

Pastor's Thoughts of the Week

Easter Sunday

There has been much consternation suffered by those in our land who have, for the most part, had to for the first time in their lives, forego the simple freedoms of religion, the liberty to assemble, and the right to traverse the streets of our towns and villages: these rights that we so cavalierly take for granted just because we are Americans. Nothing could make our freedom more dear than suffering the loss of it. We must be grateful to God that we were not born under tyranny. Statists would be glad to forge the chains of repression and limit all our cherished freedoms not for forty days but forever. May these few weeks of draconian regulations put an utter disdain in the hearts of our countrymen.

How strange indeed was it to rise this Easter morning without the prospects of the joyous meeting with other believers to announce in unity our common devotion to the risen Lord of our lives. To peel out the anthem that "Jesus Saves". To proclaim liberty from the bonds of the tyrant Devil. We are free indeed because of that glorious day

Let us turn our attention then to the glorious triumph over death that Jesus accomplished on that third day. Consider with effusive praise this victorious passage:

II Timothy 1:10: But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel:

Death abolished! What an epitaph all the interred internees of the grave have cause to sing and now add to the chorus Life and Immortality to those who believe the gospel!

The mortal has donned the cloak of immortality! Death is swallowed up in victory! That cruel avenger Death has been forever defeated, defanged and destroyed. Those who all their lifetime have lived in the throes of uncertainty now have laid claim to the Living Hope.

Here, my brethren, is a hope to carry forth to our dejected countrymen who for a short space are wrestling with the tedium of inactivity. Come to this fountain of living hope and find that fulfillment and contentedness that only the power of His resurrection affords

Have a blessed day .

Pastor

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

The Gift of Wonder

Then arose Peter, and ran unto the sepulcher; and stooping down, he beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves, and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass.

– Luke 24:12 –

What it must have felt like to be Peter that Easter morning! After hearing Mary's tidings of a risen Jesus, he rushed to the very same tomb which, just three days prior, his traitorous shame and disgrace would not have permitted him near to tread. Could it possibly be – Jesus alive? Or was it more likely that this was the idle tale of emotionally distraught women? Yet, if true, how would his Friend even receive him? Had Jesus heard his treacherous, cursing denial? A torrent of questions must have been cascading through Peter's mind, the speed of which would only be out paced by his escalating, thumping heartbeat.

As Peter reached the tomb, he stooped down. (Remember, all who would have their faith, even a scant faith, rewarded, must be willing to "stoop down" – for the Master said, we must become as a little child.) How the scene before him would have overwhelmed his senses as he beheld the barren tomb with no trace of the Lord but His neatly folded tallit and the empty linen cloth shell of His grave clothes. Indeed, something beautifully and undeniably inexplicable had occurred, and Peter's confused skepticism was transformed into a warm, surprising admiration – a *wonder* – at the glorious occurrence and its momentous import.

We all doubtless remember our first time at the tomb, do we not? No – we were not physically present, like Peter. But for us, when the Holy Ghost was first having His way with our very Peter-like hearts and introducing us to the Risen Christ via the conduit of saving faith, that very same *wonder* that Peter experienced filled our hearts and minds as we grappled with the fact that this neither fairy tale nor merely a Sunday School lesson, but the very Lord of all Creation Who had given Himself for us on Calvary's tree and defeated the icy enemies of Satan, the Curse, Death, and Hell so that we need no longer be bound.

And does not that same *wonder* frequently remind us that, like Peter, while we still have many questions, He has already answered the most important ones, and will answer the others in His time?

And does not that same *wonder* assure us continuously that, like Peter needed to know, our Lord's friendship is stronger than our failures?

And, dear friends, does not that same *wonder* also encourage and propel us, like Peter, to find someone to share the news with of what's happened at that tomb for all who will dare to approach and stoop down at its inviting entrance?

Could Peter possibly have been meditating during his wondering return from the tomb that Easter morning on Psalm 88:10 – "Wilt thou shew wonders to the dead? Shall the dead arise and praise thee? Selah."

I wonder.

First Things First

And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.

Matthew 28: 9, 10

In the 28th chapter of Matthew there are many lessons to glean from the circumstances surrounding the resurrection of our Lord Jesus. One such lesson is learning that the power to testify effectively of the risen Savior requires that we be first be rooted in worship. Worship should take precedence over all other Christian duties and disciplines. On Resurrection Morning the women were told to go quickly to tell the disciples the good news. On their way Jesus greets them. Beholding Him, they hold Him by those precious pierced feet and worship Him. All of the love He had poured out in His life and sacrificial death, now penetrates as they meet Him in the power of His resurrection. After taking time to worship, the Lord sends them on their way to tell the brethren the good news. The supernatural message they were bringing would be much more meaningful now because of the time they spent at His feet.

This order of **worship first** is also reiterated in the outline of the Lord's Prayer...Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. In Luke 10 we are also reminded that Mary was commended for staying at His feet while her sister was busy about serving. And our Lord in John chapter 4 instructs the Samaritan woman that we must worship in spirit and in truth for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. A blessed and humbling thought that the Almighty seeks to have an intimate relationship with us.

As we seek to be more effective in our Christian witness may we always be reminded that the power of our witness emanates from our worship of the Savior. Each day may we seek to join the four and twenty elders and fall down and worship Him that liveth forever and ever.

-JDE

Contentment

*Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.
Hebrews 13:5*

We are bombarded daily in this culture with advertisements aimed at convincing us that we need more. We are amazed at a population saturated with abundance of things when they react to news media threats from would-be forecasters by clearing the store shelves to hoard even more. And none of us is immune to the temptation to wonder if perhaps some of these claims may be correct. But in the midst of a world in disarray, we have the comfort of our Lord reminding us that He is our sufficiency. No matter what unforeseen events may come upon us in this life, we can rest in the everlasting promise that our God is with us. Whether we lack wealth or health or more convenient conditions, the promise of never being forsaken by our heavenly Father can be our source of contentment. The apostle Paul reminded Timothy that godliness with contentment is great gain. And from a cold, dark Roman jail cell he was able to tell the Philippians that he was content whether abased or abounding, yet was thankful for the loving gift that they had sent his way. None of this is normal human reaction. It is learned from hiding in the Rock of our salvation and believing the promises of His presence with His own. Let this reminder establish, strengthen, and settle our hearts and souls. *He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? (Romans 8:32)*

Fear Not, Paul...

Be of good cheer...For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.

– Acts 27:22-24 –

As we tread the pathway of discipleship, there is no doubt that many of us find ourselves returning frequently to the example of the Apostle Paul for strength and encouragement. As we familiarize and remind ourselves of his tireless efforts, his character becomes a distinct and shining beacon of what it means to press for the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. There are so many accurate words we could use to describe the Apostle – bold, tenacious, wise, fiery, resolute, prolific, faithful, *ad infinitum*. One adjective that perhaps does not immediately recommend itself, even though it would be just as biblically accurate, at least at certain moments in his post-conversion life, is *afraid*.

Fear is a necessary result of sin to mankind. It is a painful reminder of our exposure to harm due to our broken fellowship with the Almighty. It was one of Adam's first realizations of that broken fellowship after his fall in the garden – "I heard Thy voice... and I was afraid..." (Gen. 3:10). None of Adam's natural offspring is immune to fear. No matter what height of either courage or bravado is exhibited, each of us shall experience times where fear is overwhelming, threatening to paralyze our confidence and even cease our very breath. "His confidence shall be rooted out of his tabernacle, and it shall bring him to the king of terrors." (Job 18:14)

It is little wonder, then, that even the converted Paul, Christ's Apostle to the Gentiles, was acquainted with fear. In Macedonia, Paul reminds us that "our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were *fears*" (2 Cor 7:5). In Corinth, after being rejected by a number of the Jews, the Lord appears by night in a vision to encourage Paul to "Be not *afraid*, but speak..." (Acts 18:9, *in. loc.*) The ensuing text shows us that the resistance was strong enough within eighteen months to create a civil disruption within the city, so Paul's apprehension was not unfounded. The threat of harm in Corinth was substantial, and Paul knew it. And in our launching text, we see that an angel was dispatched to assuage the Apostle's fear upon the tempest tossed ship.

But just as the realization that even the Apostle Paul experienced fear is a comfort to our hearts, so his response to it should be our antidote to this intrusive pest as well. "Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: *for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me*" (Acts 27:25) Yes! Faith is fear's nemesis. For our God has a purpose for each of us, just as He had for the Apostle.

Friends, as we find ourselves in midst of this historic, global COVID 19 pandemic, fear and anxiety will be a tenacious tormentor of our peace. Much of what we are experiencing is unknown, and the unknown's standard-bearer is always fear. When fearfulness begins to molest our imperfect hearts we must willfully and resolutely, like Paul, choose to "believe God", reminding ourselves of His manifold promises. He has promised that all things work together for our good. He has promised that we are a peculiar people, set apart to Himself. He has promised that He will carry the work that He started in each of us to completion. He has promised that we are come to the Kingdom for such a time as this. He has promised that neither height, nor depth, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor death, nor life, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Brethren, let us boldly be of good cheer, and believe God.

Let us therefore

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 4:16

It is imperative for us as Christ's disciples to establish the spiritual habit of taking in the Word of God with regularity. And yet so often our well-intentioned habits can lose their intentions and become just habits. How gracious are the admonitions from the writer in this chapter, yea in this epistle, to continually remind us that each foregoing warning or glorious reminder demands a response.

Three times in this chapter alone we are reminded by a "therefore". First, we ought to rightly fear coming short of true faith in His promise. Second, we are encouraged to be diligent (labor) to enter into the glorious rest of the people of God that is procured by Christ's work and apprehended by unfeigned faith. Finally, we are reminded that, in the sight of Him with whom we have to do, where there is no hiding place from the word of God that reveals the true intents of our heart, that we have a great high priest, Jesus the Son of God, who has gained victory over sin while feeling the infirmity of human temptation. This final "therefore" brings hope to the truly believing heart, which has heeded the admonitions in this and the previous chapter and now sees that the One whose eyes are as a flame of fire is the very purchaser of our grace and mercy. How then do we heed the offer to come boldly? Certainly not with human demands; but in this context, to even come at all, believing His promise of mercy and grace to help the helpless.

So when you see the therefore, always remember to see "what it's there for."

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Pastor's Thoughts of the Week

II Corinthians 11:3: But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

Our text affords us insights into the beguiling subtlety with which Satan deceives the unsuspecting. Our current distress affords to us an object lesson in the devices of Satan's schemes to destroy humanity. The coronavirus and sin are both invisible enemies. One can see the evident consequences, but the attacker infects stealthily.

In Luke 21 we find these words: "*and take heed to yourselves lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and cares of this life and so that day come upon you*". The greek *aiphnidios* means suddenly and unexpectedly we are today in the throes of a pandemic that no one expected at the beginning of the year and now has suddenly taken control of American society. The pervasiveness of this disease has brought the word pandemic into common vernacular. Epidemics are widespread through a specific location, whereas a pandemic is worldwide and knows no boundaries.

Sin is ubiquitous it infects everyone everywhere. Ecclesiastes 7:20 says "*For there is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not*". Satan is a roaring lion on the prowl going "to and fro in the earth and from walking up and down in it". The influences of his temptations have infected every man, woman and child since Adam and Eve fell in the garden. Covid-19 is a deadly virus and is indiscriminate toward its victims. In Jeremiah 9:21 "*We find for death is come up into our windows and is entered into our palaces to cut off the children from without and the young men from the streets*". Even Prince Charles of England has been afflicted with covid-19 reminding us that sickness and death is no respecter of royalty, rank or social status. Sin has an inevitable consequence for the "*wages of sin is death*" and "*sin when it is finished bringeth forth death*".

Mankind's best and brightest have not been able to mitigate the spread of this highly contagious plague. Epidemiologists tirelessly work to find a cure but every effort has been in vain. And so Psalm 39:5 "*Behold thou hast made my days as an handbreadth and my age is as nothing before thee. Verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity*". The insidious nature of viruses is that we have no cure for them we can arrest symptoms and offer supportive care but cure the virus we cannot. And added to the complication is that viruses mutate as though it had a mind of its own and changes its composition to resist any antibiotic that scientists come up with to combat its progression. Likewise, sin is hydra-headed and adapts to exploit the weakness of the sinner host. Satan employs a vast array of sinful actions to ensnare his victims. When one may find deliverance from certain proclivities, the devil will find some new form of temptation to recapture his prey.

Defeating the virus of sin requires more than man's best efforts. As the song says: "What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus" it is now being posited that by collecting the blood from recovered covid-19 patients and introducing it into the infected patients that the immunity of the recovered victim may be transferred to the sufferer. What a marvel when one considers that Christ was infected with our virus of sin and now through his blood we can be cured from the plague of sin. That Christ became a curse for us to redeem us from our impurity is the very foundation of our salvation. I encourage every listener to be transfused with the blood of Jesus Christ and be eternally healed from the curse of sin.

Have a blessed day .

Pastor

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

Such a Time as This

For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

– Esther 4:14 –

The historical trajectory of what transpires in the Book of Esther pivots in large part upon the above verse. The extraordinary series of events that had catapulted young Hadassah into Ahasuerus's immediate sphere of interest and subsequently transitioned her identity from that of a mere common Jewish maiden into that of Esther the Queen was as inexplicable as it was breath-taking. It must have been unsettling for Esther, at least in those first days and weeks, to have to learn how to assume the duties and obligations of royalty within a Gentile dominion. But human nature being what it is, it is not unreasonable to assume that as time went on, the queen became at least somewhat accustomed to and comfortable with her new-found position.

Perhaps just as she was settling into the advantages as well as the prerogatives of her authority, an unseen Hand was about to disrupt her plans and present her with a critical choice to make. When word came that cousin Mordecai was mourning in sackcloth and ashes in the midst of the city due to some unknown issue, it began a chain-reaction of events that led Esther to a decision-point that we can be sure she had not anticipated when she awakened that morning. For under her very nose, within the sphere of her husband's closest allies, an age-old enemy of the people of God (a descendent of Agag) was executing a well-orchestrated, meticulously crafted scheme to secure for himself a vice-grip on exclusive power and annihilate the Jewish people with it. Esther's decision was courageous. She solicited fasting and prayer, and boldly proclaimed "I will go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish." (Esther 4:16)

Events can change so rapidly in our lives, dear friends. We can awaken one day to find long festering cancers have metastasized, or our pleasant circumstances have been disrupted by forces completely outside of our control, or the security of all that we have known has changed overnight. As I pen these words, mandates are coming forth daily from federal and local authorities (due to the COVID 19 pandemic) that have no written law as their foundation, creating societal upheaval and setting dangerous precedents for the veracity of the civil liberties that we have known as citizens of the United States for generations. Tomorrow no longer seems as certain or secure as it once did.

Whether it is a personal trial or a national challenge, we will frequently find ourselves at the cross-roads of decision. Will we fret, or fast? Will we hide, or "go"? Will we love our lives unto the death, or boldly hazard our lives with the knowledge that God has the outcome in His omnipotent hands?

Our God is in the business of turning common people into kings and queens and then using them for His ends. We can choose to ignore the problem before us, or we can courageously use our sphere of influence to meet it head on with the knowledge that we are come to the Kingdom for such a time as this. Brethren, our Master makes no mistakes. We are precisely where He wants us at this moment in time, and we possess right now the authority to change the course of history with our words, our actions, our love, and our lives. May we boldly choose to be His vessels of enlargement and deliverance!

My heart is fixed...

My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise.

Psalm 57:7

The first six verses of Psalm 57 record what seems to be a hopeless situation for David as he is being pursued by the jealous and vengeful King Saul. David's calamities were described as if he was being swallowed up while surrounded by lionlike men. His enemies had set traps for him, and they were armed with spears and arrows. In verse 5 David stops pouring out his troubles and must exalt his God as he catches a glimpse of Him in all His glory. But like all of us, his focus slips back to his bleak and desperate situation. Then suddenly David draws deep from the well of his soul and determines to be resolved regardless of his circumstances and cries out to the Lord "My heart is fixed..." at which point he erupts with praise to his God. Verse 7 records this abrupt turning point where David's focus turns from all the overwhelming circumstances that surround him...and his heart was fixed! All the evil that his enemy could bring against him could not overcome the power that issues from the praise he declares for his God. In verses 7 through 11 David's heart overflows with the praise that reassures him that his God is greater than his greatest trial.

The many and varied trials and conflicts of David that are recorded in scripture often remind us of the assaults that Satan brings against us. Like David, we also are pursued by the enemy of our soul. Peter is inspired to tell us that Satan is like a roaring lion who seeks to devour us with a goal of producing fear, worry and even the temptation to quit. The next time we find ourselves in a similar situation, may we like David say "my heart is fixed" and find that delivering power of praise for our God.

JDE

Keeping in Touch

(Read Luke 8:42-48)

And Jesus said, Who touched me? Luke 8:45

When this current pandemic subsides and we are able to go about the daily routine of life, we will be confronted with the “new normal”. Varying degrees of social distancing will continue; and it’s even been suggested that handshaking could become extinct. After many weeks of being quarantined, people may continue finding it difficult to connect with others because of the fear of still being able to be infected. All of this can have an adverse effect on our Christian fellowship and also in our evangelistic efforts. Under our “old normal”, how often God’s love was conveyed through us as we embraced the broken hearted, encouraged a person with a pat on the back, or by holding one’s hand as we implored the Heavenly Father to answer our prayer. Even the power of the unspoken witness to the unbelieving world as previously they observed Christians interacting in fellowship with one another could possibly decline in our “new normal”.

Fortunately, there is One who never has and never will withdraw from us if we reach out to Him. He continues to beckon us to draw near, to bear the yoke of the burdens of life together, to abide in Him, and to walk in the light together with Him. This One who left heaven and came to this corrupt and sinful world in order to be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, every aspect of His life was about touching others. Like the woman with the issue of blood who was outcast and unclean, engulfed by the crowd and yet so very much alone, we also desire to get close to Jesus. And although all she wanted was to merely touch the border of Jesus’ garment to find physical healing, she found that doing so resulted in a far deeper healing than she could have possibly imagined. Her life was now forever touched and changed by the Savior.

Whatever happens in the “new normal” we will always be able to touch and be touched by our loving Lord Jesus.

JDE

The manna ceased

*And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year.
Joshua 5:12*

After forty years of wandering in the wilderness, this generation of the children of Israel had witnessed the miracle of God's power to stop the waters of the Jordan river, to allow them to follow Joshua across the dry river bed into the promised land of Canaan. Now after a renewal of the Mosaic covenant and keeping of their first Passover in this new land, Joshua and his people continued the ensuing feast the next day, eating the prescribed unleavened bread with the parched old corn of the new land. Then on the next day they witnessed another miracle from God, as seen in our text. The same power that had fed them daily with this strange "angel's food" for the last forty years had now taken it away. This miraculous provision, which their parents had complained about to Moses in the wilderness, had been this generation's primary sustenance for all of their lives in that wilderness on the other side of Jordan. But now it was time for a significant change. Now they would eat the substantial bread that God would provide through His deliverance of this land into their possession.

And so it is for the spiritual life of the believer in Christ. We may begin our journey as His disciples feasting on the manna of His grace. He nourishes us with the sincere milk of the Word as we desire it in our spiritual state as newborn babes. In our infancy and early childhood, that manna is sufficient to sustain our spirits. But the time must come where He causes the manna to cease. Let us not look back to wonder where it went. Instead, let us look forward to the substantial feeding on the deeper truths of the Word of God in the promised land of the fulness of His Spirit. It's time to equip for battle. That we be no more children..., but grow up into Him who is our head, even Christ, as He fits us together to do our part in His church body.

Pastor's Thoughts of the Week

*Now we know that what things soever the law saith,
it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped,
and all the world may become guilty before God. Romans 3:19*

How often the case we see Jesus shutting the mouth of His critics. In Matthew 22 His fiercest adversaries, the Herodians, the Saducees, and the Pharisees, "had taken counsel how they might entangle him in his talk". They were flummoxed and "no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions". And so shall it be for all of those who now construct their specious arguments against God and His Word in our unbelieving generation. They hurl invective at the Divine Savior as they wreath the mocking crown of scorn to support their fantasy that Jesus was a deluded dreamer-the son of Joseph and not the Son of the Most High. They may now hold sway over the skeptical masses but the hour soon draws nigh when "every mouth will be stopped" as they stand before God in naked isolation. The Lord will demand of them "Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless."

What can we say if we live our lives in disrespect of his commandments, if we reject His tender appeals to come to Him, if we trample under foot the blood of the covenant, if we refuse to give glory to the One who granted us life. He who healed us from so many afflictions, who supplied us with every meal, who filled our lungs with oxygen, who caused our heart to beat countless times, who times without number the Holy Spirit strove and convicted the conscience but "ye would not come" to him. How many the times the voice of conscience bade "Come unto me" only to be met with impenitence and hardness of heart. What defense can be proffered? There is nothing we can say when the Almighty makes holy inquisition of our lives and we are found ungrateful and unbelieving. We who have arrogantly questioned the Everlasting God will then hear Him say: "Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me". There will be silence in heaven in that hour when God puts to silence "the ignorance of foolish men". Our text affords us a foreshadowing of that dreadful hour.

How blessed will be the outcome for the humble in heart who have visited the fountain of the water of life and have drunk freely thereof. The hour of final revelation will find them ceaselessly, fluently speaking, with mouths that can never be stopped, of the wonders of His saving grace.

Have a blessed day .

Pastor

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

The Hill Mizar

O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar.

– Psalm 42:6 –

We live in a very advanced age, yet the most troubling problems of the human condition remain the same since Adam's fall in the Eden. The psalmist was facing one of man's greatest tormentors when he penned the forty second Psalm, and one that still continually taunts not just the fearful and the unbelieving, but also the most spiritual among us, even today – depression.

Sadness is as natural to man as laughter, and perhaps even more so. Consider the Lord Jesus. We are on sound theological footing to assert that the Savior knew the whole panorama of human emotion, including joy. But note that it is never once mentioned by the Gospel writers that He laughed, while it *is* recorded that He wept, and that on multiple occasions (at the tomb of Lazarus, over Jerusalem, with strong crying and tears in the garden, etc.). Indeed, Isaiah's seemingly natural appellation for the great sin-bearer is that He would be a "man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:5)

A life free from sadness would indicate a callous and impenetrable heart. But sadness and depression, while a difficult and necessary corollary to the curse, need not be a permanent state for any believer. It may overwhelm for a moment or even a season, but ultimately serves a sovereign purpose, becoming the vestibule to the sanctuary of exultant worship.

Being "cast down" makes us vulnerable to the promptings of the Spirit of God and permits us to recall His plan and purpose for us. Hence the psalmist's recollection of the hill Mizar. This place has no national import. It boasts no great battle or special event or crowning achievement of the Israelites. Nonetheless, it was evident to the psalmist that God *did something* there – something *uniquely special* – and He did it for the him *personally*. Whatever it was, we are not told, but it served as a timeless Ebenezer of God's undying devotion to the saddened writer, enough so to permit him to pivot in his heart and mind toward a deep communion and happy hope that the same God who met him at Mizar is with him still.

Dear friend, do you remember your hill Mizar(s)? The place or moment (or both) where the God of all creation – the very Ancient of Days Himself – condescended to meet *you* with a sense of His presence that was palpable, and wrought a deliverance for *you* that was so inexplicable that you *know* it was undeniably your Savior. If He loved you that much *then*, does He love you any less *now*? If He was with you *there*, in all of His sovereign faithfulness and care, will He abandon you *here*? Is there any logical reason to remain cast down in what you are facing? No, no, no – a thousand times, no! Let us traverse this moment of sadness and hope in God. Let us praise Him Who is the health of our countenance, and our God!

Meet Bezaleel
(Exodus 31:2-5)

And I have filled him with the spirit of God...Exodus 31:2a

There is an abundance of lessons to learn from biblical characters. Some have intricate details describing their lives, while others are more obscure; but all of the accounts have spiritual truths and principles to impart to us today.

One of the lesser known biblical characters is Bezaleel who is mentioned a few times in Exodus and Chronicles. Just the meaning of his name- "*in the shadow of God*" - is enough to cause us to contemplate the depth of such a position. We are reminded in Psalm 91 that he who dwells in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. Was it because Bezaleel dwelt in that shadow that God sanctions him for a special purpose by filling him with His Spirit? Being filled with God's Spirit endowed Bezaleel with the wisdom, knowledge, and skill to become the main architect of the tabernacle and the articles used in the worship of God. When completed, the tabernacle would be the place where the fire of God's glory would descend and emanate wondrously in the sight of Israel. This glory of God's presence was to be the focal point upon which Israel's faith and culture revolved. Because of Bezaleel's spirit-filled obedience, God used him to impact the lives of countless others.

Bezaleel's example is a good one for us to emulate in our own lives. If we abide everyday in the Lord's shadow, He will provide us with the opportunity to be emptied of ourselves and filled and instructed by His Spirit. Only then can God take our efforts to do His works whether great or small, recognized or unnoticed by men, and use all for His glory. If we fail in this, all of our efforts can only be fueled by our own carnal energy and knowledge and will therefore be deficient of the necessary heavenly power that impacts the lives of others.

O Lord, may your Spirit that filled Bezaleel, fill us this day as we humbly perform your works, and may Your glory shine through us.

JDE

Draw Nigh

*Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you.
James 4:8*

What a promise we have in this simple statement from James. He will draw nigh to you. God will! Though preceded by a four-word condition, the resulting benefit of having close relationship with the Creator of the universe should make the condition a welcome invitation. As Jacob served his seven years with such great anticipation for the immediate desire of his heart, so that those years seemed but a few days, how much more should our desire for the presence of God in our lives make this condition fall into similar perspective? This desire aligns us with the aspirations of the psalmists:

“When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek.” (Ps. 27:8)

“As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.” (Ps. 42:1)

“O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is.” (Ps. 63:1)

“My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.” (Ps. 84:2)

And yet, how much do we pursue this exhortation to draw nigh to God? What is it that keeps us from doing so? As we behold by faith the glory of the Lord through the “glass” of His word, can we be overwhelmed by the sight of His majesty, as much as Jacob was overwhelmed by the sight of his bride, so that the distractions of this life cannot detain us from our pursuit of Him? We can’t if we don’t focus on this promise. Yet, we need His presence every passing hour. So, whatever our hindrance, let us lay aside those weights and sins that so easily beset us, and draw nigh to Him who has promised to reciprocate.