

Divine Encouragement

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

Every one of us experiences a variety of pressures in this life. Some are mild while others can be extreme; some may have been avoided by making wiser choices, while others occur apart from our choices. Today, the secular world is promoting an abundance of information about mental health and stress relief. Most involve various self-help remedies that are rooted in some form of meditation. Desperate people may seek a physician's prescription to alleviate stress, and sadly many turn to illegal narcotics, leaving a person feeling more stressed and causing their situation to spiral out of control.

A Biblical path of dealing with a stressful situation is found in today's verse. At this time, David is on the run while trying to avoid the wrathful and jealous King Saul. David has accumulated an array of loyal followers who were disappointed in the leadership of the deeply troubled king. While David and his men were away from their encampment, the Amalekites came and captured all of the women and children who remained behind. Intensely grieved, the men vented their anger towards David and even considered stoning him to death. As today's verse states, David was greatly distressed. Utterly abandoned and under extreme pressure, David encouraged himself in the LORD his God and did not lose hope.

After enduring this and other humbling experiences, God used David to author many of the beloved Psalms, which provide vital encouragement to Christians through the ages. David expresses his trust and reliance on God in times of great difficulties throughout the Psalms. Here are a few examples: In my distress, I called upon the LORD, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears. (Psalm 18:6) Unto thee O LORD, do I lift up my soul. O my God, I trust in thee: let me not be ashamed, let not mine enemies triumph over me. (Psalm 25:1,2) What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee. In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me. (Psalm 56:3,4) David became an experienced soldier and surrounded himself with an array of mighty men, yet he always expressed that his deliverance and hope came from the Lord his God.

As believers, many times in our lives, we will need encouragement from above. The word encouragement in this text is also translated as strengthen in other scriptures. In many situations, we can understand that when God strengthens us, He also encourages us, and when we receive encouragement, it also strengthens us. He supplies both the arm around our shoulder and the mettle to our spirit. When distress comes upon us, let us follow David's example and look unto the Lord for strength and encouragement.

J. Ekis

Know the truth

I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth.

I John 2:21

In the midst of John's warning to his readers about false professors that infiltrate the church, he stops, as he often does in this epistle, to explain his reason for writing. So far, he has warned of those who profess to love God but deny the Lord by their hatred, and, in this immediate context, of those very antichrists who have wrought schisms by their false doctrine that denies the deity of Jesus the Son. Yet to those among his readers who know the truth, he reminds them that they have received from the Lord that very precious gift that will allow and empower them to carry out the tests he admonishes them to perform. He is not treating them like they need to know the truth. He is reminding them to employ the tool that they've been provided. Just before this he reminds them of the unction, the anointing Holy Spirit, promised to the apostles in the upper room, who would deliver this gift of truth and discernment to His own. So the apostle exhorts them, and us, that, though it is a glorious blessing to know the truth, we must not think that it is sufficient for us to only know it, but we must employ it in the discernment of false teachings and false professors.

To know God's truth is to have the holy common sense to be able to humbly identify liars. John is not afraid to use this strong language throughout this epistle. The benefit is two-fold. If the reader is in fact one of these liars, who professes Christ but denies Him in practice and precept, the conviction of these warnings can reveal the need for repentance and surrender to the truth unto salvation. If the reader is a possessor of the truth, acting upon these warnings can guard the heart and mind against error, as well as enable one to gently rescue others out of the snare of the devil. Let us each examine ourselves to discern how we have heeded this warning.

Inconvenient

And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David: If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem ...Whereupon the king...made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt...

– 1 Kings 12:26-29 –

King Jeroboam, the newfound ruler of the northern kingdom of Israel, was in danger of losing his power due to the religious nature of his people. The house of God was in Jerusalem, which was in the southern kingdom's geographical domain and therefore under the jurisdiction of his rival, King Rehoboam. If the people wanted to worship Jehovah according to His directives, they would ultimately have to travel to Jerusalem to do so. None of this had really changed since the enthronement of Jeroboam. The only new variable in the equation was the division of the people and the establishment of his power. But being a cunning man, Jeroboam also understood something about the spiritual lethargy of the people he ruled, which he leveraged to his political advantage. The crafty king placed his bets that if he gave the people an easier conduit through which to entertain their religious affections, they would no doubt choose the easier, less demanding form of worship. He was right. The fickle flock of the northern ten-tribes bought whole-heartedly into the new idea of "church-going", which, while dressed in the vernacular of historic Jehovah worship, was nonetheless an idolatrous counterfeit which would cost thousands their souls.

Times have changed, but the same phenomenon exists today. Millions flock on a weekly basis to assemblies that use Christian syntax but are devoid of a living Christ. Additionally, many do not even make the consistent weekly Sunday trek to any assembly, choosing rather to attempt to feed their spirits via internet streaming or the television preacher. (While we can be thankful for modern technology and its right use to publish the gospel out to the masses as well as to provide a restorative alternative to the incapacitated, it should not be mistaken for a full-time surrogate for the serious, able-bodied worshipper of God.)

The fact is, the worship and service of Christ and the care of our souls is meant to be intrusive. When the rich man turned back from following Christ, Jesus made it clear that discipleship requires inconvenience, acknowledging that those who follow Him must forsake even the most valuable and precious things in their lives – houses, brethren, sisters, father, mother, wife, children, lands. But He simultaneously promised that such sacrifice will have a hundredfold return (Mt.19:29).

In our flesh, we do not like incursions to our plans and we are slow to exercise ourselves unto godliness. But this is necessary to our spiritual growth. Let us be sure to eschew the compromise of spiritual convenience and ardently seek to worship our God on His terms and according to His way. Such "inconvenience" shall bear eternal reward. — D. Murcek

Pastor's Thoughts of the Week

Revelation 19:7: Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.

We have here a description of the bride, how she appeared not in the shameless dress of the mother of harlots, but in fine linen, clean and white. We see the evident contrast between the Mother of Harlots found in chapter 17 of Revelation juxtaposed with the description of the bride of Christ in chapter 19. One lives in Babylon the other in the New Jerusalem. One is robed in scarlet while the other in fine white linen. One drunk with the blood of saints the other drinks at the wedding feast with the bridegroom. One a Fornicating harlot the other a chaste virgin. And one rides the Beast while the other is led by the Holy Spirit.

The fine linen, clean and white is the righteousness of saints in the robes of Christ's righteousness, both imputed for justification and imparted for sanctification--the wedding gown is a white robe of absolution, adoption, and enfranchisement, and a robe of purity and universal holiness. She had washed her robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb and these her nuptial ornaments she did not purchase by any price of her own, but received them as the gift and grant of her blessed Lord.

As in the parable in Matthew 22, no man enters into the feast without the provided garment. This lofty imagery depicts the utter necessity to be clothed in the garments of Christ's salvation. This was an ancient metaphor employed by Isaiah 61:10 I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.

Expatriating on this theme the apostle continues, "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." Paul and Isaiah both employ the bride motif to press upon the believers to inspire their expectation, their readiness and their sanctification.

If we are listening closely, we might hear the clarion call "Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him."

Enjoy your day in the power of Christ,

Pastor

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

A Good Rebellion

And the LORD was with him; and he prospered whithersoever he went forth: and he rebelled against the king of Assyria, and served him not.

2 Kings 18:7

When hearing of a rebellion, we usually have a negative impression of what is occurring. Rebellion is *resistance to or defiance of any authority, control, or tradition*. Generally, authorities, controls, and traditions serve to make society more organized and peaceful. Rebellion is often rooted in pride and self-centeredness and eventually causes problems not only for the perpetrators but also for many on the perimeter. Nearing the time to enter the Promised Land, God reminded His people that they had been rebellious from the day He knew them. Israel's rebellion against God's commandments had caused much pain and suffering. Though rebellion has a negative reputation, today's verse gives us an example of a beneficial rebellion that serves to enlighten and encourage us.

Hezekiah was king of Judah when they were on the precipice of being overrun by the evil Assyrian Empire. The Assyrian army encircled Judah and sought its surrender through intimidation. By boasting all of their successes in the past, Assyria hoped to incite fear in the hearts of the residents of Jerusalem. Fortunately, a revival was occurring under the leadership of King Hezekiah. Hezekiah had resolved to forsake the idols of Israel's former kings and instead serve and worship Jehovah God. The prosperity that followed his commitment to serving the true God inspired the necessary faith and courage to rebel against the Assyrians. With his confidence in the LORD, Hezekiah refused to serve the Assyrians. As invaders were poised to destroy Jerusalem, Jehovah miraculously intervened and destroyed the wicked Assyrian army.

This historical account reflects many situations that occur in believer's lives. Like Israel being delivered from the clutches of Pharaoh, we have been delivered from the grasp of our adversary the devil. Though we are set free from his dark kingdom, he continues to assault us in an attempt to mar our witness by bringing us into bondage to some sin. Just as Jerusalem was surrounded, the devil comes at us from multiple angles. Especially at a time of revival, the enemy will seek to disrupt our spiritual progress with psychological warfare. Sennacherib tried to make Hezekiah wave the white flag of surrender by using intimidation tactics, and Satan does the same. By using situations that produce fear, his plan is for us to lose sight of the delivering power of our God. Fear, doubt, and discouragement give opportunities for the devil to rob us of our peace and trust in Christ. He tries to convince us that our situation is hopeless so that we will just give up. Hezekiah took the initiative by refusing to serve the invaders; and so should we. Hezekiah knew he could not win the battle against the Assyrians with his physical strength, so he dropped to his knees and called upon his God who is mighty to deliver. With prayer and confidence in Jehovah, the enemy was destroyed.

Remember today that while we are safely protected by our God, our enemy lurks about. With holy resolve may we refuse to surrender to him and trust that the LORD will deliver us by His power.

J. Ekis

Integrity judged

*The LORD shall judge the people: judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness,
and according to mine integrity that is in me.*

Psalm 7:8

If we should read this verse alone out of its context, we might assume extreme audacity on David's part to make such a request. As in all scriptural interpretation and application, we must abide by the context. This request comes in the midst of his plea for help against one, perhaps accompanied by others, who has evidently accused and persecuted David unjustly. We see him in the opening of this psalm first bringing an open heart before the Lord, even agreeing to any consequence commensurate with his own sin (vv. 3-5). However, after putting his case in God's hand, he then pleads for righteous judgment from the Lord with respect to his case before his enemy, who has wrongfully accused and persecuted him. Thus, our text is not a request from David to be generally judged before the Lord based on his own integrity. He indicates from the outset that his trust is in the Lord (v. 1), not in himself. He also ends the psalm praising the Lord according to *His* righteousness, and not his own. In the context, he makes clear his understanding of the penetrating judgment of God, who tries the hearts and reins (v. 9), so that when he has laid bare his own heart before the Lord, only then can he say "my defence is of God, which saveth the upright in heart" (v. 10).

For our own application, we can follow this example of first examining our own hearts, yea, opening our hearts before the Lord for His examination, that He might reveal where we must confess and forsake sin (cf. Psalm 139:23-24). When our examined heart reveals innocence with respect to a false accusation, we may then with David plead our cause before the righteous Judge of all, as He is our ultimate defense. The Lord's pronouncement in such cases is plain, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:10), and puts us in good company, "for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matthew 5:12).

Seven Thousand

Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hat not kissed him.

– 1 Kings 19:18 –

The prophet Elijah had just won a courageous and decisive show-down on Mount Carmel against the idolatrous priests of Baal and had executed them in obedience to God's Law. Queen Jezebel received word and sent an audacious message to the prophet that she would return fire by issuing his immediate death warrant. On the eve of what could have been a national restoration led by just one more stand from this man of God, Elijah's years of courage, zeal, and obedience dissipated in the weakness of his flesh, discouragement finally raising its head high enough in the man's heart to win the moment. Elijah ran for his life.

At Horeb, God found his servant, and held him accountable for his flight. "What doest thou here, Elijah?" It said it all. This was not part of God's directive to His prophet. There had been neither retreat nor retirement ordered by Heaven. Elijah burst out with a self-authorized complaint which was nothing short of an excuse for his carnal fear. This giant of the faith was really no more than a man subject to the frailty of the flesh and the like passions of us all. His excuse-making culminated in self-exaltation ... "I, even I only, am left..." (1 Kg. 19:14).

The discouragement that cut Elijah's ministry short was ill-advised. He had apparently convinced himself that no one was being faithful to Jehovah but him. But God rebuked this self-centered perspective of his prophet and cited His remnant of 7,000 faithful believers, of whom Elijah, for whatever reason, apparently knew nothing. Was it due to his focus on his mission? Was it because to the isolation of his peculiar call and ministry? Whatever the case, it was short-sighted and wrong.

Let us refrain from passing judgment on the man, though. We are all likely guilty of similar imaginations of heart, particularly in our sinful age. We see the advancements of Hell, we witness the compromise of the Church, we watch the fall of many a professing believer. It makes us feel – alone.

But we are not. God will always have a faithful remnant of like-minded saints who refuse to homage the Baal of the day. They may not be out in the center of the stage, but they are out there, nonetheless – scattered in the four corners of the earth (and many of them close by) – standing against the tide, holding fast the faithful Word, and refusing to bow the knee to the enemies of Christ. Take heart, faithful believer. Be encouraged in your God. You are not alone. He has, and always will have, a people. --- D. Murcek

Is This The End of the World?

*Luke 21:9: But when ye shall hear of wars and commotions,
be not terrified: for these things must first come to pass; but the end is not by and by.*

I believe that the various conflicts that have occurred in Israel since 1948 are a preview of what will be the final conflagration during the tribulation known as Armageddon *Revelation 16:16*. I am sure that so-called prophecy preachers will be rushing to the publishers with their manuscripts in attempts to sell their latest read on current events. All of this is useless speculation, in my estimation, and reflects poorly on the cause of Christ when their "predictions" fail to come to pass. (I recall when the Gulf War was raging and the plethora of books were published naming Sadaam as Antichrist and Iraq as Mystery Babylon.)

These conflicts fit a biblical paradigm that has been established since the days of Abraham's battle with the ten kings led by Chedorlaomer :Genesis 14:5: And in the fourteenth year came Chedorlaomer, and the kings that were with him, and smote the Rephaims in Ashteroth Karnaim, and the Zuzims in Ham, and the Emims in Shaveh Kiriathaim, I expect to see a continuation of this paradigm until the culmination in Rev 16. Just as there have been " many antichrists" who have risen but were not the Antichrist, so we can expect that many scenarios that appear to be the battle of Armageddon have manifested but were mere paradigms of what is yet to come. The church is the restraining force in the world and will continue to stand in the way of Satan's full manifestation.

The alignment of the nations has been somewhat consistent through the centuries though the names have been changed. We must keep in mind that Israel is a blinded nation because of their rejection of Christ. That said, the covenantal promises, both Abrahamic and Davidic, abide with them despite their unbelief. I expect that they will continue to suffer as the Lord predicted :Luke 13:35: Behold, your house is left unto you desolate: and verily I say unto you, Ye shall not see me, until the time come when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. Deuteronomy 28:65-67: And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the LORD shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind: And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life: In the morning thou shalt say, Would God it were even! and at even thou shalt say, Would God it were morning! for the fear of thine heart wherewith thou shalt fear, and for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see.

Christians should always be "looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God" but keeping in mind that God is long-suffering and waiting for the repentance of sinful men. Let us pray for the poor blinded Jews and Muslims that have rejected Jesus as Lord. May the uncertainty and terrifying effects of warfare cause many to seek the only true source of peace found at the cross of Christ.

So such conflicts as we see unfolding remind us that there is a time coming when : ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. Matthew 24:6:

Pastor

Revealed Secrets

***Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward.
Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults.***

Psalm 19: 11,12

A fitting for formal attire, whether it be a woman's gown or a man's suit, usually includes standing on a platform encircled by mirrors. This arrangement provides a 360-degree view that is impossible to achieve by standing before a frontal mirror. An expanded view reveals unseen flaws which can then be corrected, presenting a more favorable image. Just as mirrors reveal unseen flaws to be amended by a skilled hand, God's Word exposes our hidden sins with a hope for change by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Psalm 19 gives glorious details of how God speaks both through His creation and by His written word. His perfect Word holds the power to convert the soul, make wise the simple, rejoice the heart, enlighten the eyes, endure forever, and is true and righteous all together. The book of James compares this perfect law of liberty to a looking glass that promises a blessing for those who look into it with the purpose of correcting flaws. God's Word was effective in showing us our need for the Savior while we were lost in the darkness of sin and after conversion it continues to manifest the hidden sins in the recesses of the heart. The warnings it brings are intended for our spiritual benefit. Consider how we are confronted with warning signs in everyday life. When approaching a railroad crossing in our vehicle, we face at least four warning signals meant for our safety. The symbolic sign illustrating the crossing itself is next accompanied by flashing lights, along with sounding bells, and finally, a barrier intended to prevent a vehicle from crossing. Disregarding these warnings would likely result in a catastrophe. The same is true concerning the warnings we find in the Scriptures. God cautions us about the associations we keep, how we invest our lives, the paths we take, the words we speak, how highly we think of ourselves, and a host of other daily life choices. God's warnings in His Word can effectively alert us to details and occurrences in our lives we may be neglecting. As we expose ourselves more fully to the light of His Word, we allow Him to sensitize our hearts to lay bare the sins that displease our Lord.

As disciples, we should long to grow in our intimate relationship with our Savior. Let our prayer be for God to cleanse us deeply within and without. May the last verse of this Psalm be included in our daily prayers: ***Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer. Amen!***

J. Ekis

Throne of judgment

The LORD is in his holy temple, the LORD's throne is in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men.

Psalm 11:4

What do you think of when you hear mention of a throne? The term is found over two hundred times in our Bible. In an ordinary sense, it is a chair. Yet most of us would probably envision a throne as being elevated, if not at its base, then by its size, but in most cases probably both. It is a highly symbolic seat, normally signifying at least dignity and majesty, and certainly the idea that the one seated upon it represents authority and strength, either attained or bestowed. While thrones have been attributed historically to earthly kings, there are numerous references, including our text, to the throne of God.

Considering “highness,” the LORD’s throne is here described as in heaven, which from mankind’s vantage point is the highest of all thrones. Whether this speaks of actual heavenly “furniture” or only of the LORD’s spiritual and sovereign position over all His creation, the latter is obviously what matters. He is King of kings and Lord of lords. Often in the Psalms and in the Revelation is His throne mentioned. In this verse, the particular signification of the throne seems to be His authority to judge, based on His holiness. There is none like Him, especially in perfection of righteousness. The final verse of this short psalm proclaims, “for the righteous LORD loveth righteousness.” As Judge, His personified “eyelids” try, or test, the children of men. The apostle would later declare that “neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Hebrews 4:13). This in fact was a comfort to the psalmist David, as he began this psalm declaring that his trust was in the LORD, the judge of all, so that he didn’t have to fear the threats of his enemies. When we belong to the LORD of heaven and therefore pursue His righteousness, we also can share this sentiment with David, being glad that the LORD tries, or tests, the righteous (v. 5), that He might refine us, to conform us to walk in His blessed way, while He will recompense those who oppose Him and His own (v. 7).

Author and Finisher

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

– Hebrews 12:2 –

As Adam's children, we are a people bent on boasting. We love ourselves enormously (regardless of pop-psychology's incessant protestations that we don't love ourselves enough!) We believe the world ought to know about our lives and accomplishments. In the professional world this is an art-form. Bragging on one's credentials and attainments is as expected as it is encouraged. LinkedIn profiles and postings are all intended to draw attention from network to self. But why stop our analysis in the professional world? Social media is the engine that drives the promulgation of self-glorification for the masses in general, now spanning generations. Instagram, Facebook, X (Twitter), TikTok, etc., are often the conduits that give platform and megaphone to everyone everywhere, permitting anyone to attract as much attention as possible to everyone's very best friend – themselves.

As believers, however, we have enrolled in a life-long, Spirit-conducted class on self-suppression. We are very familiar with the flesh and its influence, and we know we therefore must crucify it afresh daily. This is an arduous task, for the beast of the breast neither relents easily nor retreats permanently. The best strategy for this warfare is found in our text. Succinctly, we are to look "unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith." This means to behold Him with the eye of faith, meditating upon Who *He* is and what *He* has accomplished (as opposed to being so fixated upon our own person and work).

Christ is the author of our faith. The very faith we possess is a gift from God. He did not have to create man with the capacity to believe Him, but He did. Were we left to ourselves we would have never found our Christ. Every believer understands in the deepest recess of their being that we love Him because He first loved us. We were desperately lost and were only found because He sought us long before we sought Him. This is not Calvinistic fatalism, but quite contrarily, Bible truth – that our love for our Savior, like the Shulamite's for King Solomon, was birthed from His unlikely first interest in us.

Christ in the finisher of our faith. He that began a good work in us is going to carry it to completion. While we cling to Him like little children rushing to their daddy's arms during a thunderous storm, He, like that daddy, is clutching us with the vice-grip of eternal, heaven-borne love. Indeed, no man can pluck us out His hand. When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord raises up a standard against him. If we stumble, we are not left to ourselves. We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. Our names are written down. Our eternity is secure. Our Savior has made it so.

Let us eschew self and look unto our Lord, who is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last. He, and He alone, is worthy of attention and praise. --- *D. Murcek*

Reserved Seats

And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms....But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: Luke 14:7,10:

This intriguing text brings to light the essence of His call to true humility and service to God. In the seventh verse the Lord "marked how the Pharisees chose out the chief rooms" - the seats of highest honor being closest to the master of the house. One's seating arrangement was a designation of their societal importance. Sycophants would often jockey for higher positions by flattery and by proving their ability to enhance the status of the host. It is interesting to note here, that very little has changed in 21 centuries. There are those who adulate the rich and famous in hopes of gaining some standing with them. Movie stars have their legion of devotees. Athletes are swarmed by their admirers. Political leaders amass huge rallies of supporters. Religious luminaries attract multitudes to their meetings. All of these hoping to gain some place of distinction by association and the objects of their devotion carefully filtering through the masses to see who among them might best inflate their station and so find the highest seats..

Now note here the glorious Maker of heaven and earth chooses for his holy cadre the ignorant, the common, the persona non grata. Could we sinful miscreants find a more congeal text than Luke 15:1-2: Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. The Divine Messenger made himself of no reputation so he could include the disenfranchised and call them his friends.

So the Lord makes His point, When deciding who to invite to your soiree put at the top of your guest list the undesirables- the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. These that have no means to repay your kindness. No quid pro quo. No handsome return on your investment. Let the unworthies of society, the forgotten men, women, and children be the objects of your benevolence and expect no recompense Beloved Let us as His church today act in His behalf, for surrounding us we will find all of the above cases, worthy of our love and attention. The Lord is careful to add the reminder: thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just. Matthew 25:34-40: Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

Oh what consolation shall be ours as we celebrate at the marriage feast of the Lamb. We have hope that seated next to us will be those many who on earth were beneficiaries of our kindnesses. On earth, they could offer us nothing but a word of thanks but here we can now harmonize our praise to our common King. But do I with wonder hear Him say "Friend, go up higher" and now be seated with me in heavenly places! Hope deferred would thus be recompensed. How good it was to seek out the lowest seat in the service of God that we might hear that glad promotion. "Go Up Higher!"

Have a blessed day,
Pastor

Miserable People

If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead...

1Corinthians 15:19,20a

The outward actions of a person's life usually manifest what is occurring in their hearts. In Mark 7, Jesus delineates a list of sins ranging from murder to foolishness, which emanate from the heart and defile a person. These sins produce an unbecoming behavior that not only impacts the person who acts out but also affects those around them. In today's world, there seems to be an increase in the number of people who take to the streets to vent their anger and frustration. War demonstrators, environmentalists, transgender advocates, pro-choice groups, anti-police groups, and labor unions often resort to unruly and unlawful behavior to emphasize their point of view. The restraints produced by faith in Christ have diminished because so many people have exchanged spiritual and eternal hopes for temporary material gratification. They find themselves depressed when their desires are not fulfilled. Even Christians can sink into this miserable state when influenced by the world around them, and they lose sight of the superior value of the future eternal existence God has promised.

The invitation to come to Christ for the forgiveness of sins is not an invitation to have everything perfect in this life. The pressures of this life quickly test the exhilaration of being forgiven of our sins and having our names written in heaven's registrar. Paul's admonition to the early converts is also true for us today: *to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God*. Though we will experience varying forms of tribulation, distresses, persecutions, famines, deprivations, perils, and swords, we must remember that we shall never be separated from the love of Christ. So, when we experience these difficulties, it is then that the anchor of our faith holds fast in the crucified and risen Christ. Because Christ lives, we not only enjoy life forever with Him in heaven but we also have access to a life of fellowship with Him in our here and now. We can walk with Him, talk with Him, and sense the Holy Spirit within us through all of the valleys and mountaintops of life's journeys.

So why are many people so miserable today? Because they do not have the love of Christ within them and all of their hopes are in a crumbling and corrupt world, even as they acquire those things they thought would satisfy, they find that fleeting value does *not* satisfy. When life's crushing blows come against us, let us remember... *but now is Christ risen from the dead!*

J. Ekis

Taught of the Lord

*The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way.
Psalm 25:9*

In this psalm, one thing David is focused on is the teaching of the LORD. Starting in verses four and five, he pleads, “Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day.” Following our text, in verse twelve he ponders, “What man is he that feareth the LORD? him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose.” After that, in verse fourteen he observes, “The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant.” In the midst of proclaiming his need for forgiveness (vv. 7, 11, 18) and patience to wait on the LORD (vv. 3, 5, 21), his related cravings for direction and discretion are captured in our text with the necessary prerequisite of meekness.

There can be no growth without meekness. If we be without meekness, we cannot be taught, no matter what our station in life. Meekness recognizes that, whatever abilities we may have attained, there remains more to learn, and perhaps even to unlearn. Meekness is willing to put aside prior learning, experience, or even perceived power or authority, to apprehend further or deeper understanding. There is no greater teacher than the LORD, so if we submit to His guidance and teaching we are obviously blessed by it. But let us recognize that He often tests our level of meekness by way of the tools that He uses to instruct. Are we willing to learn from others that we may suppose are inferior in knowledge? Do we think that our experience in some area precludes another’s ability to add to our learning? If so, beware that such attitudes might readily exclude us from being taught of the LORD. On the contrary, let us be looking for those unsuspected avenues to exercise the meekness exhorted in this verse, which will guide and teach our spirit and soul in His way.

Doers!

Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

– James 1:22 –

One of my favorite stores is the Home Depot. Like any successful organization, they have codified a market desire into a catch phrase that conditions consumers to purchase their goods and services. “Doers get more done.” While I would likely shop at Home Depot regardless of the tagline gimmick, if I’m being honest, it probably does persuade me to some degree. I identify with it. I don’t want to sit around. There are projects large and small that need accomplished regularly around the homestead. I want to be a doer. I want to get things done! Off to the Home Depot...

We have all undoubtedly heard the trite modern evangelical expression, “the Bible is not a book of do’s and don’ts.” Like Home Depot’s slogan, it’s catchy. Unfortunately, however, it’s a lie. The Bible actually IS a book of do’s and don’ts. Properly understood, it tells us that in our natural state, the things we do come from a sinful heart and are therefore displeasing to a Holy God. We have all fallen short of His holy standard, evidenced in the things we do and the things we don’t do. But Christ DID everything we were supposed to and exchanged His record for ours. This creates a new desire in those who believe to live a new life doing the right things. But how do we know what those things are? By God’s great book of do’s and don’ts!

In spiritual matters, being a doer is not optional. The born-again believer knows he or she has lots of things we are called to do. We cannot sit on the sidelines. We must get busy in the things of God and get some things done before we go to our eternal rest. Below are just a few smattered examples of the multitude of commands and commissions that apply to all who have obeyed from the heart the doctrine which was delivered unto us (Rom. 6:17) ...

- Mortify (put to death, on a moment-by-moment basis) our fleshly desires (Rom. 8:13)
- Yield (present in totality with no hesitation) ourselves to God for His service (Rom. 6:13)
- Love our neighbors as ourselves (that’s a ton of love) (Mt. 22:39)
- Love our enemies (this is not easy, but it’s a direct command from our Lord) (Mt. 5:43)
- Love the brethren (the family of God) (1 Pet. 1:22)
- Live soberly (be unrelentingly serious about spiritual matters) (Titus 2:12)
- Preach the gospel to every creature (someone new daily?) (Mk. 16:15)
- Give of our resources, simply (Rom. 12:8) and cheerfully (2 Cor. 9:7)
- Rejoice evermore (away with that ‘poor me’ attitude!) (1 Thess. 5:16)
- Pray without ceasing (be in constant communication with Heaven) (1 Thess. 5:17)
- Look for Christ’s return (our life proving out that He could come momentarily) (Titus 2:13)

...and there are so many more...

This old world is dilapidated. It needs fixed. Doers get more done. Let’s be God’s doers today.

— D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

The Silence of God

Job 38:2-4: Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me. Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding

The sin of presumption can adopt many forms. Man's finite mind sometimes mistakenly thinks it has a right to question the Almighty. God has equipped us all with the capacity of reason which, at least at times, demands explanations from the Creator. Inquisition after all is what brings a man to belief. But there are boundaries that must never be violated. "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further," says the Lord to the proud waves and likewise to the proud insinuations of man. In our sedulous pursuit of truth, we must never lose sight of the infinite chasm that separates the Divine from the profane - the Creator from the created. As sanctified as one may be we are always reminded that man in his best state is altogether vanity. And that vanity is always seeking opportunity to ventilate.

God's permission of suffering has always been a source of consternation for the skeptic. Men surmise that God owes them an explanation. To this point in the drama of Job, God has been silent. Job laments "Oh that I knew where I might find him!". In our reference above after Job's faith has been sorely tried, the Lord finds him. In Sir Robert Anderson's seminal work *The Silence of God*, we read these salient thoughts: "No one may limit what God will do in response to individual faith. But we may confidently assert that, in view of His supreme revelation in Christ, God will yield nothing to the petulant demands of unbelief. And that revelation supplies the key to the dual mystery of silent heaven and the trials of the life of faith on earth."

Life in a cursed world is a tenuous journey filled with dangers, toils, and strife. One must not expect to "be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease". We dare not accuse our gracious Maker of caprice in His permission of our afflictions but rather rejoice that the day of redemption is soon at hand. God forbid that His children darkeneth counsel with words without knowledge. Let us be content to trust the infinite mind of God and find our place at His feet declaring He doeth all things well.

Have a blessed day,

Pastor

Always There

Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there.

Psalm

139:7,8

Omnipresent is the condition of being everywhere simultaneously, and eternal is the condition of existing with no beginning or end. God is described as being both in the scriptures, a thought that can only be accepted by faith rather than understood by human reasoning. Mankind relates to time and location because that is what they know by experience, whereas neither of these hinders God. The fact that God always *has been* and always *will be* present for His people offers a great source of comfort and encouragement for us.

At the outset of creation, God was already there because He always *has been*, and He is there as the book of Revelation unfolds the end of the age and the dawning of eternity. In the paradise of Eden, God's presence was there as He talked with Adam and Eve, and after sin and banishment, we find God still there for fallen mankind. After Noah builds the ark, we find God inside the ark inviting Noah and his family to enter so they would not perish in the flood. Centuries later, we find God again speaking to Abraham, directing him to go to a land that He had promised to him. This promise would not only impact Abraham but would be a blessing to all the world in the ages to come. God was there when Moses was cast by the faith of his mother onto the Nile in a basket of bulrushes, and He was there guiding Israel every step of the way through the wilderness. Though unseen, God was the Captain of Joshua and his forces as they conquered the Promised Land. Standing alone against four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, Elijah received power from the True and Living God to call down fire from heaven. Daniel in the lion's den and his three friends in Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace found that God's presence had not forsaken them. Though the name of God is never mentioned in the Book of Esther, His divine presence is seen as He miraculously delivers His people. Peter and Paul found God's presence tangible in their imprisonment, and Stephen beheld God's presence while being executed. While exiled on the Isle of Patmos, the Apostle John stood in God's presence while receiving the glory of His revelation.

Remembering that the Scriptures were written for our learning, we receive hope and encouragement that God is also there for us in every circumstance. Even before we were converted, we experienced His protection and His drawing us to Him; and after conversion, He is there to lead us in His perfect will. The highs and lows of life have the common thread of God being there for us. Though unseen, the reality of His presence shines through as we patiently wait upon Him and trust in His promises. When we are fearful, He is our encouragement. When we are lonely, He is our companion. When we are enclosed with darkness, He is our light. When we are burdened with sadness, He is our joy. He was there when we entered this world, and He will be there as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. When we finally stand on Heaven's shore, He will be there to welcome us home.

So, whatever comes our way, we can confidently know that our God is always there.

J. Ekis

Desperate praise

*I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.
Psalm 34:1*

Although many of the psalms have introductory captions, which often describe how the psalm is to be performed, others provide the occasion upon which the psalm was written. The caption of Psalm 34 is of the second type, and very descriptive: *A Psalm of David, when he changed his behaviour before Abimelech; who drove him away, and he departed.* This refers to the account in I Samuel 21, when David was running from Saul and in desperation attempted to defect to the enemy Achish, the Philistine king (i.e., the Abimelech) of Gath. But when the servants of the king identified David as their arch enemy, insinuating him as unworthy of their trust, he quickly feigned himself mad, which allowed him to be disregarded and escape a situation that could have led to his destruction.

Thus, after two acts of desperation, from a proverbial frying pan to potential fire, David recovered from the hands of two enemy kings, and expressed in this psalm his blessing and praise for the LORD, who heard his cries for help and deliverance. Perhaps he shared this psalm with the band of men that came to his aid in the cave Adullam where he next fled (I Samuel 22), and exhorted them particularly with verse 3: “O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together.” Notable in this psalm are the repeated references to seeking and crying unto the LORD (see vv. 4, 6, 10, 15, 17). David would need to often repeat this practice during the rest of the long period where he continually fled from the madness of Saul’s jealous vengeance in return for his own loyal service. In such a baffling circumstance, David would need the sustaining power of the LORD’s deliverance, and the accompanying refreshment of his own continual blessing and praise to the LORD on each occasion, until he finally realized his final deliverance from Saul (vv. 19-22).

Let us also learn this lesson from David, and in the midst of baffling behaviors and surmounting circumstances remember to seek and cry unto the LORD our help and sustainer. Then bless the LORD and continually praise Him for the help and the health of His countenance (Psalm 42:5, 11).