

Way of life

*For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life.
Proverbs 6:23*

The Proverbs speak of the way of life explicitly three different times. The next time it appears is in Proverbs 10:17: “He is in the way of life that keepeth instruction: but he that refuseth reproof erreth.” After that, Proverbs 15:24 says: “The way of life is above to the wise, that he may depart from hell beneath.” In all of these instances there is an implied need for a change of direction. Both our text and Proverbs 15:24 include the need for reproof, which is coupled with instruction. Reproof is an expression of disapproval, or being told what we have done wrong, normally coupled with concern for our correction, which requires instruction. Its connection with instruction differentiates reproof from rebuke, where we may be told simply that we are wrong, without any further information about a remedy. Although both are needed for our spiritual and physical welfare on different occasions, while a rebuke may stop us in our tracks if we will hear it and realize our error, it is the instruction of a reproof that leads to repentance, if heeded, or “kept.” That repentance, then, turns us to the way of life, away from the path that leads to hell beneath. Thus, it is clear that to refuse to hear reproof is foolish, yea, stupid.

Our text provides sources where we can find both the reproofs and instruction we need to turn us into the right way of thinking. First, the commandment is a lamp. We shine a lamp when it is dark, to find sufficient landmarks to guide us into the right way. When hunters enter the woods early in the morning before sunrise, our lamp is sufficient to help us find the markings, which we left in the daytime, needed to guide us to our destination. So as we find and understand God’s commandments, written to us by the light of His countenance, they will turn us to or from our direction to be able to navigate to the right destination through the darkness. But then, the law is light. It is said that the word for light here means illumination – like the sun. When the sun rises and illuminates the woods, we see everything in one clear picture, and often need to adjust our position even from where the lamp led us. So as the various commandments and teachings of our Lord comprise the entire corpus of His perfect law of liberty, we see the entire framework of His loving plan for our good in the eternal way of life. We then understand that every reproof, whether from His word or His messenger, is for our good, and we desire to keep the loving instruction delivered to us by the light of His word and Spirit.

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

What Might Have Been

If it had not been the LORD... Psalms 124:1

It is a frightening yet necessary exercise to consider what our lives might have been "if it had not been (for) the Lord". At whatever juncture that transformative moment of conversion took place, it is certain that our lives would have been much worse had it not been for the Lord. What benign influences have gently guided our steps since we surrendered our future to the Good Shepherd? A life we once were so enamored by with its arrogance, pride, and lust would most certainly have brought us to a myriad of sorrows. The carnal mind often ruefully looks back at the missed opportunities and drowns itself in the contemplations of "If only I had done this thing or that". The believer who is led of the Spirit never has to wallow in that slough of despond; to the contrary, he is confident that his destiny has been assuredly charted by the unvacillating hand of our Redeemer.

If it had not been for the Lord:

The Woman at the Well would be pleading for a drop of water in the fires that shall never be quenched. Zaccheaus would now be counting his ill-gotten wealth in the realms of eternal destitution. The Thief on the Cross would have joined his blaspheming companion in the fires of perdition. The Centurion would now be begging for a mercy that he had forgotten to show toward the Son of God. Saul of Tarsus would this moment be in the dungeon of damnation pining over the worthlessness of his self-righteousness.

We might rightly add our names to this list because if it had not been for the Lord, who can tell what depths of misery and depravity we may have plumbed by now? Have we not all encountered those "friends", coevals of our past lives, who now we find are bonded to inveterate dissipations or have suffered through bad marriages or felt the pangs of severe disappointments owed to sons and daughters who have taken the satanic bait. For a moment we muse "This could have so easily happened to me"...if it had not been for the Lord.

Believers are not immune to troubles. But the steadying leadership of the Holy Spirit encourages us to trust the only One who can work all things together for good. Innumerable benefits have accompanied our brief journey here. Walking with the Lord was the best decision we have ever made. We have wisely chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away.

Have a blessed day,

Pastor

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

Habits With Heart

Evening, morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud and he will hear my voice

Psalms 55:17

It's been said that man is a creature of habit. A definition of habit is *an acquired behavior pattern regularly followed until it has become almost involuntary*. Of course, some habits can be extremely beneficial, while others are a nuisance or even harmful. A person can labor along forcing themselves to develop a good habit, but it eventually becomes ingrained in their routine.

Every Christian should incorporate good habits into their lifestyle. After coming to Christ old things pass away, while all things become new. Many new things come about because of cooperating with the Holy Spirit that indwells the believer. Though this is not a complete list, these are some standard habits that should be a part of a believer's life: Bible reading and memorization, prayer, church attendance, sharing the faith, thanksgiving, joyfulness, and a loving spirit. The early Christians demonstrated these habits in the Book of Acts, and the results impacted the world. We see from today's text that David committed time to pray in the morning, at noon, and in the evening. Daniel practiced the same habit of praying three times a day, and even the Persian decree could not deter him from his prayer time. When the early disciples were scattered because of persecution they continued the habit of preaching the Gospel wherever they landed. The Apostle Paul continued to pray and sing praises though chained in a jail cell.

The unfortunate side of good Christian habits is that they can be done in a perfunctory fashion, depriving the believer of the blessing from each discipline. Loving the Lord our God with all our hearts, souls, and minds should also be reflected in the habits we develop. The heathen pray with vain repetitions and think they are heard because of much speaking. Prayer with heart reaches the ears of God, as in the case of Cornelius (Acts 10). Our prayer habits can be revived if we realize that we are alone in the presence of God when we pray and He hears us and wants to speak to our spirit. Reading several chapters a day from the Bible is a good habit, but what good does it do if we read without a desire to learn more about our Lord and commune with Him? How many people attend church out of a sense of duty rather than an expression of love for the Lord?

May we develop habits with a heart that will increase the quality of our walk with the Lord, and may His Spirit remind us when we are just going through the motions.

J. Ekis

True learning

*For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.
Proverbs 2:6*

There seems to be much emphasis in some factions of our present culture on education and information. Many seek to be known by the number or sources of their degrees. We have heard reports of parents who have used deceptive means to have their children accepted into prestigious universities. There are now employers for somewhat simple occupations that require some kind of college degree. Some people measure intelligence by the number of books they've read, or listened to, or by their ability to dump their opinions into the internet clouds. Some parents of elementary students are persuaded that their children are better educated because they use a computer. Yet, as we stand back and listen to the ideas and concepts being foisted upon this generation by many educated elites, it becomes evident that there is a great famine of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding.

King Solomon, the writer of this proverb, indicates plainly here that wisdom comes from the LORD. He knew that by experience, having requested and received from Him his own wisdom for governing the LORD's people. The interesting construction of our text provides an essential mix. Knowledge alone is not sufficient for wisdom, but must be integrated in a context of understanding to yield wisdom. All this must come from the LORD. On the contrary, when men seek knowledge alone, or even understanding apart from that which God gives, it is not surprising that they become devoid of wisdom. Then we hear of outlandish conclusions and applications of knowledge that become foolish. They deny the obvious in the name of what they claim they can do with their knowledge. For example, one who could use medical knowledge wisely, to relieve the effects of disease or injury, instead purports to change a person's sex by chemical or physical mutilation, and foolishly destroys lives by denying the obvious order that the LORD designed in His creation. The apostle's words are fulfilled, "professing themselves to be wise, they became fools" (Romans 1:22).

However and wherever we seek learning, let us never forget that it is at least pointless, and at worst evil, if not coupled with wisdom and understanding from the LORD. "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding" (Proverbs 4:7).

Troubling God

Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them.

– Isaiah 1:14 –

For the student of Scripture, there is no doubt that God is good and benevolent. He loves because He is love, He delights to show mercy, He looks to bless, He comforts, He guides, He heals, He restores. The host of gifts that His children enjoy are the result of His gracious nature. Mankind in general, made in His image and likeness, and believers in particular, adopted as His children, are the focus of His ever-flowing goodness. Yet a truth we must also embrace is that, as humans, it is more than possible to trouble this benevolent God. What is it that troubles Him? Insincerity and hypocrisy.

Even as believers, insincerity can be a nagging issue. We are unfortunately prone to become overly comfortable with God's goodness, forgetting that He owes us nothing. Our lives are to be a living sacrifice. But if that sacrifice be one of obligation rather than gratitude or self-will rather than surrender, then it is tainted with the leaven of hypocrisy. Insincerity creeps into our lives when we are careless in the inner man – when we act before we pray, when we speak before we think, when we commit before we count the cost. We can do good and right and necessary things that would normally cheer the heart of God – go to church, give in the offering, sing in the choir, teach a Sunday School class, clean up around the church building, witness for Christ, etc. – but if these are done with anything but a burning love for God and an intense zeal for His cause, they are at risk of being offerings of nothing more than wood, hay, and stubble. Even our daily Bible reading and prayer can be executed as a matter of fleshly ritual rather than a habit of consecrated holiness.

If we are honest, we are all most likely guilty of such insincerity in our sanctification at times, and it is spiritually healthy to remember that this troubles our Father. For, in so remembering, it will drive us to the throne of grace to obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Like a little child who intently desires to please his daddy is heartbroken when he finds that he has disappointed him with a misaligned action, so should we embrace a similar spirit when we realize we have troubled our heavenly Father. We must then openly confess our insincerity and ask His assistance to fortify our hearts unto unhyprocritical living going forward.

Let us strive to be real about our lives before God at all times. Let us worship as redeemed sons and daughters of the Most High. Let us assemble with anticipation as the family of God and Church of the Firstborn. Let us serve Him wholly and zealously in all things. Let us love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity (Eph. 6:24).

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Contemplating Infinitude

eremiah 32:17: Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee:

For the Maker of heaven and earth, it must be admitted, nothing is too hard. When one tries to catalog the infinitesimal functions that must be maintained to sustain life on this fragile planet, we must stand in awe of our omnipotent Creator. The Fibonacci sequence is a unique ratio that can be used to describe the proportions of everything from nature's smallest building blocks, such as atoms, to the most advanced patterns in the universe, like the unimaginably large celestial bodies. Nature relies on this innate proportion to maintain balance. It was in 1230 AD that Fibonacci discovered this "golden ratio" but it lay hidden in the genius of God's handiwork for millennia before that revelation was made manifest.

Jeremiah employs the ever so rare exclamatory "Ah Lord God!" to give expression to the contemplations of God's great power. Scientists weary themselves in trying to plumb the depths of the inexhaustible mysteries of a God who is "past finding out". To their credit they have discovered some of these enigmas, at least in part; but to do so they have had to depend on the gifts of inquisition, reasoning, and knowledge provided by a wisdom endowed by their Creator. The truly wise man upon standing at the threshold of the unknown removes his shoes and recognizes that the natural mind can only carry us "here and no further". Pusillanimous man should fall to his knees in acknowledged humility in light of such an overwhelming presence. The nearly inarticulate "Ah" is the best a finite mind can utter. We stand mouths agape as we ponder the myriad of mysteries the Almighty has laid before us to consider and then to draw the ineluctable conclusion that with God nothing is too hard.

And so the passage we are to consider tacitly invites us to take hope in our God who has the mastery of all things temporal and eternal. His creation provides to us evidential proof that there is nothing, even to the minutest detail, that does not ultimately come under His purview. We may, with our limited understanding, find ourselves confronted with seemingly perplexing problems with no apparent resolution, but what solace we find in taking these "Gordian Knots" to the One "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge".

As children we all stood before our father or mother with some irresolvable problem that interrupted our puerile joy, be it a broken toy or knotted shoelace or scraped knee or a thousand other complications. We watched nonplussed as they were able to brush away the annoyance with such ease as to assure us that no problem was too hard that they could not ameliorate it. How much more does our heavenly Father invite us to "cast our cares" upon Him whose "great power and outstretched arm" is sufficient to sustain us through all the perplexities of a hostile world and finally deliver us to the realms of glory where the nettlesome vexations shall molest us no more.

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

Spring Cleaning

Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.

Revelation 1:5

Springtime is a time of renewal and refreshment. The warmer weather and the longer daylight seem to lift our spirits and energize us. It also motivates us for the annual spring cleaning when the dirt and grime of winter are chased from homes and washed from cars. Having things clean again can produce a feeling of relief and improve our outlook.

As believers in Christ, we also need a time of cleansing. Coming to Christ for salvation is preceded by seeing our need for forgiveness from sin. Prior to conversion, we had stained our souls with a lifetime of accumulated offenses against a holy and righteous God. The sins of inward thoughts and outward actions had us on the broad road to destruction. After trying to find some self-relief remedy for the guilt of sin, we concluded that there was only one answer. As the hymn states- *What can wash away our sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus! What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus!* When the light of the gospel message dawned, we had nothing but praise for the One who *loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood*. Being cleansed from our sins removed a heavy burden and set us free to live a new life. But all too soon we discovered that the joy and newfound fellowship with our God could be interrupted by the filth of sin we would accumulate as we walked through this life. The sanctification process while growing in Christ will often reveal the sins that still lurk within us. Pride and selfishness can surface reminding us of the need for daily cleansing. In John 13, Jesus taught the disciples about the need for daily cleansing by washing their feet. This custom was performed by a host for the guests who had their feet defiled as they came to visit. At first, this lesson is not accepted by Peter until Jesus reminds him that to have part with Jesus he must be washed. As Christians, our names are written in heaven after being washed by the blood of Christ, and our fellowship with God is enabled by being washed of our daily sins. As believers, *if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, His son, cleanses us from all sin*. The Lord's Prayer also reminds us to ask for forgiveness of our sins.

As Spring is known for being a season of cleansing, God's children should take time to seek the Lord's forgiveness for the sins that so easily beset them. May we pray as David did: *wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.* ~J. Ekis

Divine Conditions

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shall believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

– Romans 10:9 –

One of the repeated mantras of the modern church is that God's love is unconditional. While that may be true, like many biblical verities, it needs counterbalanced with its equal and opposite scriptural doctrine to provide us the whole counsel of God. True – God loved us while we were yet in our trespasses. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. God is love. Nothing can change this about Him. Yet it is not God's love alone that saves and sanctifies fallen men. There are conditions to be met for entrance into Heaven and usefulness upon earth. Our text reminds us that human action is part of God's work. God does not save everyone He loves, but only those who respond to His offer. And justification is not the only conditional aspect of the salvation experience. There are many others. Below are just a few considerations from the pages of God's eternal Word...

Baptism is based upon the condition of sincere belief in the finished work of Christ. Philip made this clear to the Ethiopian eunuch. "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest [be baptized]" (Acts 8:37). Baptism without belief is useless.

Our prosperity in the things of God is based upon the condition of our regard for, study of, and adherence to the Word of God. "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do all that is written therein; for then shalt thou make thy way prosperous, and then shalt thou have good success." (Joshua 1:8). How do we esteem God's Word? Are we attentively reading the Bible? Do we believe it? Do we obey it?

Our usefulness to God's purpose and plan is predicated upon the condition of our spiritual temperature. "Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing..." (Matthew 5:13). How's our saltiness?

Our very discipleship is built upon the condition of our continuance in Christ's word. "Then said Jesus..., If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed." (John 8:31). Are we still in the game?

Our confidence in God is based upon the condition of our heart. "Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God." (1 John 3:21). How's the conscience? Are we striving to keep our hearts pure?

Our spiritual health is based on our confession of known sin. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9) When did we last confess our sins to our Father? Are we keenly aware of our faults, and taking them to Jesus?

Our invincibility is founded upon the condition of God's allegiance to His own. "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31). Thank God! Do we act like we believe this?

Let us bask in God's love while we ensure that we abide by His conditions for our good and His glory!

Judges 16:28: And Samson called unto the LORD, and said, O Lord GOD, remember me,

I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once,

One of scripture's saddest declaratives must be "he wist not that the LORD was departed from him". Samson's love of a women was stronger than his love for God and so he forfeited the treasured gift of God's power for the satisfaction of temporal lust. Many are the once stalwart defenders of the truth who have fallen prey to similar follies, having esteemed the pleasures of this world a greater recompense than the approbation of the Almighty. Samson frittered his power away by his uxorious doting on Delilah but at the end the mighty God would return to frustrate the prostituted betrayal and to save the backslidden judge. Thus was the unenviable plight of the Old Testament saints who, though experiencing divine visitations, extended dialogues, and impartation of miraculous wonders, yet they did not have the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. "God having provided some better thing for us."

Believers now have a supreme advantage in the spiritual warfare that Satan relentlessly wages against the forces of good. We have a power that far exceeds the physical prowess of a Samson. We have the indwelling Spirit of *El Gibbor* (the mighty God)! The devil employs the deceptive power of intimidation to cower his victims into servile submission but "though this world with devils filled should threaten to undo us; we will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us". Truly greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world.

It may be so that we have become innervated in the work of the Lord-wearied with the daily struggles to maintain a consistent walk with the Master. Though we would deny having plunged full-bore into the sybaritic failures of a Samson, yet we would admit that the siren call of other things has often distracted us. And like Samson we can still expectantly plead "Remember Me" in the hour of our greatest need. It is a testament to the Lord's faithfulness that He answers us and strengthens us when we least deserve it.

It has always been an exercise in bewilderment for me when I have examined the list of the righteous legends in Hebrews 11 and to see that voluptuary, Samson, on the roster while Josiah, Ruth, and Jeremiah are conspicuously overlooked. The answer lay assuredly in the inscrutable counsels of "the Lord, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth," who delighted in a morally failed man that nevertheless, at the end, called unto the Lord "Remember Me".

Have a blessed day,

Pastor

Prepare, But Trust God

For I will not trust in my bow, neither will my sword save me.

Psalm 44:8

The beginning of the 44th Psalm reflects on what God had done for His people in the past, while also reminding them that all of their accomplishments were not the result of their own efforts. Driving out the heathen and occupying the Promised Land was accomplished by the Lord Jehovah because of His favor. Israel's part was only to obey and trust the Lord, but overcoming the many obstacles was the direct result of God's divine empowerment. Moses had his rod, Joshua had his army, Gideon had his sword, and David had his sling, but the victory was achieved only because of the divine power of God.

The journeys of Israel and many people of faith in the Old Testament teach us valuable spiritual lessons; some are examples to emulate while others are to avoid. Today's verse reminds us that our trust must go beyond the physical tools that are provided for us in the Lord's service. With the advent of the internet, we have instantaneous and inexhaustible resources at our fingertips to equip us with the knowledge we need to better serve the Lord. There is an accumulation of several centuries of writings by men who were greatly used by God available for our reading. We can read about the lives of great reformers, evangelists, missionaries, and martyrs for inspiration. Commentaries, devotionals, and an endless supply of informational Christian literature can also be accessed online. The abundance of materials to help expand our spiritual knowledge to strengthen us seems to have no end. Preachers may attend seminaries, laymen can participate in seminars, and all Christians can read and pray. However, just like Moses, Joshua, Gideon, and David, our ultimate trust is still in the power of our God to whom we pray and not in the resources we have accumulated in preparation to serve Him or even in the words of our prayer itself.

We must be careful not to trust our efforts or tools of the trade in Christian service. Churches can trust their programs and forget to trust God for results. Any time we have an opportunity to serve the Lord, we should take advantage of all available resources and invest in preparing our hearts as much as possible to maximize our effectiveness, yet our trust is not in what we can do, but in what HE can do. In each opportunity to present the gospel, we should demonstrate a spirit of love coupled with a clear outline of the plan of salvation, and trust that God speaks to hearts above and beyond what we have done. The Psalmist said that he wouldn't trust his bow or sword, and neither should we. Remember that it is not by might, nor by power, but by His Spirit, saith the Lord. ~J. Ekis

Words

There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health.

Proverbs 12:18

Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad.

Proverbs 12:25

There are many proverbs about the power of the tongue and the words that come forth from it. We also have great warning about the negative power of the tongue in the third chapter of James. Why so many warnings and exhortations? The answer is obvious – we often continue to live like we’ve not heard them. We seem to need these reminders around every corner of life. Even though we’ve read them, meditated on them, and even memorized some of them, our reactive fleshly nature, which still lurks within, will often subdue their power just when we need them most. In the two proverbs before us, we are again reminded that our words can have powerfully negative and positive influence. The metaphor of a piercing sword is most appropriate. To contemplate its force is beyond typical human experience. Most of us have not felt the pierce of a literal sword; at least those of us who remain alive. The sword that pierces vital organs brings death. Yet, many of us have probably had the opportunity to feel the emotional piercing of words upon our heart. Even worse, many of us have inflicted such emotional pain upon others with our words. Such is not the way of the Spirit of God; and when He dwells within, He cries against our spirit, to deliver us from this body of death and lead us to repentance.

Contrariwise, the balance of these proverbs exhorts us to be not so foolish, but to instead allow His wisdom to teach us to speak healing words. Just as a man may physically stoop because of infirmity, the hearts of many stoop due to spiritual or emotional heaviness, which can come from many sources of this life – even from piercing words. In these situations, we have great opportunity to offer a good word, to lift up a stooping heart and bring it healthy gladness. While this seems to be a natural or spiritual gift for a few, whom we may rightly emulate, it must be a learned attitude and behavior for many of us. Our nature and our culture easily train us to pierce. It is natural to want to “have the last word.” So the prophet’s necessary exhortation is: “*cease to do evil; learn to do well*” (Isaiah 1:16-17). Let us therefore seek to attend this class of the Holy Spirit often, that we may learn from Him how to speak the right word in due season (Proverbs 15:23), to lift a stooping heart, not only out of heaviness, but unto the knowledge of Him who will heal the soul.

Fat Souls

There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty. The liberal soul shall be made fat; and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.

– Proverbs 11:24-25 –

Physical obesity is an American epidemic. Inactivity, overeating, and food supplies that are filled with all kinds of preservatives are major contributing factors. But our society is schizophrenic when it comes to physical beauty – telling everyone “let you be you” and “you are beautiful”, yet simultaneously peddling chiseled and toned physiques as the apex of physical evolution and the should-be goal of every man or woman, regardless of their inherited physical frame, genetic predispositions, metabolic DNA, etc. Whatever the case, being “fat” still carries the stigma of shame and embarrassment, regardless of age, race, creed, or socio-economic status.

It is intriguing, however, that the Word of God paints an antithetical picture regarding our soulish frame. Yes, the Bible actually invites us to be spiritually obese! In biblical terms, leanness of the inner man is a sign of spiritual poverty. God wants our souls fat and flourishing – well fed, continuously tended to, and constantly increasing! What’s more remarkable is that achieving such fullness of spirit is not the product of feeding one’s own soul, but filling others’; not the result of gorging, but of giving.

The fact is, we all are stewards of God’s gifts. He has showered a multitude of blessings upon each of His dear children. They come in many forms – melodic voice, monetary reserve, communicative ability, poetic prowess, tenderness of heart, et. al. The body of Christ is fitly fashioned with all that the church needs, and each of us as members has our storehouse of God’s treasures for which we are responsible. The key, however – what are we doing with our Lord’s entrustment? If we are merely sitting by, leanness of spirit will follow us to our grave. But if, as our text in Proverbs exhorts us, we are scattering our Master’s pantry with robust effort to a lost world and watering those who are parched in this dry and thirsty land where no water is, then God will see to it that our own souls are well nourished. Like the disciples, if we distribute the fish and loaves in hand to the multitude, there will be twelve generous baskets of fragments left over – one for each of us – and we will feast under the smile of our Savior.

Do you have a fat soul? Are you giving out what God has given you? Or are you withholding more than is meet? Away with spiritual miserliness. Let us strive to be generous of spirit, looking for every opportunity to distribute our Master’s goods as He has instructed. Only then will we be full, flourishing, and living the rich inner life that He has graciously intended for each of His own. — D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Liberation

*And when Jesus saw her, he called her to him, and said unto her,
Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. Luke 13:12*

But now see here a sudden interruption to His lesson. Jesus spies a woman in dire exigency. It is so much like the Savior to prioritize this woman's need and thus puts the sermon on pause as His great heart of compassion draws him towards this pitiable victim of Adam's curse. No question passes the lips of the Heavenly healer as was sometimes the case. He needn't ask "What would you have me to do?". It is not in response to her petition for a blessing for she is there for no other reason but to absorb the ministry of His teaching. She is resigned to living with a burden she has borne for 18 years. But the Master came to set at liberty those who were bruised and so He lays His hands upon her and dispenses the healing while dispersing the curse! Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. In a word her body liberated, her life was changed.

We must pause here and take in the spiritual implication of this miracle. Here we have a woman bearing a heavy burden for many years. She is stooped and bowed down. Every day the burden seems heavier and harder to bear. This bespeaks the burden of sin that weighs us all down-which innervates and vitiates and so saps us of the joy of life. Jesus knew that man living under the weight of sin needed a deliverer and so he exclaimed "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest". Sisyphus, a figure of Greek mythology who was condemned to repeat forever the same meaningless task of pushing a boulder up a mountain, only to see it roll down again. Life without Christ and the hope of heaven is a burdensome weight. In 1949 The French existentialist Albert Camus wrote the Myth of Sisyphus in which he compares the absurdity of man's life with the situation of Sisyphus. That life is inherently devoid of meaning and consequently absurd, but humans will forever search for meaning. From a Christian perspective, John Bunyan in his Pilgrim's Progress depicts the burden of sin by describing a load on the back of his protagonist Christian

"Up this way, therefore, did burdened CHRISTIAN run; but not without great difficulty, because of the load on his back. that just as CHRISTIAN came up to the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and began to tumble; and so continued to do till it came to the mouth of the sepulchre, where it fell in, and I saw it no more. Then was CHRISTIAN glad and lightsome, and said, with a merry heart, "He hath given me rest by his sorrow, And life by his death."

And so in our text, the woman who bore the heavy burden was loosed by one touch from the Great Physician Psalm 55:22: Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee:

For every Christian, the sin burden was lifted at Calvary. Our soul has been liberated from the ill and odious effects of the curse though the flesh remains subject to the corruption of Adam's sin. The glad day is coming for complete deliverance from this corruptible carcass that still must bear up under the onslaught of the devil's curse.

Woman thou art forever loosed and now empowered to live that straight life of godliness! Overcoming, victorious living is the birthright of every believer. We are not to cower and wither under the seductions of the evil one as some pusillanimous weakling. Be Strong in the Lord and the power of his might!

Have a blessed day.

Pastor

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

Discouragement's Defeat

He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law.

– Isaiah 42:4 –

We are all quite familiar with it. It is something more than merely resident to the human condition. Its common cadence beats steadily upon the inner man, rudely rearing its head at the most vulnerable of times and unrelentingly weighing heavily upon a broken heart. It can make the heavens seem as brass and test the resilience of our faith with the bitterest of pangs. We speak of the phenomenon of discouragement. How often have we all faced this wicked twin of the Giant of Despair? How frequently does he intend to assault us still? Oh, what are we to do about this Goliath who waves his spear at us, taunting our fortitude and defying our God?

As with all human problems, our solution is found in our near-kinsman Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. Isaiah's prophetic text foretold that our Lord – the last Adam, tempted in all points as we are and faced with far stiffer trials than any of us – would not be discouraged. Think about that for a moment. When His parents, privy to the angelic messages of Bethlehem and witness daily to His untainted childhood in Nazareth, did not yet understand His mission when He was twelve years old, He was not discouraged. When (as would seem to be the natural conclusion from the silence of the Gospel writers) His "father," Joseph, passed into eternity, leaving a void in His human life and Him with the untimely and significant responsibility of headship of the sizeable Nazarene household, He was not discouraged. When His cousin and forerunner, John, sent doubting embassy to Him, He was not discouraged. When He learned of John's vicious and unjust prison-bound execution, He prayed, but was not discouraged. When His dear friends and kindred souls, John and James, yet misunderstood His message and what spirit they were of, He was not discouraged. When the crowds dissipated and His popularity waned, transforming into burgeoning and devil-inspired opposition, He was not discouraged. When His trusted confidant Peter rebuked Him, and then later denied Him, He refused to be discouraged. When His friend, Judas, betrayed Him, He was not discouraged. When the High Priest refused to believe His claim and right to His reception as Messiah, He was not discouraged. When the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Roman soldiers railed upon Him like brute beasts from the foot of His cross, He was not discouraged. When the two on the road to Emmaus did not recognize Him, He was not discouraged. When Thomas doubted His resurrection, He was not discouraged. When Peter grew grieved by His patient, restorative questioning, He was not discouraged.

Brothers and sisters – what are you discouraged about today? Look unto your Lord as the paragon of the faith that pleases the Father. Commit your cause unto Him that judgeth justly. Be not afraid, for He is with thee. Be not dismayed, for He is your God. He will turn today's troubles into triumphs and your current mourning into everlasting dancing. The empty tomb of our Savior is our undaunting reminder that all is, and will forever be, well. — D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

He Is Risen!

And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Matthew 28:5-6

The grim recollections of the violent scenes of Gethsemane, Gabbatha, and Golgotha loomed in the hearts and minds of the disciples, What a dramatic reversal of emotions it must have been for those mourning disciples whose thoughts were suffused with the grisly recollections of the horrors of crucifixion. They were eye witnesses to the violent scene when with cruel hands their Lord was mercilessly flagellated, scornfully crowned with thorns, and brutally abused with the agonies of the cross. But to this dolorous picture we must add the final "G", namely the Garden-"John 19:41: *Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus*". It would be there that the holy women were greeted by the angelic salutation "He is Risen!". As Jesus predicted their "sorrow shall be turned into joy".

That most glad evangel fills the air again as we commence to celebrate God's greatest gift to mankind -The resurrection of Jesus Christ! All hail the Son of God who subdued the minions of darkness, both temporal and demonic, who thought they could "eat up His flesh" but instead stumbled and fell as Christ rose triumphantly to abolish death and bring immortality and life to light through this gospel. He is Risen! I am sure the unwelcome news echoed through the caverns of hell and signaled the defeat of all the miserable internees who even yet pine away in that dreadful inferno. It was equally unwelcome by those evil men that demanded His death when Pilate was willing to release Him. His blood would be upon them and their children by their own imprecation.

He is Risen! It was a glad anthem in the ears of the inhabitants of paradise that long awaited for the captain of their salvation to come and carry them captive into the presence of the God that they faithfully served without seeing. He is Risen! The rebel skeptic abhors the absolutism of this victory shout. Their fevered brains continue to denigrate the impeccable Savior as they oppose their own salvation inventing wicked machinations even denying the Lord that bought them. He is Risen! The deluded religionist hears this word but denies the power thereof and futilely labors on in a vain hope of pleasing God by meriting what God has declared can only be freely received.

He is Risen! Ah but to the true child of God, these are the words of a victory secured -a salvation from death, hell and the grave forever! All creation waited for these words and yet groans within, waiting for the final accomplishment as the "victor from the dark domain" returns in glory to subdue all of the curse beneath his nail-pierced feet. He is Risen! This bold assertion stands as a verbal Ebenezer reminding us that the work is finished and that the grand release lay before us. We must press towards the mark with renewed vigor and revived hearts until that day that our risen King calls us into His presence. So come and join in the celebration of history's greatest moment. Find yourself this Sunday swelling the chorus with your own grateful heart song. He is RISEN!!!

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

Pastor

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