

## Spiritual Guidance

*I will instruct thee and teach thee in the which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye. Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, ... ~ Psalm 32:8,9*

Have you ever experienced a guided tour? Historic landmarks and National Parks usually provide tours to offer greater insights about things that may go unnoticed by tourists. In our state, you can choose to tour Gettysburg National Battlefield on your own; but by using a guide you will hear details and background that are not available by reading the placards on monuments or viewing the landscape. A guide is trained to enrich your experience. The same is true for our Christian journey. The guidance of our great God is invaluable for conforming us to the image of Christ and enabling us to live our best life for God.

After trusting the Lord Jesus for our salvation, we began the journey of our Christian life. Being born again brings newfound joy to our lives, but there are still challenges in making decisions for our spiritual growth and wellbeing. God has provided the means to guide us on the path He has designed for us, but often our ignorance and self-will interfere. Today's text cautions us not to be like the horse or the mule. Horses need a bridle to harness their restlessness to go ahead of command, and mules need to be spurred on to motivate them to get moving in the desired direction. God's spiritual bridle can help us to be settled and wait for His command to advance in His planned direction or remind us that we are acting in our own energy instead of taking time to pray for guidance. Conversely, we also can be like the mule and refuse to take a step forward. Fearing uncertainty can glue us in place minimizing opportunities to receive nourishing spiritual lessons and experiences. God promises to instruct us with continued and progressive lessons. We need to be taught daily and guided in the way we should go. With His word as a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path, we can mine the depths of the riches of His wisdom moment by moment. Knowing that the Lord has ordained a course for our life, we want to be sure to order our steps accordingly. Thankfully, we also have the indwelling Holy Spirit to guide us. His silent voice speaks loudly within us when we are intentional about taking the time to listen. If not, our life can become much like traveling in unknown territory without the aid of a map; we waste time or even get lost. Accessing the map of God's word and His Spirit as our guide, we can view all the points of interest He has planned and by His grace victoriously reach our heavenly destination.

Take advantage of God's guidance today and be edified by the spiritual points of interest along the way. ~J. Ekis

### **Model motive**

*Now therefore, O LORD our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the LORD God, even thou only.*

*II Kings 19:19*

This conclusion of king Hezekiah's prayer in the face of verbal and written threats from Sennacherib the king of Assyria against Judah demonstrates a model motive. In spite of his wicked father Ahaz, who had initiated unfaithful affinity with Assyria, Hezekiah had ruled Judah righteously, so that his reign was described as doing right in the sight of the LORD, but also "according to all that David his father did" (II Kings 18:3). That second appellation was reserved for very few kings of Judah. In Hezekiah's case, it is highly probable that this was due in part to the influence of the prophet Isaiah. During his reign, Hezekiah was aware of the exploits of the Assyrians against many nations in building their empire, especially of their destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel in fulfillment of God's prophesies against them (II Kings 18:11-12). Now they were threatening to come against Judah, even after Hezekiah's attempt to appease Sennacherib with ransom payments.

Having made his best attempt to stave off the threats, to no avail, Hezekiah spread out the letter of Sennacherib before the LORD in the temple. He did not ask God to bless him because of his good reign, nor for his purging of idolatry from Judah. He appealed to none of his own works or assumed worthiness as a basis; he simply confessed what he knew. Although Sennacherib assumed the LORD to be no more powerful than the idols of the nations he had already conquered, Hezekiah knew that the gods of those nations were, in fact, non-existent. He therefore begs the LORD to reveal to the kingdoms of the earth, including the rampant Assyrian conqueror, that the LORD God is the only true God. He looked not to his own fame or personal need, but, as young David had done before the threat of Goliath, to the honor of the LORD whom Sennacherib had blasphemed.

In this case, God answered Hezekiah's prayer with a mighty deliverance against the Assyrian army and Sennacherib personally. Yet, there have been other instances throughout the history of God's people, in Old and New Testament times, where immediate temporal deliverance was not provided. However, the same model motive for prayer remains appropriate in either case. May we, along with our brethren in other lands, many under threat of harm, continue to follow Hezekiah's example and implore that ours and all the nations would know who is the one and only true LORD God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.

## Mock On

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*Suffer me that I may speak; and after that I have spoken, mock on.*  
– Job 21:3 –

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The book of Job is a deeply enigmatic treatise, inspired of the Holy Ghost, chronicling man's reasoning regarding the problem of human suffering. The ultimate answer that it presents is that while the devil is in the details, God is in control.

But the book also offers us a pragmatic perspective into human interaction with regard to competing theological viewpoints. Job's "friends" – Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar – possess an esoteric understanding of God, not a practical one. They assume Job to be harboring some secret sin, else he would not be suffering. They cannot empathize with him because their view of the world does not permit them to reconcile Job's public righteous character with his present distress. They heap insult upon insult on him. But Job tenaciously maintains his innocence, and that his suffering, while inexplicable, is definitively not the result of any known offense to the Almighty. He had searched his heart, and though Job unwisely doubles down on self-justification, which is anything but exemplary, we can nonetheless learn at least something from his stubborn disposition. When the world attacks you on the premise of your relationship with God, push back and stand your ground.

The world loves to mock believers. Have you noticed? American culture is increasingly anti-Christian. It is massaging the masses into a practical atheism that chides us for clinging to an ancient book. Our adherence to God's Word is a sticking point to "progress". You are undoubtedly familiar with all of the philosophical attacks. "If God is good, why is there suffering?" Or, "If God is loving, why do you hate people who don't believe like you do?" Or, "If God created everything, why has science proven that evolution is true?" Many professing Christians unfortunately cower at these straw-man arguments, unaware not only of the fallacious nature of the foundation of the charges, but also of the certainty and surety of the Word of God.

It is here that we can take a queue from Job. Search your heart and know your Bible, Christian! Truth is neither relative nor personal – it is absolute. Know what is true, and realize that any attack against the truth is one that must be met with a righteous and stubborn rebuttal. Realize that the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. At some point, there is no common ground. Truth must win the day, and we are its ambassadors. If they can't see it and continue to insult, mock on. Here I stand.

Be valiant for the truth today. He that said, "I am... the Truth" is watching. – D. Murcek

# Pastors Thoughts of the Week

## A Sacred Trust

*I Thessalonians 2:4: But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts.*

The gospel of Jesus Christ is a most sacred trust for therein lies the key of knowledge. God has entrusted to us the most powerful element in His entire creation and has commissioned us to broadcast it to the ends of the earth. He has promised to endue us with His Spirit so that we might rightly divide its precious words. He has “fitted our lips” to utter its unfathomable teachings. And we dare not diminish its trenchant truth to win the favor of any mortal be it king, relative, or neighbor, for we have been granted permission from the “the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords” to disseminate His good news without amendment or private interpretation.

When writing a will one must be careful in the choosing of a trustee. “The trustee acts as the legal owner of trust assets, and is responsible for handling any of the assets held in trust, tax filings for the trust, and distributing the assets according to the terms of the trust.” This role involves duties that are legally required. It is at the discretion of the testator to direct his assets as he wills. He may impose any conditions so as to ensure that his final directives are executed but in the end, he must have absolute confidence in the trustee’s fidelity to act in deference to the expressed will.

If earthly possessions require such careful scrutiny, should not the execution of the Divine Will be of even greater concern? We must be humbled by the enormity of the trust that God has bestowed upon us. Placed under our supervision are the Words of Eternal Life! Words that the Father intends for us to freely distribute to needy hearts. We dare not be derelict in our duty. The siren call to blunt the two-edged sword and accommodate the capricious modernists is an ever-present temptation that must be assiduously avoided. Let us be valiant for the truth in the face of men-pleasers and so win the approbation of our God who shall soon try our hearts and judge our trusteeship.

Have a blessed week,

*Pastor*

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

## **Free Indeed**

*If the Son therefore shall make your free, ye shall be free indeed.*

*John 8:36*

When we reflect on our nation's two hundred and forty-sixth birthday, we should realize the tremendous cost of liberty. America has many flaws because like all nations it is populated by sinful people, but it still affords personal liberties beyond the other nations of the world. We have freedom of speech, freedom to assemble, freedom to protest peacefully, and freedom of religion, among the other freedoms guaranteed by the constitution. Yet people of all ages and from all walks of life are in bondage because of sin; it is Jesus alone who can spiritually set the captives free in the truest sense.

Today's verse is set in the encounter Jesus had with the Pharisees as He announced that He was the light of the world. Pharisees were indeed an elite class in Jewish society, and they enjoyed a more privileged life than the common people. Though claiming to never have been in bondage, their actions and attitudes demonstrated bondage to pride and self-righteousness. Life has countless examples of seemingly free people who through bad choices are captives to sin, but good people who pride themselves in their moral uprightness and clean lives are equally trapped in their self-righteousness.

Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would proclaim liberty to the captives. In His first advent, Jesus' ministry would liberate people from all walks of life. From the Pharisee Nicodemus to the maniac of Gadara the delivering power of God's love and truth found in the cross of Christ dramatically changed lives. Experiencing love and forgiveness produced freedom from the oppression of the multiple facets of sin. Recipients of this transformation understood what it was to be truly free.

The newfound freedom believers experience at conversion is soon tested by varying trials and temptations. The power that liberated us from the clutches of sin, continues to be available for us. Though saved by grace there can still be a tendency to return to relying on good works to merit God's favor. The pull of peer pressure exists even in Christian circles. With Christ, we are free to be what God wants us to be, not what others expect us to be. Fears that can plague us fall away when God's promises are remembered and applied. God is the great deliverer of those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. Every day there may be things that attempt to draw us back into the chains of bondage. Our relationship with One who came to set the captives free can make us free indeed. ~ J. Ekis

### **Like father like son?**

*And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done.*

*II Kings 23:32, 37*

This epitaph that occurs identically in both of these verses was applied separately to Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim, who were both sons of Josiah. In so describing them, it ignores the deeds of their immediate father, who was described in the same and the previous chapters as one of the most righteous kings of Judah, doing right in the sight of the LORD, walking in the way of David his father, and turning not aside to the right hand or to the left (II Kings 22:2). Under his reign, as he endeavored to have the temple repaired and cleansed, Hilkiah the high priest *discovered* the book of the Law of God in the temple. After Josiah heard the word of God, he repented himself and also called Judah to repentance, cleansing the temple and the land from idolatry and its ensuing sins with a sweeping revival. Upon his death in battle with the army of Pharaoh-nechoh in the midst of the Assyrian incursions, the people of Judah made his son Jehoahaz king, who reigned only for a brief time and was evidently unaffected by the ways of his father. Pharaoh-nechoh soon replaced Jehoahaz with another son of Josiah and renamed him Jehoiakim, who became a puppet tax collector under Pharaoh and also disregarded the spiritual heritage of his own father.

This illustrates that, while we often hear the adage “like father, like son,” it is certainly not a universal axiom. As we trace the recent lineage of these kings, we also see that Josiah’s righteous reign came on the heels of his evil father Amon, who was preceded by granddaddy Manasseh, who was the most wicked king ever to reign over Judah and brought the LORD’s condemnation and prophecies of the destruction and captivity of Judah, which occurred beginning with Pharaoh-nechoh, followed by the Babylonians. Yet just before Manasseh, we see his righteous father Hezekiah, who also followed the wicked, idolatrous reign of his father Ahaz with a significant revival and turning to God. It is encouraging to see how Hezekiah and Josiah could turn so avidly to the LORD in spite of their birth-fathers, yet it is equally disturbing to observe how Manasseh and the two sons of Josiah could do the opposite. We must conclude from these observations that all must and will ultimately make their own choice, which will also determine their own destiny. We cannot help but mourn over those who choose the wrong, but we must never cease to pray that the godly influence will prevail.

## Violence of Action

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*And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.*

— Matthew 11:12 —

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Violence of Action is a militaristic and security paradigm. Simply distilled, it means being prepared to use the unrestricted use of speed, strength, surprise and aggression to achieve total dominance over an active threat. Soldiers or armed officers who respond to malefactors with violence of action become violent enough fast enough to end the situation. Based on information coming from the recent school shooting in Uvalde, Texas, it would appear that a violence of action response was not implemented early enough. By contrast, in 2019 when an armed assailant opened fire in the West Freeway Church of Christ in Fort Worth, Texas, killing two people, parishioner Jack Wilson, a 71-year-old former reserve sheriff, engaged the perpetrator immediately, opening fire and taking out the shooter within seconds, thereby neutralizing the threat to the congregation. The livestreamed video showed no delay on Mr. Wilson's part. He initiated a response displaying violence of action, meeting malevolent force with terminating violence.

There is a spiritual parallel. The Bible makes it abundantly clear that the Christian is to possess a spiritual violence of action mindset, not against people, but against the world, the flesh, and the devil. Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers and rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness (Eph. 6:12). There is a vast array of hell-born spiritual forces aligned against each of us, and they are continuously engaged in disturbing our peace, withholding our progress, and obstructing our witness. These forces constantly assault us on a moment-to-moment basis. We cannot sit back and watch them. We cannot think about how we are to respond. We are to be ready and prepared every moment to meet their onslaught with a quick and overwhelmingly powerful response. Thank the Lord that the Holy Ghost lives within, serving us as our bottomless ammunition depot. When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord lifts up a standard against him.

How engaged are you in this spiritual battle, dear reader? In its natural state, the Town of Mansoul tends toward less godliness, not more. Jesus reminded us that the road to Heaven is one that will be violent in the spiritual realm. The battle is invisible but real, and it is not over until we lay down arms in the Kingdom. Until then, we are exhorted to mortify the flesh (Rom. 8:13). We must strive to enter in at that strait gate (Luke 13:24). Our duty is to fight the good fight of faith (1 Tim. 6:12). We are to don the whole armor of God and skillfully wield the Sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:12). We must earnestly contend for the faith (Jude 3). Let us resolve to do all of the above today, and empowered by the Spirit of the Living God, meet the hordes of Hell with some holy violence of action. — D. Murcek

# Pastors Thoughts of the Week

## Stress-Free Living

*II Corinthians 4:8: We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;*

The Lord never promised us a life without trouble. In fact, He said, “in the world, ye shall have tribulation”. Trouble comes in an endless variety of manifestations: physical infinity, mental perplexities, emotional grief, relational disappointment, financial tensions, and a seemingly endless array of spiritual temptations. Believers have the blessed assurance that as they run the gamut of daily conflicts they have the ever-abiding presence of the Comforter to assuage all anxiety and calm every distress.

In these perilous times, we encounter so many emotionally scarred victims who have endured trouble for most of their lives. Lamentably, the dysfunctional family has become normative in America. Children have been severely handicapped by home lives that are rife with stress-filled bickering, threatenings, tumults, and abuse. Their sensitive psyches become shell-shocked with the constant bombardment of cacophonous insults and vituperation. As a result, we have spawned a generation that is maimed with psychological disorders due to stress-filled family environments. One in every five teenagers and adults experienced mental health breakdowns in the last year.

It may be simplistic to suggest that this all could be remedied by encouraging a vibrant walk of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is not a panacean magic wand that will remove any problem that may obstruct our path, but rather it is a cognizant awareness of the presence of the omnipotent God who promised to walk with us as we face the ineluctable troubles that confront all of Adam’s children. These troubles may indeed perplex us as we ponder the why and how of our exigency, but the promise is we will not be distressed or in despair. And what a comforting, stress-relieving promise it is!

Praise Him for His excellent kindness,

*Pastor*

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

## Two Voices

*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:*

*John 10:27*

John chapter 10 is Jesus' teaching about Him being the Good Shepherd. The close relationship between shepherd and sheep exists because of voice recognition. The shepherd calls the sheep by name and they follow him to green pastures for protection and nourishment. The Good Shepherd calls to all the world inviting them to enter through the Door into the sheepfold.

Though a person might not recognize His voice before conversion, it is that same voice of the Lord Jesus Who speaks, convicting and drawing them to the foot of the cross. A person coming to Christ for salvation is initially beckoned by God. Throughout life, the silent but powerful voice of the Lord invites the hearts of those who are lost and wandering by bidding them come unto Him. Sometimes God's voice is muffled by the passions of this temporal world, but He persistently continues speaking to hearts. God's desire is for men and women to yield their will to the invitation of His voice so that they may find forgiveness and rest for their souls. After being born again, the new believer is sealed with the Holy Spirit, and the voice of the Spirit continues daily speaking to God's children. Working in tandem with the scriptures, the Spirit convicts of sins that displease God and interrupt full fellowship with Him. As situations arise demanding decisions, insights from God's word and the voice of the Holy Spirit can help us to make the most edifying choice. God will ever be calling His children to come closer by having a more intimate relationship with Him.

But another voice calls out to believers as they journey through this life. As Pharaoh sought to bring the Hebrews back to Egypt, the temporary god of this world Satan continues to call believers back to this world. That earthly and devilish voice reminds believers of all the pleasures and allurements they left behind by choosing to follow Christ. This other voice entices believers to come back to the same broad road that so many others are traveling. The volume of people on the broad road provides opportunities for worldly amusements and companionship. Just as the crowd called out to Jesus to come down from the cross, this other voice calls out to believers to lay their cross down and replace it with all that this world can offer. That voice tries to sway believers to forsake the unseen eternal and embrace the immediate gratification of what is visible.

Today by God's grace may we discern the difference between the two voices, and continue listening for and following the Voice of our Good Shepherd.

J. Ekis

## The temple

*Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.*  
*I Corinthians 3:16-17*

Many refer to this passage as proof that the believer's body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and therefore believers should take good care of their bodies. While there may be a secondary, or perhaps even tertiary, application that would support that conclusion, it is certainly not the point of the context. If you want to find a closer support for such a conclusion, you might appeal to the end of chapter six, where he tells them each that their body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, the gift of God who bought them, so that they should glorify God in that purchased body by keeping it from sin. But returning to our context in chapter three, we see that the emphasis is not on the individual members. The point that he wants them to know is that they all corporately are the temple of God, which is formed by their union based on the Spirit by whom they were all baptized into one body (I Corinthians 12:13). (This emphasis is further understood by the personal pronoun in the King James version, in which "ye" is plural, as opposed to "thou," which is singular. He does not say "ye are the temples" of God.)

This therefore builds on the larger context of the problem addressed in the chapter, where they were acting as fleshly babes rather than as spiritually mature, by their factional behavior based on which of the church leaders they claimed to follow. He had then told them that there were no divisions between him and Apollos or other apostles, but that they, as one, labored together with God. As a result, he warned them to take heed how they might build upon the foundational truth of Christ that the apostles had laid. Should they neglect the foundation, and instead build upon it their carnal factions and personality cults, they would be defiling the spiritual temple of God. He therefore follows with a strong warning to not glory in men, and then concludes that all of the men, whom God chose to use to bring the foundational truth to them, were theirs to hear and understand the truth of Christ.

Let us heed the warning as well. While the communicative styles or manners of different teachers may be more or less helpful to different hearers, as long as they are true to the foundation there is no basis for such factions. Let us not be looking for worldly wisdom, nor argument over who has the seemingly better explanation, but for truth that is built upon the central doctrine laid down by scripture, holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.

## Recognizing the Lord

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*And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord...*

— John 21:6-7 —

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It had been days if not weeks since the disciples had communed with the risen Christ. As is oft the case, lack of intimacy with the Savior creates listlessness in spirit. Not knowing what to do yet confident they should do something, Peter and John returned to their occupation of fishing, with some of the other disciples tagging along. How often they had done this prior to the Master's call. How familiar they were with the waters of Tiberius. How skilled they were at mending and casting nets. How acquainted they were with toiling all the night, and taking nothing. It was not until that Voice came from shore, "Children, have ye any meat?" that they began to be jostled out of their spiritual stupor. The answer to the question was as flatly obvious as it was disappointing, and forced them to render a matter-of-fact answer back to the mysterious Stranger, "No." What did they expect being out here again? Earthly occupation as a goal in itself never yields any true satisfaction or lasting reward. Then the Voice again, "Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find." They must have looked at each other with anticipation. They had been here before, about three and a half years ago. They quickly obeyed and found a draught so great they could not draw the net. John voiced what Peter already knew, "It is the Lord."

How often do we find ourselves in similar spiritual waters as these disciples? We've not been able to find Him for a season, and our impatience begets fleshly labor. Waiting is too difficult, so we look for the familiar. We steer our own ship. We retrace our steps. We toil but find our efforts to no avail. Then, when we are exhausted, that wonderful still, small voice reminds us of the futility of our mutiny, "Have ye any meat?" No. Of course not. We've done it all in His Name, but not at His direction or by His aegis. It has been our labor, not His. We have moved in our energy, not in His power. Then that merciful Voice within takes control again in similar fashion to some previous unmistakable moment, years or decades prior, when He first proved Himself personally to our restless hearts. He neither chides nor openly rebukes, but simply instructs in gentlest fashion, "Cast the net...and ye shall find." His presence overwhelms the heart. It is the Lord. It is so good to hear Him again. Perhaps if we had simply waited for Him, we would have heard Him sooner, and avoided the pain of conscience for not doing so.

Let us wait on our Lord today. He will be known to us, and He will guide us. And may we always be grateful for His kind and gentle way with our clumsy spirituality. — D. Murcek

# Pastors Thoughts of the Week

## The Sin of Complaining

*Numbers 11:1: And when the people complained, it displeased the LORD*

Ingratitude is a most unbecoming characteristic of the people of God. Our benignant Heavenly Father has graciously provided every life-sustaining element that His universal creation demands, including the multiplicity of biological miracles that our temporal bodies require. The infinite complexity of what must occur every millisecond to keep all things animate and inanimate thriving, should evoke awe, wonder, and gratitude. And yet, so often is the case, that instead of the “high praises of God” being found in our mouths, bitter grumblings and objections pour out of our unappreciative lips. All parents have witnessed, with disgust, the odious scene of petulant, complaining brats who are never satisfied with whatever benefits the doting parent may provide. Imagine the displeasure of the Almighty God when He hears the thankless whining of His belligerent children.

We often forget that we are traversing in strange territories-a veritable, hostile wilderness fraught with dangers, disease, and disturbance. We mistakenly think that all life in this world should be pain and trouble-free. Such was not the case for the Son of God and how much less to be expected for the sons of Adam. The Man of Sorrows uttered no complaints. He said, “In the world, ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer”. So let us cultivate a spirit of gratitude in all things as the Word admonishes:

I Thessalonians 5:18: In every thing give thanks:  
for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

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

Psalms 100:4: Enter into his gates with thanksgiving,  
and into his courts with praise:  
be thankful unto him, and bless his name.

Have a thankful day,

*Pastor*

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

## The Benefit of the Doubt

*Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem;*

*Acts 9:13*

There are times in life when God allows us to be presented with a situation that demands a greater element of trust. On the surface, seemingly unreasonable and difficult circumstances may present us with challenging decisions. When there seems to be no possible benefit from deciding to trust God, it is best to give Him the benefit of the doubt knowing that He is working in all of our circumstances.

The scriptures are replete with accounts where individuals were presented with difficult decisions that ran contrary to their natural reasoning. In today's account, Ananias was presented with a terrifying task. When most of the early church was fleeing and hiding from the great persecutor Saul of Tarsus, Ananias was told to seek Saul to restore his sight. When Ananias used Saul's reputation as a reason to not go, the Lord simply responds that Ananias is to go "for Saul is a chosen vessel." Going to Saul would be the last thing the early Christians would want to do; but Ananias obeys the Lord, giving Him the benefit of the doubt. This seemingly unreasonable act is a catalyst for the earth-shaking ministry of the Apostle Paul.

In other accounts, we see Abraham being directed to offer his heir as a sacrifice, which would cause any reasonable man to tremble. Yet Abraham trusts that the Lord knows best and dutifully complies only to be stopped at the last moment. Later, God instructed Joshua to march around the city of Jericho and then blow trumpets and shout in order to conquer the city for God. Though that would have certainly seemed unconventional to any seasoned soldier, the Bible doesn't record if Joshua had any reservations. Gideon, who realized there is strength in numbers, watched his army of thirty-two thousand be reduced to just three hundred before God intervened on Israel's behalf. Naaman was not at all excited about God's seemingly foolish remedy for cleansing his leprosy, yet his disease disappeared after dipping seven times in the Jordan River just as the Lord said it would. After an unsuccessful night of fishing, Jesus tells Peter to launch out into the deep and let down the nets. Going against his experiential knowledge as a fisherman and trusting that the Lord knew better, Peter lets down the nets to receive an abundant harvest.

As believers, we may experience times when from our perspective God's ways seem unbounded by convention. When this occurs, it is always best to give God the benefit of the doubt. Remembering that His ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not our thoughts will help us accept the Lord's plan. Though Ananais had his doubts, following through with the Lord's instructions proved that our God is worthy of our trust in every situation. ~ J. Ekis

## No might

*O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee.*

*II Chronicles 20:12*

Throughout the course of life will come adversaries and circumstances against which we have no might, or even the knowledge of how to oppose or address them. In our text, king Jehoshaphat acknowledges such in light of an unprovoked attack from the children of Lot and those confederate with them. When he was informed of their approach, the king “feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.” As a result, many from all the cities of Judah assembled themselves, yet not immediately for war, but to first seek the LORD with Jehoshaphat their leader. As he led the assembly in prayer, he included this honest cry of humble helplessness unto the LORD. He did not pretend to have the military strength or strategy needed to come against them. He had to rely totally on the LORD to send mercy and help. God’s reply through the prophet was that He would indeed deliver them, and yet they were directed to go out against the oncoming enemies. Upon this news, Jehoshaphat and his army proceeded to worship and then praise the LORD, then moved as instructed to the battle. However, the army was led not by military officers, but by those singing praises to the LORD. As they went in this spirit of praise, God defeated their foes, so that Judah did not need to engage, as promised. Thus did God answer the prayer of the ingenuous Jehoshaphat. Let us learn from this that, in those times when the situation may seem to be overwhelming, we have a Rock that is higher than we, and who is a shelter from the enemy (Psalm 61). We need not focus our eyes on the adversarial situation, but on the righteous LORD, whom we can trust to judge all things from His eternal perspective.

## Heaven to House

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*And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.*

– Acts 2:2 –

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The coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost as the fulfillment of Christ's parting promise to His disciples was a momentous occasion, to say the least. The transformation of this group of believers from a well-meaning and sincere yet confused, bumbling, and timid assembly into the bold, confident, and powerful witness they became is astoundingly miraculous. There is no logical explanation for the way the early disciples turned the world upside down but by the power of the Holy Ghost. And the book of Acts is just the beginning of these exploits. The Christian faith rapidly spread in unbroken succession from Jerusalem, to all Judea, to Samaria, and then to the Gentile world. The very ascendancy of Western Civilization to primacy as well as its stunning longevity on the world stage is in many ways the direct result of the influence of the gospel of Jesus Christ, spread not by force or arms, but by humble yet wholly persuaded believers filled with the Spirit of the living God.

The house where the first disciples were gathered waiting for the promise from Heaven is not the only dwelling the Spirit filled. The "house of this tabernacle" (2 Cor. 5:1), i.e., the body of the believer, is clearly the home of Spirit of God in this current age of the church. The mystery of the Third Person of the Godhead taking up locative residence (while remaining omnipresent) in each individual believing heart is inexplicable, being apprehended only by faith.

Imagine if the President of the United States permanently moved his residence from Pennsylvania Avenue to your home. Life would never be the same, right? This may help us vaguely grasp the kind of power that lies at our disposal. Jesus promised that "the Spirit of truth...dwelleth with you, and shall be in you" (John 14:17). Once we believe, we are no longer alone. Life is forever different if the most powerful of ways. "But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you" (Romans 8:11). We possess the power to present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God, and to no longer be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds that we may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Rom. 12:1-2).

As we yield to the indwelling Spirit of God, He fills us. When He fills us, we become unstoppable ambassadors of Heaven. This causes great consternation to the powers of darkness. Let us cease living by the confines of this tabernacle. Heaven's Sovereign is in the house! Let us comport ourselves accordingly, and begin to turn our world upside down.

-- D. Murcek

# Pastors Thoughts of the Week

## Preach the Word

*Numbers 24:13: I cannot go beyond the commandment of the LORD, to do either good or bad of mine own mind; but what the LORD saith, that will I speak?*

Preachers have the honor and privilege to deliver the message of God to waiting audiences. They are endowed with the power of the Spirit to do so, but with the proviso that they “add thou not unto his words”. Peter instructed the undershepherds that “no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation” and so it behooves the man of God to stick to the script!

Since the days of the earliest prophets, there have been those who had “spoken a lying divination, whereas ye say, The LORD saith it; albeit I have not spoken”. In the text, we find Balaam, who for the love of filthy lucre and the expectation of receiving honor from the enemies of God, was tempted to curse the chosen people, but God intervened and muzzled the backslidden prophet.

How many would-be chefs try to add something to or take something from a standard recipe only to find the altered result to be an utter failure? In an attempt to spare expenses, how many contractors have left out necessary structural elements which resulted in the collapse of the building? We can only hope that a surgeon does not try to be “creative” with some experimental procedure that has never been tested when performing our brain surgery. When the preacher of the Gospel declares “Thus saith the Lord” he must be certain that the word he utters is that which was “was once delivered unto the saints” by the Holy Spirit.

It is a common, human desire to want to be well-received. Rare is the preacher who doesn’t want to be popular, but there is a cost to telling God’s truth. One cannot curry the favor of men while, at the same time, remaining faithful to God’s message. Galatians 1:10: “For do I now persuade men or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.”

When John the Baptist spoke the Word, Herod removed his head. When Micaiah told the wicked king “what my God saith, that will I speak” they smote him on the cheek. When Jeremiah gave the king the unwelcome message of doom they consigned him to the pit. Peter and John rejoiced that they were found worthy to suffer whippings and imprisonment for speaking the truth. Our Savior was brutalized, scourged, and crucified because he said “as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things”.

In this age of apostasy and compromise may the ministers of the Word be bold to proclaim: “what the LORD saith, that will I speak”.

*Pastor*

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