in heavenly places, and too confident in their God's protective custody and provisional hand to fret. Elisha prayed, "Lord, open his eyes." God granted Elisha's request, and shared a special revelation with the prophet's servant – a heaven-tuned vision to momentarily peer into the spiritual realm, revealing another military, clad not with iron weapons and shields but donning flaming and fiery armaments and possessing an obvious ability to overwhelmingly vanquish any earthly force. This no doubt not only quelled the servant's fears, but also prepared his heart with the courage necessary for God's next moves (which involved the boldness to accost the Syrian men of war without a single weapon in hand!)

How often are we like Elisha's servant, fixing our eyes upon this world's advancing assaults on the Word of God and the people of God. The desperation that welled up in Elisha's servant undoubtedly finds a kindred spirit in our own hearts, "Alas – how shall we do?!" But if we will simply remember who we are, and more importantly, in Whose hand we reside, even demonic hordes cannot elicit any angst. Our Master told us that the gates of Hell will not prevail. He calls us His peculiar people. No man is able to pluck us from His hand. The good work He has begun He will carry to completion. Our Lord, to Whom our allegiance belongs, has a Name that is above every name, and to which every knee will bow and tongue confess. Neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor powers have any say over us. We are the children of the King, sons and daughters of the Most High. Lord, open our eyes, that we may see. -- D. Murcek

The Pits

He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings.

Psalm 40:2

The devotional title for today “The Pits”, in modern-day understanding, is slang for a difficult and depressing place or condition. When the difficulties of life overwhelm someone, it seems that they are stuck in that condition, it is often referred to as that person being in “the pits”. All of us at one time or another have probably experienced some low point in our life, where it seemed that escape was impossible. The Bible records some examples of people who were delivered from literal pits, and this certainly provides hope to us for the same.

At different times and for various reasons, Joseph, Jeremiah, and Daniel were all delivered from pits. Joseph, because of the jealousy and hatred of his brothers; Jeremiah, because of preaching an unwelcome message; and Daniel, because he prayed to God instead of petitioning the king, were all cast into a pit of punishment. Although they suffered, all three of these godly men were delivered from their bondage.

The Messianic fortieth Psalm, foretells of the Lord Jesus also being in a horrible pit- the grave. By waiting patiently and calling out to His Heavenly Father, God inclines toward Jesus and lifts the Savior out of the miry clay. Setting His feet upon a rock, the Heavenly Father then establishes His goings. After being raised from the grave, Jesus gives all believers the living hope of deliverance from the grave.

Today’s verse also pictures being extricated from our old life. Our sin, whether gross immorality or self-righteousness, put us in a pit and we languished in that hopeless condition until the light of God’s truth and love penetrated our soul. How much better life became when God lifted us up and established our going! With a song of praise emanating from our hearts, we embarked on a new life in Christ.

Sometimes by our own choice or negligence, we may fall into a pit that hinders our progress. It could be the miry clay in a pit of disobedience or discouragement that imprisons our spirits. By not exercising our faith we may become stuck. The longer we stay in that condition the harder it seems to be lifted out, but there is always hope when we cry out to the One who lifted our Savior out of the grave.

~ J. Ekis

Blame game

*And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in the LORD his God.
1 Samuel 30:6*

This scene reveals a common human defect, particularly in times of trouble. David and his six hundred men have returned to their city of refuge, where they were avoiding king Saul, to find that Amalekite raiders had pillaged and burned the city while they were gone. In such a devastated state, with those that they loved violently taken away, at least some of David's men were scheming to stone him. (Here is support for the advice to not make important decisions when in a state of grief.) Why would they stone David? He also was grieving the loss of his own loved ones in this tragedy. We must fill in this gap for ourselves. Was it because, in their helpless state, they needed someone else to blame for their loss? They couldn't bear the thought that their own absence had left their families vulnerable to attack. So they would turn to the reason for their absence. They had been marching with the Philistine army preparing to war against Israel. They were with the Philistines because David their leader had fled to Achish for asylum, and they had followed. They had followed presumably because of their original commitment to David's innocence in the face of Saul's threats. Throughout their journey to this point, they probably all felt somewhat proud of their stand that they had taken with David. But the Philistine leaders convinced king Achish to dismiss David and his men from their ranks, lest they turn and fight on the side of their own natural countrymen, even though they had fled from Saul's wrath. Yet now, in this period of crisis, David's men turn against him for someone to blame for their plight.

This common pattern continues to this day. Is it not strange that natural disasters are often blamed on the president or the governor? Political enemies seize natural disasters, or manufacture coming ones, or perceived social ills, for the purpose of blaming the leader of the other side. Yet some, more like those in our text, when smitten with grief of situation, which may even reflect on their own culpability, will look for leaders of their own side, whose way they have even followed or esteemed, to blame.

David's response to this additional distress is exemplary. He encouraged himself in the LORD his God. He didn't blame back, or try to deflect it to others. Perhaps in his empathy with their grief he was able to ignore their response. In this perilous instance, he leans on his Lord, and finds encouragement only in Him. In the account that follows, such faith brings him to seek the Lord's will and eventually recover all. While in all applications, we might not always have such a happy ending in the present time. But a turn to the Lord for a solution is always a right turn, and a better alternative than playing the blame game.

My God

O LORD, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things; thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth.

Isaiah 25:1

In the midst of Isaiah's prophecies of judgments and mercies, he pauses here to respond to the greatness of the God he serves. His first reason to praise His name is for the personal aspect of the relationship that he has with God. He is the mighty God of all things, Creator, Judge, Revealer, and Redeemer, yet to Isaiah He is "my God!" As Isaiah has surely been overwhelmed with the mighty power of the Lord to execute judgment, both in punishment upon the enemies of His people as well as in remediation of His people, he is also surely comforted by being able to know and be known by his own heavenly Father. His Spirit-led response to this confession is to exalt the Lord and to praise His name, not only in light of who He is, but also for the "wonderful things" He has done. These wonderful things referred to in this opening verse of the chapter include both powerful judgments upon cities of the evil, nations that spread terror, deceivers that veil the nations from understanding truth, and the proud who would use their might to persecute and destroy God's people. They also include His strengthening of the poor and needy in their distress, His provision for His people that trust in Him, His swallowing up of death in victory, and wiping of tears from the faces of those whom He will save. (See also I Corinthians 15:54 and Revelation 7:17 & 21:4.) In this realization he points to that day when others will join him in declaring "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation" (Isaiah 25:9). All this is realized through the Lord's faithful and true counsels of old. Let us therefore, pause with Isaiah, and the echoes of Paul and John, and exalt and praise the name of *our* God!

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Divine Irony

*Luke 1:52: He hath put down the mighty from their seats,
and exalted them of low degree.*

How often is the case that the Lord, in His superior wisdom, bypasses the rich and famous and bestows His benefactions on the least of humanity. In this case, the young virgin of Nazareth puts forth this canticle of praise for the marvelously "great things" her God had done. He could have chosen any one of many courtiers found at the Herodian palaces, but intentionally ignores status to exalt penury. Centuries earlier Isaiah predicted the upheaval of the status quo when he penned these words: "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low."

Profane history affords us a plethora of examples of the adage coined by Baron Acton "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men". This has never escaped the eye of the Almighty who promises to rectify the matter when His kingdom shall appear and the promised egalitarian government of the King of Kings is installed for ever and ever.

For that moment Mary revels in the anticipation of an immediate remedy to the unjust oppression her people had endured for centuries. As we know her hope would be deferred. The mighty do not succumb without a struggle. The "kings of the earth" and the rulers of Israel took "counsel together against the Lord" and slew the "Prince of life" and in so doing postponed the exaltation that Mary had prophesied.

As it would be, the Lord had others of low degree that he intended to incorporate in that exaltation. Heaven and earth shall pass away but the hope of His word shall come to its fulfillment. His Holy Spirit is even now assembling those of low degree out of every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

Our Father

*After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.
– Matthew 6:9 –*

In our Lord's teaching and example regarding prayer, He showed us how to approach God. Many Old Testament believers certainly were well schooled in this spiritual exercise, but Jesus revealed a new dimension to our relationship and communication with the Almighty, instructing us that we are on familial ground with God as our Father.

Many who are reading this have difficult memories of their fathers, while others were blessed with men who were paragons in this role. Regardless of our relationships with our earthly dads, the Spirit has meticulously laid out in the pages of Scripture the characteristics and attributes of our wonderful Heavenly Father.

Our Father knows our weaknesses and pities our fallen condition – "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him." (Psalm 103:13)

Our Father delights in bestowing good gifts to His children – "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights..." (James 1:17)

The chief of these gifts is His own Spirit – "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" (Luke 11:13)

Our Father is as real a Father to us as He is to Christ – "Jesus saith unto her...but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." (John 20:17)

Our Father intends for our relationship to be so close that we may use endearing terms in addressing Him – "...but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." (Romans 8:15); "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." (Galatians 4:6) (Note that this title Abba is the same title used by our Lord Jesus when in His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane – Mark 14:36)

Our Father knows our every need, and desires that our knowledge of that fact cure our worry – "Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? Or, What shall we drink?...for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." (Matthew 6:31-33)

We have a very good Father. Let us approach him confidently again today with our every need, casting all our care upon Him, knowing that He cares for us. -- D. Murcek

Walking With God

And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.

Genesis 5:24

Though little is said about him, Enoch has an enviable reputation. He lived three hundred sixty-five years walking with God. Though this stark statement is brief, it speaks volumes about a life well-lived. Enoch lived in the time before the flood when the population of the earth was growing. Sin had entered the world and was manifesting its effects in the antediluvian world. In the midst of a world gone astray is a man who walked with God, and because of his walk, Enoch escapes the coming flood. Enoch and Noah are the only two men where the Bible directly states that they walked with God.

When we read this account, it is good for us to ask, do I walk with God? Does every believer walk with God? What does it mean to walk with God? Truly, it must mean more than just a general acknowledgement that there is a God. God is an omnipresent spirit and therefore, not bound to a single location. So, one may assume that He is close in proximity to everyone, but that doesn't necessarily mean that *we* are close to *Him* in relationship. Walking with Him indicates an intimacy of relationship and being in accordance with God. Though God is everywhere, He still encourages us to draw close to Him, and in return He will draw close to us. We also are to *draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water (Hebrews 10:22)*. The prophet Amos reminds us that two can't *walk together, except they be agreed*. Or, *If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another (1 John 1:7)*. By walking in the light of the Lord's presence, we experience a more intimate relationship as He manifests Himself to us. *He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. (John 14:21)*. As believers we also possess the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and with our will we can either quench or yield to the Spirit. If we quench the prompting of the Spirit, we will miss an edifying opportunity. By yielding and walking in the Spirit, we will be enabled to not fulfill the lust of the flesh. When we walk in the flesh, we interrupt that close fellowship with our Lord. By confessing our sin, and acknowledging the rightness of God's way, we can restore that sweet closeness by walking with Him.

Enoch spent a lifetime walking with God. At the end of our life may the same be said of us.

J. Ekis

Our Father (Part 2)

*After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.
– Matthew 6:9 –*

Jesus taught us the revolutionary concept of approaching God in prayer on familial terms. He is our Father. We own the right by our adoption into the family of God to come boldly before the throne of grace to obtain mercy and to find grace to help in time of need. What a treasure this is! Yet Christ also rapidly qualified our relationship lest we become overly familiar with our Creator. “Hallowed be thy name.”

If you have ever witnessed a child reference their parents or grandparents by their first names, you can relate to the danger that comes with over-familiarizing relationships. If the child is not made to understand in clearest terms that such forms of address are off-limits, the authority structure disintegrates and the relationship itself becomes inordinate. Sad indeed is the future of such a child, and sad the heartbreak that such parents will suffer due to their own permissiveness!

Many modern Christians, bolstered by teaching that either over-familiarizes the Almighty or fails to proclaim the wholeness of His character, are spiritually stunted in their relationship with Him. They embrace the idea of God as Father, yet fail to show Him the respect due His holy nature. This has given rise to everything from disrespectful terms like “the Man Upstairs” and “the Big Guy”, to referencing God as “cool”, to irreverent (and even sacrilegious) worship practices.

Knowing and honoring the character of the Father we address in Heaven is vital to our spiritual advancement, and consistently viewing Him in this august position is critical to our soul’s well-being. After forbearing an over-familiarized diatribe from the lips of Job, God condescended to meet with the patriarch. It took but a brief interrogation for Job to correct his inordinate position and wisely rescind his haughty words, eliciting from the suffering saint a reverence for his Maker. “Once have I spoken, but I will not answer: yea, twice, but I will proceed no further” (Job 40:5).

As redeemed sons and daughters of the living God, we are entitled to approach God as our Father. But as humans, we dare not pretend to possess the right to approach Him as if on equal ground. The psalmist in exultant worship proclaimed by inspiration, “God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him” (Psalm 89:7). Let us be sure to consistently hallow His gracious Name. -- D. Murcek

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Faithful

He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.

Luke 16:10

This simple axiom uttered by our Lord in conjunction with the preceding parable has multiple general applications. Although the parable was about finances, there are many aspects of life where faithfulness is required. While all of those aspects may be able to be compared and ranked in order of importance, any of them that require some action from us have one thing in common that cannot be ranked. That is our trustworthiness with respect to the required action. The Greek word “pistos” is here translated “faithful” as used subjectively, whereas when used objectively it is typically translated “faith” or “believing.” Thus, he that is faithful is one who can be believed. He will carry out that which has been entrusted to him, without a doubt. Jesus made it clear that the degree of our faithfulness is not dependent on the object or function entrusted to us. The degree of faithfulness is a function of our character. We are either trustworthy or not, and the least will reveal it, as will the much. While no human is without fault, this character trait will generally be displayed in all areas of life, whether great or small. So Jesus went on to say “If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?” (vv. 11-12)

We put our faith in God because He is completely true and faithful, and He cannot lie. Therefore, as children of the King, we ought to be careful to seek to follow His example of complete trustworthiness. When we are tempted to put aside things that we have committed ourselves to perform because they may be deemed less important, either by us or by others who would change our priorities, let us remember this admonition from our Lord. Those to whom we are committed in the least things, like the common riches of this world (“unrighteous mammon”), will be influenced by our trustworthiness in those matters when it comes to their believing our witness regarding the true riches of eternity that our Lord has promised. Therefore, let us be faithful, as He is faithful.

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Servants of Corruption

II Peter 2:19: While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.

Daniel 8:25: And through his policy also he shall cause craft to prosper in his hand; and he shall magnify himself in his heart, and by peace shall destroy many: he shall also stand up against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without hand.

Servant of Corruption: what an ignominious, yet appropriate title. Antichrist is the grand deceiver who will elicit willing obedience from an unsuspecting populous. The masses are always searching for that leader that promises to repulse the existing governmental injustice and return equity and justice to the oppressed. The Man of Sin will pose as a peace candidate, but will ultimately be exposed as a brutal tyrant. John warned that even in the first century "there are many antichrists". In his day it was Domitian, in our times Putin, Xi, and Kim.

Power to the people! That is the watchword that has been employed to rally the common man to revolution. Socialists have espoused this deceptive doctrine for better than a century. Mao's People's Republic of China was to return power to the people. Lenin's Bolshevik Revolution, Castro's Batista Revolution, Chavez's Bolivarian Revolution, and every other socialist revolution begins with the premise of returning power to the people but has always ended up with the leaders of the revolution, and a few elite insiders, seizing control and subjugating the people that empowered them. This week we have witnessed a power intoxicated Russian dictator using force to impose his dystopic rule upon the Ukrainians who want to retain their sovereignty.

The problem is the innate sinfulness of man. The avaricious grasping for wealth, prestige and power can so easily corrupt men who may have begun with wholesome intentions. Once elevated to positions of power they soon forsake any pure motives they may have had to aid and promote the common good. Unless a man is controlled by the Spirit of God he will soon be swept up in the pursuit of personal aggrandizement. We have seen this paradigm repeated in Washington DC for many years. Rare is the man who can resist such enticements and retain his integrity.

Daniel's text offers consolation. The hour is soon coming where the pompous potentates and the self-serving despots will meet with their material end. The true Prince of Peace shall arrive to sublimate these impostrous oppressors and usher in the everlasting kingdom. It was with such a hope that John records the last words of the Bible, "even so, come, Lord Jesus."

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

That Blessed Hope

Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of our great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ...
—Titus 2:13—

What are you planning on doing tomorrow or next week? Where are you anticipating going this summer? Is there a school or program you are looking forward to attending? Is a career start or change in your future? What are some things you are aiming to do in retirement? Do world events have you re-calculating?

We all have plans. The Bible encourages and even lauds the right use of planning. The Proverbs are full of exhortations to be wise with our time and our resources. These axioms are reverberated in many other pages of Scripture as well. As long as our planning is done in a spirit of faith that is reclined upon the will of God and His preeminence and prerogative to “interrupt”, we are aligned with Heaven’s view of this temporal human activity (James 4:15).

Danger lurks, however, if our plans for things we intend to accomplish in this life dominate our desire for the next. The health of our spiritual pulse is most easily ascertained by assessing the thrill level that rises within our being when we let our hearts soberly meditate upon the fact that this indeed could be the day that Christ returns to catch us away. Such moments of spiritual clarity ought to create in us an overwhelming surrender to the will of God as well as an overpowering sense of peace as we realize that all our plans really do not matter much in the grand scheme of things. If our soul does not leap like John the Baptist leaped in the womb of Elisabeth at the near presence of the King, then something is wrong, and we need to realign our hearts with our heavenly calling.

The early church turned the world upside down because they believed that Christ could return at any moment, and rightly so. Our Lord did not delineate when He will come again, but simply promised with certainty that He is coming in like manner as He went away. Let resolve that when the trumpet sounds, we have no other plans. May we look forward more than anything else to the soon-coming moment when, in the twinkling of any eye, we shall be whisked away to meet our Lord in the air, so to be with Him forever. It is that moment, when we shall see His face, that we should be anticipating above all others.

-- D. Murcek