

Identification

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.

Romans 6:3-5

There is great reason to celebrate the magnificent work of the Son of God in purchasing redemption for all who believe, through His unfathomable suffering and His glorious resurrection. Yet beyond celebration, when we have believed unto salvation, our text reminds us of the personal identification that becomes ours. The baptism described here has a two-fold application. It at once carries with it the symbolism of physical water baptism, but more significantly the counterpart of spiritual baptism. But the initiating baptism was His own, not only of symbolic water, but of His whole humanity into His passion. When we attempt to comprehend the immensity of His suffering, to pay our sin-debt and to satisfy righteousness, our humanity recognizes its limitations. Yet such an attempt of faith also stirs up a spirit of gratitude and love for such a Savior, that we can with the apostle express our desire to know the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death. Then we can be willing to welcome the rejection of the world, as He promised would be the case for His disciples. We can also share in a love for Him that can answer with the apostle, twice in this chapter, "God forbid!" when confronted with the false notion that grace might allow us to sin.

At the same time, the identification extends to the power of His resurrection, which we also long to know, not only in the grandeur of a promise for a blissful eternity in His presence, but also in our daily walk in newness of life, in the presence of His Spirit. Note that the apostle here makes the indivisible connection between the identification with both His death and life. As we own that newness of life with Him, the balance of this chapter reminds us of the power of His resurrection that enables us to live unto righteousness. Because He lives, we shall live also. And because death hath no more dominion over Him, so sin shall not have dominion over us; for He satisfied the righteousness of the law that would have condemned us, and empowers us to serve His righteousness. "But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life" (Romans 6:22). Let us say with the hymnwriter, Such love, such wondrous love!

Like Jonathan

Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. – 1 Samuel 18:3

The account of the David's life in 1-2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles is filled with much foreshadowing of the Christ. There are so many ways that David typified our Lord. But buried in the text we can see ourselves as well, particularly in David's friend Jonathan. The remarkable story of Jonathan and David's friendship yields lessons that should light our path and remind us of who we are and how we should carry ourselves as believers.

Jonathan's name means "God has given." Once we exist, there is no undoing the eternal nature of our souls. Life is a gift from God and therefore filled with purpose. There is a reason we are here. Others can learn from our example if we walk faithfully. Indeed, each of us is fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14-16) – gifts to the world from God.

Jonathan was the son of a rebel. His father Saul started well, but rebelled against the Most High, and suffered the inalienable consequences. There were strings attached to being the progeny of the first King of Israel – duties and obligations that, if questioned or countered, carried serious and dangerous consequence. Indeed, Saul's wrath was seen on more than one occasion when Jonathan intimated the most reasonable of questions and intercessions. It is interesting that Saul's derangement saw Jonathan as the rebel, and not himself as such (1 Samuel 20:30). But are we not of our father, the devil (John 8:44), who is the first of all rebels (Isaiah 14:14). And must we not be vigilant in our dealings with him who walks about as a roaring lion, seeking to devour us (1 Peter 5:8)?

Jonathan had a right to the throne. It was his legally. Being the son of a king means you are heir to his power. We can safely conjecture that everyone in the court knew this, and that they encouraged Jonathan in seizing what was his. Does this not remind us of our rebellious former master, constantly whispering in our ears as he did in our primal parents, "Ye shall be as gods..." (Genesis 3:5)?

Jonathan, however, abnegated his right to the anointed of God – the shepherd of Bethlehem Judah. He perceived Jehovah's pleasure in David and wisely befriended the boy. Instead of tenaciously holding to his assumed destiny, he laid it at the feet of one better than he. This is not the anticipated reaction of a prince! Jonathan reminds us of ourselves who, when we perceived the Lion of Judah as the Christ of God, willingly laid down our arms and surrendered to His will – knowing that the suffering of the loss of all things could be counted as dung, that we may win Christ (Philippians 3:8).

Finally, despite his wise and loving choice, Jonathan was still subject to the systemic problems resulting from his father's revolt against Heaven's decrees. Slain on Mount Gilboa, Jonathan would have to wait until the resurrection to see his friend assume the throne. Because of our father's rebellion, we too, are appointed to die, and after this the judgement (Hebrews 9:27). But there is coming a Day – for us, for Jonathan, and for David as well – when we will receive the final result of our faith, when Jehovah makes good on every promise in His Word, and we behold with our own eyes the Son of God ruling and reigning from Jerusalem. Until then, let us strive to be like Jonathan – selflessly covenanted to the Son of David, our Lord Jesus. -- D. Murcek

Resolve In The Midst of Gloom

Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places.

Habakkuk 3: 18,19

As long as we live in this present world, we will never be immune from bad news. Because of modern technology, both good and bad news are almost instantaneous; trivial things and momentous events pop up on cell phones throughout every day. Everything from threat of war to financial collapse can cause anxiety in many lives. When the Covid-19 pandemic occurred, the whole globe was impacted by an atmosphere of uncertainty and impending doom. Thankfully believers possess a hope that God is in control and we can rejoice because of our eternal hope that transcends this world.

The ministry of the prophet Habakkuk occurred on the eve of the invasion of his country. The Chaldean war machine was on the move conquering every nation in its path. Because of Israel's idolatrous disobedience, the prophet knew that chastisement from Jehovah was imminent. At the conclusion of his prayer, Habakkuk expressed hope in the midst of this gloom by rejoicing in the God of his salvation. He fully realized his inner strength came from his trust in God, and his confidence rested in the Lord God who could make him walk in high places above the strife of this life.

No matter what level of peace and security we experience in this life, there will always be some threat of bad news on the horizon. The threat of an interruption to our peaceful existence can occur during a large-scale national catastrophe, or it can come on a personal level through distressing news from a medical doctor. The media capitalizes on dramatic events to enhance their broadcasts and create fear and anxiety. Wars and rumors of war, disease, natural calamities, and financial uncertainties dominate the content of reports. With all the technical advancements in this rapidly changing world, man still cannot maintain a lasting environment of peace. The effects of this stress touch all levels of our society.

Like the prophet Habakkuk, we can rejoice this day because of the God of our salvation. When we focus on what the Lord Jesus has done for us and for the wonders of heaven that await us, the strength of the devil's scare tactics can be diminished. When our trust is in the Lord, we walk at a different level above the world's strife. May the Lord by His grace grant us the resolve to rejoice in His salvation.

J. Ekis

Hard to believe

Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.
Jeremiah 33:3

This familiar passage is often quoted to encourage us to pray, especially in difficult circumstances. While this promise alone is certainly worthy to be cited for that purpose, its context accentuates the greatness, mightiness, and unfathomable things possible for the Lord to perform. This promise comes to Jeremiah while he is shut up in the prison in Jerusalem, during the time that the Babylonian armies of Nebuchadnezzar were holding the city under siege. Jeremiah had warned king Zedekiah of the coming destruction and had urged him by the word of the Lord to surrender to Nebuchadnezzar. On several occasions, one example of which is recorded in the next chapter, Jeremiah told him that the city would fall to the Chaldeans and that he would be taken captive. Yet, Zedekiah was more influenced by his ungodly counselors, false prophets, and unfounded expectation to be able to resist the Babylonian invasion. As a result, he had committed Jeremiah to the prison while Jerusalem continued to slowly fall to its enemies. It is in this setting, where Jeremiah is seemingly left in a helpless state, while his countrymen are on the verge of slaughter and captivity, which he has been assured of by the words from the Lord, that this promise is given.

Beyond this promise, the Lord continues with specifics that could have certainly seemed to Jeremiah in that setting to be hard to believe. Although God says that the city would be destroyed and filled with dead bodies, He also says that He will “bring it health and cure, and I will cure them, and will reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth” (v. 6). He further promises cleansing and pardon from their iniquities. The balance of the chapter continues with predictions of restoration and return from captivity, not only of Judah, but also of Israel, who had been taken captive by the Assyrians years before this time. The farther-reaching promise of the ultimate fulfillment of the Davidic covenant in Christ is then proclaimed in verse 15: “In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land.” By the end of this chapter, the promises are overwhelming for even those of us who now look for the second coming of Christ. Yet, Jeremiah received them in his prison court, and he faithfully proclaimed and recorded them in his book, for them and for us. May we be fully persuaded with him to continue to call unto the Lord, trusting in His greatness and might.

Daily

These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. – Acts 17:11

We were created to live a twenty-four-hour cycle. In the beginning, when Jehovah made the heavens and the earth, He did so within the framework of the same. We are told repeatedly, “And the evening and the morning were the first (and second through sixth) day” (Gen. 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). The repetition of the daily sequence permits us to anticipate, plan, work, rest, accomplish, re-energize, etc. There are many important things that transpire in our lives during each of earth’s millennia-long reliable rotations. It is therefore vital for us to learn an important spiritual lesson from the Bereans whom the Spirit denominated as “noble” – that they made their spiritual well-being a daily (not periodic, not weekly, not sporadic – but regular and daily) exercise. Let us meditate upon the advantages of daily spiritual focus.

We should pray daily. “Evening, and morning, and at noon will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice.” (Psalm 55:17) Imagine not speaking to our loved ones daily if the opportunity was so afforded us. Why would we do such a thing? Daily communication builds relationships. Neglecting it is indicative of a heart that desires isolation to its own detriment. What a blessing that we can reach Heaven on a daily basis.

We ought to rejoice spiritually every day (Psalm 65:8). There is much in a cursed world that can tend to depress us and cause our spirits to be cast down. But Jesus gave us His joy that ours might always be full (John 15:11). As God’s people, there is no reason for the long countenance or the Eeyore disposition. A deep and abiding joy is a well from which we can draw daily – and we are fools if refuse to do so!

Spiritually astute believers understand that they need fellowship daily. The early church knew this to be so, for they continued “daily with one accord in the temple, and in breaking bread from house to house...” (Acts 2:46). If our interaction with fellow believers is reserved to one to a few times a week, we will be stunted in our spiritual development and usefulness. Daily fellowship is a recipe for growing in grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus.

Our witness should be a daily exercise as well. The early gospel believers ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ every single day (Acts 5:42). Who did we speak to for our Lord yesterday? To whom did we bring the salve of the peace of the gospel within the last twenty-four hours?

We must search the scriptures daily, as our launching text in Acts 17:11 tells us. The Word of God must not sit unopened and unmined for more than a day’s time. Job esteemed the words of God’s mouth more than his necessary food (Job 23:12). We are wise to do the same. Is there something more important? It cannot possibly be. Daily Bible consumption is the cornerstone of the spiritual life.

While it is called today, let us exhort one another (Hebrews 3:13) and ensure that our hearts are enamored with our wonderful Master. May we find His blessing as we seek His countenance today.

-- D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Gethsemane Gabbatha Golgotha

*And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.
Luke 22:44*

Gethsemane: Though it would be right to consider the entirety of the life of the Lord as being one of suffering, it is more especially understood that our Man of Sorrows enters into the deepest throes of his agonies at the garden. It was here that the unbearable horror of what He was about to endure in becoming “sin for us who knew no sin” came with full magnitude upon His mortal frame. Luke, the physician, dutifully records the tremendous physiological and psychological trauma that was occurring from which that precious blood commences its life-giving stream. Satan had not spent all of his fury at the 40-day contest with Jesus in the wilderness of temptation. He had in reserve the most diabolical weapons to hurl at the Son of God and he was now unleashing them in hopes of defusing what would eventuate in his own destruction. But undeterred our victorious Lord “offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared”.

Gabbatha: From the garden to the pavement where his judgment would be decided. By now He has been condemned by the supercilious Sanhedrin, indecorously crowned by an imposter king of the Jews, flagellated by sadistic legionnaires, and then contemptuously displayed before the rabid mob. The procurator in hopes of eliciting some pity pleads: “Behold the Man ! ”. But no mercy could be found in the minds of that untoward generation. They would prefer the seditious murderer rather than the Savior, the murderer before the Master; the robber rather than the Redeemer. “Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas”. And when Pilate demanded of them the verdict the vox populi responded: “Let him be crucified and His blood be on us, and on our children.”

Golgotha: “The place of a skull” was the inglorious name of this area situated without the gates of the holy city so as not to disturb the pretended piousness of the hypocritical religionists that dwelt within. And so here, in a place littered with the skeletal fragments of criminal lives ill spent, here would the holy Son of God make “his grave with the wicked”. As the vicious crowd hurled their malicious invectives in the ears of the sinless Savior, as the darkness shrouded the place of the skull and the earth began its laborious heaving, as the stench of death wafted in the air and the pariah dog howled in hungry expectation of the impending carrion, only the eye of faith could behold this scene and find in it a source of enduring hope. He, who unabashedly declared: “I am the Resurrection and the Life”, succumbs to the most torturous death ever conceived by demented minds and yet in doing so had, through death, destroyed “him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”

Have a blessed day,

Pastor

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

His Way

As for God, his way is perfect: the word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler to all those that trust in him.

Psalm 18:30

We often see the word “way” used in the Scriptures, and it is most frequently found in Psalms and Proverbs. The same word is translated road, journey, or path. No matter which word is preferred when translated, it also indicates the direction a person is traveling. Before a person is saved, the way they are traveling through life is directed by their self-will, and self-will most often leads a person away from God’s perfect plan. Unbelievers often have a difficult time accepting the ways of God, while those who have accepted his plan of salvation begin to have an understanding that God’s work is still quite mysterious. The circumstances of life remind us that His ways are not our ways. As the prophet Isaiah recorded *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

Today’s verse reminds us that God’s way is perfect, and that His perfect word has been tried, tested and proven to be right and true. Acknowledging the veracity of the word is easier than actually believing and trusting it. Situations will arise that present us with the choice to let go of our own understanding and in all our ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct our paths. The Scriptures record many accounts where individuals had to forsake traditional reasoning and just take God at His word. Both Joshua and Gideon followed God’s unconventional battle plans to defeat their enemies. Noah, Abraham, and Moses were all commanded by the Lord to do things that seemed unreasonable. After hearing teachings of Jesus and witnessing His miracles, the Apostles could not understand when He told them that He was going to be crucified and raised again.

As we walk by faith through this world, God has a perfect plan for all of us to follow. He has warned us that in this world we will have tribulation which will come at us from many different sources. Because we do not know what tomorrow will bring, we are to walk by faith each day. There will be times when we may doubt that following the Lord’s plan will have a positive outcome. At the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, most of the disciples were fearful and heartbroken and wondering how the Man from Nazareth, the Miracle Worker could die. Three days later on that morning of mornings, they could understand that God’s way is perfect. Everyday may we grow in confidence to trust and walk in His way.

J. Ekis

Warnings of mercy

It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I purpose to do unto them; that they may return every man from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin.

Jeremiah 36:3

This chapter records God's direct command to Jeremiah to produce a book, a scroll, of all the prophecies that the Lord had given to Jeremiah to that point. They are described as "the words that I have spoken unto thee against Israel, and against Judah, and against all the nations." Jeremiah obediently called Baruch to write the words in the book as he spoke them to him. Jeremiah then instructed Baruch to go and read the words in the temple. As the words of the Lord were heard by a scribe, who then brought Baruch to read the warning to the princes of Judah, the princes were rightly afraid and determined to inform king Jehoiakim. After they instructed Baruch to hide himself and Jeremiah, their encounter with the king did not go well, and, upon hearing the words of the book read, Jehoiakim sliced and burned the roll, though he was not able to apprehend Jeremiah and Baruch.

Thus, Jehoiakim resisted God's purpose for the writing, which is revealed in our text of the Lord's words to Jeremiah. Although the roll contained many warnings against Judah and their kings, as well as against the nations that would come against them, the purpose of the warnings was not to simply condemn, but to call to repentance. We see at the end of this verse that His ultimate purpose is to forgive iniquity and sin. However, forgiveness is predicated upon repentance, because our God is just as well as merciful. Therefore, He lays out the terms of reconciliation and the path to forgiveness to the people of Israel in these warnings. Jehoiakim refused to heed the warnings and was eventually defeated and deported to Babylon, as prophesied by Jeremiah.

Nevertheless, God's word was not destroyed. Later in the chapter we see the Lord instruct Jeremiah to "Take thee again another roll, and write in it all the former words that were in the first roll, which Jehoiakim the king of Judah hath burned... and there were added besides unto them many like words" (vv. 28, 32). So despite man's refusal, the Lord still sends warnings of mercy to those who will hear and heed, from the times of His calls to Israel, through His calls to all today in His word. "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9).

The Place of a Skull

And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull... – John 19:17

The skull. It forever represents the eerie and awful intruder to the human race – the emblem of the power and finality of the curse brought upon us by the first Adam's failure. Had there been no rebellion in the Garden of Eden, there would be no death, no sorrow, no pain. But paradise was lost to all of us by the overtures of Hell that the first Federal Head of humanity could not (or would not) rebuff. And from thence the long train of rot and decay would pursue each and every one of Adam's offspring. It must now be appointed once for every man to die.

It is therefore fitting that the last Adam must come here, to Golgotha, the place of a skull. It could not be in the barrenness of the wilderness, though there He had previously sent the Tempter packing just three years prior. It could not be in the loneliness of the garden, even though He found Himself sorrowful unto death in such a place just last night. No. It always had to be here on this mount that the Son of Man must complete His mission. Here and only here at this place of a skull could He suffer the penalty of the race and reverse the power of the curse. Here and only here could He make Himself subject to death in order to defeat Hell. Here and only here at Calvary – the place of a skull – could He through death destroy him who had the power of death and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. There was no more fitting place. No man took His life from Him. He had power to lay it down – here, at the place of a skull – that He might take it up again within three days' time.

Is it not amazing that since that awful day, God's children now sing of the wonders of Calvary – the place of a skull? How fully has our Savior undone the effects of the curse! How completely has He reversed the power of the grave! How wonderfully has He restored to us by His obedience unto death the paradise the first Adam surrendered in his inexcusable rebellion against the Most High!

Let us rejoice for this place of a skull – for One greater than death transformed it into the ground for a new tree of life by the power of His cross. -- D. Murcek

End of the Game

*But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.
1Corinthians 15:57*

The 2008 Super Bowl was played between the New England Patriots and the New York Giants. With an undefeated record, the Patriots entered the game as heavy favorites against the Giants with six losses. New England was on the brink of becoming the first team in over 35 years to accomplish a perfect season. The Giants were able to pull off an upset with a win and take home the trophy. At the completion of the big game New England still had the better record, but the Giants were the champions. The game serves as a reminder that it is most important to win in the end.

Today's verse and many other passages throughout the scriptures emphasize inestimable value of gaining victory in the end. The rhetorical question of what does a man profit in gaining the whole world while losing his own soul in the end demands an answer. The whole fifteenth chapter of 1Corinthians accentuates the resurrection victory that awaits the believer at the end of life. Our victory was only made possible because the Lord Jesus Christ secured the victory (conquered) over death and the grave, and because He lives, we can also live. For the unsaved, any victory on any level in any realm will be short lived. The Book of Job states that *the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment*. The listing of stalwarts of the faith found in Hebrews 11, cites the extreme trials they endured and clearly proclaims they were enabled because they were waiting for a better resurrection.

In many ways, life in this world is filled with battles and struggles between two extremes. The spirit against the flesh, light versus darkness, good versus evil, and heaven against hell. History records there have been successes in the spiritual realm, such as the Protestant Reformation, but the overall trend is civilization drifting away from God and the resultant evil decline. As time moves on, the scriptures tell us that evil men shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. When the spiritual and moral forecast appears grim, we can take our encouragement in knowing that because of the resurrection of Christ Jesus, we are assured of victory in the end. Death and the grave may seem to win a temporary battle, but the ultimate victory is ours through our Lord Jesus Christ. May we fight the good fight in the power of His resurrection.

J. Ekis

Compounding ignorance

*As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the LORD, we will not hearken unto thee. But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, as we have done, we, and our fathers, our kings, and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem: for then had we plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil.
Jeremiah 44:16-17*

This text contains the words of the Jewish remnant that had escaped the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem, and then fled to Egypt for supposed protection, in opposition to Jeremiah's warning from the Lord in chapter 42. In that chapter, the remaining leaders of the people had specifically requested Jeremiah to ask the Lord what they should do, and they pledged to follow whatever the Lord said. Jeremiah delivered the answer from the Lord to stay in Judah, where He would preserve them. Yet, knowing of the intent of some to flee to Egypt, He also gave warning against it, and Jeremiah had predicted their rebellious response: "Saying, No; but we will go into the land of Egypt, where we shall see no war, nor hear the sound of the trumpet, nor have hunger of bread; and there will we dwell" (42:14). And so they did, despite their previous pledge.

Now in Egypt, where they had also brought Jeremiah, they are, in our text, refusing the warning from Jeremiah to cease worshipping idols, which was the major reason for the destruction that finally came to their land. As they attempt to justify their continued idolatry based on the appearance of circumstances of "plenty" and "wellness," there is a faint echo from the past in their response. Their ancestors in the wilderness with Moses had also cried, "We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick" (Numbers 11:5). The nation back then had also quickly forgotten how the Lord had judged Egypt and delivered them from Egyptian bondage, and were scorning His miraculous provision of manna, wishing instead for the food of their bondage. Both in the past and in Jeremiah's time, their focus was more on their food than on their freedom or on their spiritual provision.

They also had evidently forgotten, or ignored, the fact that the Lord had clearly pronounced the final judgment of Judah based on the unrestrained idolatry of their king Manasseh, to which they quickly returned after the brief revival under king Josiah. They had mistaken the patience of God, giving them time to repent, for some beneficence of the false gods that they chased. After generations of judgments upon Israelite idolatry, their generation epitomized the saying of Solomon, "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Ecclesiastes 8:11). And so God through Jeremiah completes the prophecy of the destruction of Egypt under the armies of Babylon in the balance of this chapter.

Let us learn the lessons, recognize the power of God and the ignorance of men, and avoid the ruin of compounding ignorance.

As Sure as Ye Can

Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can. – Matthew 27:65

It wasn't enough that He was dead, and that via the torturesome means of the cross. No. Our Lord's enemies, rabid with hatred, implored Pilate with the same fervency of their bloodlust the security of the Roman warrior class to secure the tomb and stifle the hope of the disciples. We do not know with what spirit the Procurator met these demands, but his words serve as an epithet upon the grave not of our Christ, but that of the powers of darkness. "...make it as sure as ye can." This they did with all they had and with the unwitting assistance of demon hordes, but their best efforts were exposed as overwhelmingly powerless early on the first day of the week...

There is no question that if our Lord could have been kept in the tomb, He would have been. The feverish pitch that had culminated from their increasing opposition to His clear claims of Messianic identity and the subsequent mock trial they put Him through made His death and burial a necessity to His foes. Spawned on by Satan himself, the powerful religionists and the ruling might of Rome had banded together in a unique show of force to brutally put down the perceived insurrection of "the King of the Jews." No man came back from the cross. But did they not realize within themselves that this was no ordinary Man? The extra measures were therefore necessary to ensure not just the demise of Jesus of Nazareth, but also the trampling of any incipient rebellion from the disciples of this One Whom they affirmed to be the Christ of God.

But when men and devils take counsel together against the Lord and against His anointed, He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh and have them in derision. The "sureness" of the Roman watch and seal were no match for the Son of God Who could not be holden of death itself. The angels that could have been dispatched earlier to save our Lord from His enemies were instead sent now to proclaim His victory over them. They rolled the stone away not to release our mighty King from the confines of the grave, but to show all men for all time that He had destroyed death and defanged the jaws of Hell itself.

Our adversary could not keep our Lord in the tomb. While this may have caused him to change his strategy, his tactics remain the same. His efforts over two millennia now focus upon barring the door of the human heart, making is as sure as he can, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ should shine therein. But are you not grateful that our Lord broke those bars asunder, like He did those of His own grave, and shone in your heart in all His resplendent resurrection glory? And this because the glad tidings of His triumph over sin, over death, and over Hell were proclaimed to us when we were still in darkness.

May the Spirit of God grant us the opportunity to share the good news with some bound and blinded heart today. Let us remember – the devil's chains are paper thin in comparison to the power of His resurrection! -- D. Murcek

Zabud

And Azariah the son of Nathan was over the officers: and Zabud the son of Nathan was principal officer, and the king's friend.

1 Kings 4:5

There are over a thousand people whose names are recorded in the Bible. Many are merely names included in the lists of the chronicles of the nation Israel, while others have become well-known through the exploits of their lives included in the Bible narrative. Some people have become notable because of their involvement with some special event, even though their specific name is not given. A few names are mentioned once or twice with a brief description or a characteristic accompanying their name. One such person is Zabud, who held an important position and was also described as *the king's friend*.

Zabud is a type of what every believer should become: a friend of the King of Kings. Because of his father Nathan, Zabud probably had some contact with King Solomon, but the Bible does not record how this friendship came about. Most friendships require individuals to have something in common to give them a connection and also providing time spent in each other's presence, as in the case of David and Jonathan. We know from the scriptures that Jesus was a friend of publicans and sinners, and during His earthly ministry, He had contact with all levels of society. As He was being betrayed, our Lord even referred to Judas Iscariot as *friend*. Which may cause us to ponder the question- Would Judas have considered himself to be a friend to Jesus?

Do we carry and conduct ourselves in such a fashion that we would be considered a friend to Jesus? He sees and knows every detail of our lives, and He even knows what is in the hearts and minds of every person. With our sin, selfishness, and unbecoming behavior, the Lord Jesus Christ is the best friend anyone could have. But how do we display our friendship to Him? Do we spend time with Him alone while sharing the innermost concerns of our hearts? Are we not only sharing our needs with Him, but do we also take time to be still and listen to what He may be saying to us? Though Jesus needs no defense from us, are we willing and ready to stand up for Him when we hear Him being maligned? We should read His word as an important letter received from our closest friend. As we spend more time with Him, it should cause us to sense His presence and seek to know His mind on matters in our daily life.

Though Zabud is only mentioned one time in the Bible, he is eternally remembered as a friend to King Solomon. May we live in such a fashion that others may recognize that we are a friend to the King of Kings.

J. Ekis

Discernment with the holy

Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.

Matthew 7:6

Jesus made this metaphorical statement just after condemning hypocritical judgment of others. Within that previous teaching, He also employed metaphorical language of beams and motes within the eyes of hypocritical judges and their brethren whom they feigned to help. In the end of that familiar teaching, which made the major point that, if we don't diligently consider our own blinding sin (the beam in our eye), we have no right, yea, no ability, to judge a less odious fault of a brother (the mote in his eye). That major point is a negative one. However, at the end of that point, Jesus also made the positive point to the hypocrite doing the judging that, if he would remove his own beam of sin, he could in fact pursue the spiritual and moral clarity to be able to help his brother deal with his mote of sin. This positive point teaches us that, if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged (I Corinthians 11: 31), and we might even become useful to the Lord in meekly helping others to bring glory to God (Galatians 6:1).

However, even in pursuing the positive application of ridding ourselves of "beams," seeking humility and meekness, and caring enough for others to help them to see the similar grace of God work to help them with their own weakness, our text reminds us that the help offered must also be received with a right spirit for it to be effective. This exhortation then challenges us to seek the discernment that only the word of God and His Spirit can give. Although Jesus was able to "know what was in man," and therefore rightly predetermine who was truly seeking Him, we have not that ability. He illustrated this even with the Syrophenician woman in Mark 7, where at the first He denied her request, on the surface applying the teaching of our text, but understanding that she would eventually reveal her importunately seeking heart, to which He responded with grace. In contrast, we see His disciples frustrated with the situation, not having such perception.

What is our part, then? Perhaps for us it is to know our frailty, not being able to pre-judge others in the dogs/swine category of spirituality, and to carefully and prayerfully carry the holy treasure of God's truth to those who might hear. Yet, when there is no seeking response from those who reveal themselves to be in such a category, let us pray for the discernment to leave such in the Lord's hands, perhaps for another time and another witness. Paul instructed Timothy to be "instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth" (II Timothy 2:25), yet he told Titus to reject "a man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition" (Titus 3:10). May God help us to understand and rightly apply these exhortations.