

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

You're in the Will!

Hebrews 9:15: And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.

When Antony delivered the panegyric at Caesar's funeral, he deftly turned the hearts of the citizens who, at first, held with the perfidious conspirators that put their leader to death. But then the sentiments were abruptly turned when Antony announced that Caesar had left his inheritance to them.

"Here is the will, and under Caesar's seal
To every Roman citizen he gives—
To every several man—seventy-five drachmas.
Moreover, he hath left you all his walks,
His private arbors and new-planted orchards,
On this side Tiber. He hath left them you
And to your heirs forever—common pleasures,
To walk abroad and recreate yourselves."

The Lord's Last Will and "New" Testament

In Luke 19:14, Jesus puts forth a parable describing the ultimate rejection of his own people towards Him: "But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us". Like Caesar, Christ was betrayed by those who ought to have been His most ardent devotees. Upon His death and resurrection the New Testament was activated. The laws of inheritance have immutably demanded: "For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth" Hebrews 9:16-17.

We can only marvel at the grace of God that would take us, who caused Christ's death, and write us into the will; thus making us joint-heirs with His only begotten Son. Shakespeare thus framed the expectant desires of the Roman citizens that attended Caesar's funeral: "Read the will; we'll hear it, Antony; You shall read us the will, Caesar's will." With even greater fervency the believer longs to hear the reading of the Last Will and New Testament of their Savior. "Read the Word" we might be heard to say, "You shall read us the will". For herein lies the copious promises of eternal inheritance that have been stored up for us since the ascension of the Lord Jesus. The ears of all heirs tingle at the recitation of the benefactions imparted to those unworthy of the least of such mercies. No Death! No Sorrows! No Crying! No Pain! All Things New! Mansions! Glorified Bodies! Sumptuous Feasts! Glorious Music! And above all living in the presence of the Everlasting Father who bestowed such love upon us that we should be called the Sons and Daughters of God! Enjoy your inheritance.

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

The Disciple's Course

And straightway he constrained his disciples to get into the ship, and to go to the other side...

– Mark 6:45 –

The disciples had known for some time now that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah. They had beheld Him change the water to wine. They had watched in hushed silence as He commanded unclean spirits and they fled in terror. They had seen His power to heal the most impossible sicknesses, and at Nain, they had enjoyed a glimpse of His authority over death itself. They were presently still stunned by His feeding of five thousand with nothing but five loaves of bread and two small fish. But eclipsing the excitement of this miracle was the burgeoning anticipation of the multitude, ready to make Him king. Here it was – the kingdom! Oh, despite all they had seen and heard, how little the disciples understood. The Master was not subject to the whims of this fickle crowd whose god was their bellies. Much yet needed to transpire, and His time was not yet. Jesus must here seek the secret place of the Most High, to abide under the shadow of the Almighty. As He went to the mountain to pray, He gently constrained His disciples to cross over to the other side. In so doing, He quietly shattered their presumptuous plans of an ill-timed reception and kingdom.

Though deflated, their love remained steadfast. Perhaps Mary's words in Cana still lingered in their hearts and minds, "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it." It really is that simple. No matter the disillusion, disappointment, or difficulty, do what He says. They likely wanted to stay, to leverage the crowd, to persuade the Master to re-think His departure and dismissal. But He bid them to cross over. The true disciple must lovingly obey. And so, they set sail. They are far from land when the storm is so boisterous that these skilled navigators cannot make headway. It would be easier to turn around, for the wind is contrary. But Jesus was clear – cross over.

How much is our journey through this life like that of the disappointed disciples on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus has commanded us to cross over. The tempest, though. Yet we must cross over. But – the waves. Yet we must cross over. Our bark is frail and falling apart in the storm. But still, we must cross over. He knows our faltering hearts. He sees us toiling and desires to enter our ship so that He may subdue the tempest's rage and prove Himself yet again to be not just Lord of creation, but Master of our faith and the Lover of our souls. He is so very far above our fears and failures.

Brothers and sisters, let us continue our crossing today.

Commitment

As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him:

Colossians 2:6,7

Marriage is meant to be a commitment between a man and a woman. On their wedding day the couple willingly join their hands and hearts to be united. From the moment of pronouncement that they are husband and wife, they are to proceed together through a lifetime of enriching experiences. This relationship will define much of who they are and affect their decisions and the direction of their lives. The same is true for Christians and their relationship with the Lord Jesus.

Today's text states that since we have received Christ Jesus the Lord, we are to now walk in Him. Our relationship is not based solely on Jesus dying for our sins to purchase our salvation, but also that He is our Lord. If earthly Kings receive obedience and homage, should not the King of Kings receive much more from us? Why is it that so many find it easy to trust Christ as Savior, yet find it difficult to submit to Him as Lord? Remember, He not only has the power to save, He also has the power to keep. That being the case, our faith is to impact every area of our life. Jesus rebuked the religious leaders of His day for not living out true faith. He said that we should observe and do what they bid us, but *do not after their works: for they say, and do not*. Our life should be in accordance with what we say we believe. How we walk as Christians should impact our words, attitudes, reactions, interest, decisions, and every fiber of our being. Walking also suggests that we are to be moving in a forward progressive direction. With the cross as our banner, we should be pressing forward to the prize before us. No matter what requirements we are obligated to perform in this life, our main priority is to serve and glorify our Lord. With all the pressures of this sinful world, it is our faith that keeps us focused. Together with the Lord we can walk in the light as we navigate through this present darkness.

Every day, no matter where we are, our profession of faith will be provided with opportunities to demonstrate the power of the in-dwelling Christ. May the commitment we made when we believed continue on so that our lives can influence others for Christ Jesus our Lord. - J. Ekis

Go Thy Way

Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way.

John 4:50

It is by true belief that we entered into the family of God, and it is by faith that we should walk the Christian life. Even after conversion we can be prone to developing superstitions by which we look for some positive sign of God's favor. The Lord wants to strip us of any vestiges of false beliefs or superstitions. Believing God at His word is what pleases Him, and to which He responds. God is glorified when faith is pure with no attachments.

Today's account does not give any background of the nobleman, nor the nature of his son's sickness. Desperate to find a cure for his gravely ill son, he acts upon what he has heard about Jesus, and then urges Him to come and heal his son. Jesus responds with a gentle rebuke about people not being able to believe without signs. The nobleman again requests for Jesus to come to his house to heal his son. Jesus then issues a simple statement for the nobleman to go his way, because his son lives. The simple rebuke from the Lord, and His ever-present compassion were enough to change the attitude of the nobleman. He then submits to God's will and responds in belief to the words of Jesus. It is after he acts upon Jesus' message that he receives a sign that his son is healed. This confirms that the Lord's powerful word is able to supply our greatest request.

Throughout our lives there will arise situations in which we will desperately seek some sign from the Lord. With the pressure of a present trial, it is easy to resort to looking for something that could offer a shred of hope. We should be encouraged and take comfort in knowing that He has a divine plan and has everything in His control. Though the outcome might not be exactly what we desire or expected, we will find that the Lord's will is always best. His Word was more than sufficient to bring us to salvation, and it also more than sufficient to meet any trial that arises. He wants us to believe His word and then by faith act upon what He has said. When our situation seems overwhelming may we always hear Him say: *Go thy way; thy son liveth.*

J. Ekis

Opportunity

*And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.
As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them
who are of the household of faith.
Galatians 6:9-10*

This exhortation comes on the heels of a discussion of sowing and reaping. There are times in this life where we may be discouraged by the unnatural responses of a world that has been twisted by the curse of sin. So it is necessary for reminders like this to help us focus on the principles of God, when our experience with a world that has departed from His principles would tempt us to give up on “sowing to the Spirit” when it’s not appreciated by those about us. It’s at those times that we must remember to place our focus in the right direction, caring not whether our actions are appreciated by those in this world, but if they are in accordance with the stated will of our heavenly Father. Due season is defined by Him. Therefore, as we are exhorted here, let us cast off the weariness that would keep us from looking for opportunity to do good. Our hope must be in the Lord, as we look toward that day when He will review and reward those good works done in His name. “As we have therefore opportunity” ... may seem to lend some excuse should we not see one. However, we can miss opportunities, not only because of weariness from good deeds cast aside, but also because of the inability to see them. There is much to be accomplished in our daily lives, and most for good reason or cause. This can tend to keep our focus in good directions that can become distractions from the better. Many of us have that tendency to become buried in the current good task as we miss a better one. As we contemplate our directions and choices for our days, let us remember this exhortation, as well as to look for the opportunity that God has indeed placed before us, to bring glory to His name.

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Hedonism

Judges 21:25: In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

As an ethical hedonist, the 18th-19th-century English utilitarian philosopher and proto-bleeding-heart-liberal Jeremy Bentham, believed that right and wrong could be determined by weighing the “pleasures” and “pains” of any given action, with an action that produced more pleasure than pain being morally right. Jeremy would have enjoyed living in the moral quagmire that characterizes the age in which we now exist. How anyone can believe that we are an evolving species remains an enigma to me.

In the 1960's the watchword was: “If it feels good, do it”. As a generation uninhibited by moral constraint they sought to break down every barrier to sate their unbridled lusts with riotous living. Sexual mores were cast to the wind along with any vestige of respect for traditional authority. We rapidly descended into the rabbit hole of degradation.

Without God's law to anchor us we would have to depend on an inner moral compass to establish societal law and order. Considering the resident, depraved nature of man without God, one can easily see how rapid the collapse of moral order would devolve.

For centuries the moral relativists have been espousing the notion that there is no absolute truth. Even Pontius Pilate was affected by the prevailing notion that truth was an elusive, abstract concept when he uttered his rhetorical question : “What is Truth?”. After which he delivered the Son of God to the capricious multitude to do to Him what they thought was “right in their own eyes”.

The age will end when the “man of sin” takes center stage and God and His laws are jettisoned. It is then that “God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness”. Thinking themselves to be free thinkers they will be put in bondage “While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.”

Believers serve the King of kings and possess an unswerving certitude in regards to what is right and what is wrong. Accompanying the gift of eternal life, the Lord has endowed His children with the “mind of Christ” that can “judge all things”. No longer must we trust our deceived hearts to adjudicate the rectitude of any issue for God has spoken and “the scripture cannot be broken”.

NOTE: Could you please let me know if you are reading these devotionals by sending your response to faithbible150@yahoo.com. simply respond with yes every week or yes on occasion and your name.

Thank you. Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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The Strength of Wisdom

*A wise man is strong; yea, a man of knowledge increaseth strength.
– Proverbs 24:5 –*

The age in which we live worships the human body. This obsessive focus upon physical fitness has given rise to body culture. Everywhere and in every way, we are the objects of marketing campaigns and social media flurries that encourage us to try this diet, join that gym, do this routine, etc., all touting that adherence will not just trim down our overweight bodies, but build them into Greco god-like physiques.

While there is no doubt that bodily exercise has some benefit and governing the appetite is part of a healthy lifestyle, our generation is pre-occupied with the body to the exclusion of the intellect. But time and culture have not changed the fact that God created man's true fortitudinous potential in the inner man. God's premium has never been upon the fitness of the body, but rather upon the condition of the mind and heart. Today's text reminds us that real strength is found in wisdom.

Wisdom is a curious thing. There are many highly intelligent people who are not wise. Conversely, there are many simple folks who display a wisdom beyond their years. Wisdom is not merely knowledge attained. It is knowledge retained and consistently applied. And it is not just any kind of knowledge. Enduring wisdom has its genesis in the fear of God and its growth is in the knowledge of the Holy. Seeking God via His Word is the surest pathway to apprehending the knowledge that can make one wise while believing and obeying it is the way an individual's wisdom grows. James whets our appetite for this wisdom from above, reminding us that it is pure, peaceable, gentle, easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. It is no wonder that when one possesses such wisdom, they prove to be increasingly strong and spiritually formidable!

The world, the flesh, and the devil all have an easier time victimizing proud minds and simple hearts. But wise children of God possess the ability to thwart Hell, crucify the flesh, and confound the world. Let us therefore resolve to continually grow in the wisdom of God and the knowledge of the Holy.

-- D. Murcek

Something to Consider

For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye wearied and faint in your minds.

Hebrews 12:3

In all the varied situations of life, it is easy and most natural to see everything from our own perspective. Whether in a season of deep sorrow or loss, or even in times of prosperity and joy, our viewpoint is from our personal mindset. When we hear of a tragic occurrence, our hearts usually reach out with sympathy; but when tragedy strikes us personally, we are prone to feel that our situation is greater than others. When we look at our personal trials exclusively; the weight of sorrow can be overwhelming and discouraging. There is a strong temptation to think that nobody knows how we feel. The suggested remedy is to try walking in other people's shoes, but ultimately, we should consider the extreme trials our Lord Jesus.

When we read of the trials of our Lord Jesus, do we pause to contemplate the enormity of his sacrifice? Do we deeply consider The One who was rich and yet for our sakes became poor? Our first step on heaven's shore one day will reveal the magnitude of all that Jesus willingly left behind for us. Or have we ever taken time to meditate upon what it was like for Him who knew no sin, to become sin for us? Unfortunately, we grow used to sin and even enjoy its very temporal pleasure, not realizing that the holiness of God can not even look at sin. Yet, God in His amazing grace sent His Son to be our sacrificial lamb. Could we even begin to imagine allowing one of our children to be offered as a sacrifice for some vial criminal? When we are lonely, do we ever consider how Jesus must have felt when *he came unto his own, and his own received him not?* The prophet Isaiah reminds us that our Lord was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Because he voluntarily was *wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities* we should express deep remorse for our sin that caused our Lord's suffering, while at the same time having our souls flooded with joyful relief. We should often peer back to that eventful time when the Lord of Lords submitted to the worst of what sinful man could pour out.

Pausing to ponder the rejection, the sacrifice, the mockery, the spittle, the scourging, and the love of our Savior, will help us when we are experiencing the crushing heavy weight of our own burdens. Take time to consider, lest we forget.

J. Ekis

Faith unfeigned

And now, behold, the LORD hath kept me alive, as he said, these forty and five years, even since the LORD spake this word unto Moses, while the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness: and now, lo, I am this day fourscore and five years old. As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out, and to come in. Now therefore give me this mountain, whereof the LORD spake in that day... if so be the LORD will be with me, then I shall be able to drive them out, as the LORD said.

Joshua 14:10-12

Forty-five years after Caleb had returned from spying out Canaan with Joshua and the ten others, his confession of faith in the power of the Lord to give him the ability to take the promised land (Numbers 13:30) had not diminished. Caleb's professed faith when he was forty years old remained now at age eighty-five. As the promises of God are everlasting, so true faith in those promises will also last. This quality of true faith, as opposed to a mere profession with no real substance, is attested to throughout the scriptures by precept and example. Caleb's example of unfeigned faith demonstrates the quality of such faith to remain, even in the face of opposition from his fellow Israelites, as well as the forty-year wait through the wilderness wanderings as a consequence of the disobedience of others. His unfeigned faith was rewarded according to God's promise (Numbers 14:24) after forty-five years. Though tested by adversity and time, he was granted the mount in Hebron by Joshua, and went on to possess it by faithful action. The rest of his generation that resisted him and Joshua back in Kadesh-barnea had died in the wilderness, also according to God's promise, based on their unbelief.

The New Testament epistle to the professing Hebrew Christians confirms this (Hebrews 3:19), while warning them to take heed, lest their professed faith be actually feigned like those unbelieving examples of old (Hebrews 3:12), echoing the admonition from Psalm 95. Jesus confirmed the same truth when He declared to the Jews that appeared to believe on Him, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed" (John 8:31). This is not a condition placed upon them for achievement, but rather a statement of fact describing how true faith is manifested. So Paul in his warnings to Timothy concerning false teachers also declares, "Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned" (I Timothy 1:5). With these warnings and promises, let us heed the exhortations to follow Caleb's example of faith: "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, ... Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised)" (Hebrews 10:22-23).

Dear followers

*Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children.
Ephesians 5:1*

What does it mean to be “dear children?” And what does it mean to follow God as such? The term “dear” has become so overused in some areas of current culture that there is danger in losing its meaning in a context such as the one before us. For example, it’s probably fair to say that when most people begin a letter with “Dear Sir,” they probably don’t consider the true meaning of the term, and would not necessarily consider the “Sir” to whom they write as truly dear to them. Yet in our Bible the word translated “dear” in our text is also translated “beloved” elsewhere (e.g., I John 4:7). Webster’s 1812 dictionary defines “dear” as “Of a high value in estimation; greatly valued; beloved; precious,” and uses our text as an example.

Therefore, before we rush past this blessed adjective, we need to understand the first part of the sentence in light of it. The way we ought to follow God is to be consistent with our standing as His beloved children. Children who understand the overwhelming love of the Father will follow Him and His commandments, not out of a sense of duty, but from hearts full of gratitude for such undeserved yet magnanimous love. The passage goes on to exhort us to walk, that is, to live, in such love, in a manner comparable to how Christ also has loved us, and has given Himself to God as a sacrifice on our behalf for His honor. The apostle John later expresses this response simply: “We love him, because he first loved us” (I John 4:19). It is the obvious expected response from a redeemed heart. Then, as we continue to walk in such love, and more fully grasp it, His commandments are even more our very desires. So Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15), followed by the promise of the Holy Spirit providing us with the constant fellowship of God. With such realization, let our lives daily reflect the motivation of this relationship, as we delight to do His will.

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

PECULIAR PEOPLE

*Deuteronomy 33:29: Who is like unto thee,
O people saved by the LORD*

The benefits that accrue to the account of the redeemed are too numerable to delineate. Believers bask in God's fresh blessings on a daily basis. Oh yes, there are the elements of His "common grace" of which all God's creatures are beneficiaries. Daily sustenance, life and breath, the capacity to enjoy, the pleasures of existence, are but a few of His general provisions of which even the lost partake, but the evident tokens of God's munificent gifts are so apparent in His saints that even the lost are forced to admit it ; "then said they among the heathen, The LORD hath done great things for them."

Even a cursory reading of the scriptures reveals the special care that God demonstrates to His own for "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" In the midst of famine ,Elijah is tenderly cared for by the Heavenly Father .The ravens, not generally known to have a charitable spirit, became servers at the prophet's table. When the Egyptians were visited with ten plagues, the children of God enjoyed a divine exemption. And even when their back was against the sea, "they passed through the Red sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned." The Philistine champion miscalculated what the Mighty God could do through the weakest saint and a Spirit -guided missile. Peter was able to snore the night before his execution because he knew his God was able to deliver him, for he had once before prayed, while nearly drowning, "Lord, save me". O people saved by the Lord , "let the weak say I am strong"

Psalms 68:19 reminds us: "Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation." Chief among those benefits has to be the residing hope of that unseen world that promises us the dissolution of the cursed chains that now bind our bodies to a host of dissipating afflictions. Then our blessed Redeemer shall clothe us with "the garments of salvation" for we "shall see Him as He is" and "sorrow and sighing shall flee away".

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Pastor

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Contradictions

For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. For ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

– Hebrews 12:3 –

Our nature and spiritual constitution as men and women desires fellowship. As such, we tend to try to avoid conflict. Most people will “go along to get along.” This fundamentally is part of our inheritance of God’s image and likeness, to be at peace and not in constant struggle.

Yet we also live in a fallen world, a world that is at enmity with God. Once adopted into His family through the redemption that is in Christ, we become strangers and pilgrims on earth. Our communion is no longer with this world, but with our God and His people. We begin looking for a city with foundations, whose builder and maker is God. An old hymn so clearly resonates this truth...

*This world is not my home, I’m just a passin’ through
My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue
The angels beckon me from heaven’s open door
And I can’t feel at home in this world anymore*

As Christians, we should never feel at home in this world. If we do, something is wrong spiritually. Our text reminds us to consider our Lord, who endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself. This world, under the spell of its god, hates our Christ. We should feel a similar resistance from it. Jesus reminded us, “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you” (John 15: 18). And again, “...because I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you” (John 15:19). And again, “In the world ye will have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Many Christians think they can eke out a life here on earth free of conflict. But if we truly belong to Christ, that is simply not possible. Our relationship with our Master will inevitably bring us into conflict with this world’s philosophy, pleasures, dictates, and norms. While we strive with as much as lieth within us to live peaceably with all men, let us embrace the fact that our enemy the devil does not want to live peaceably with us, and he has a whole world under his spell. As he turns up the heat, let us stand fast in the whole armor of God. The battle is not ours, but God’s. He will supply us everything we need to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil world.

-- D. Murcek

Do We Err?

Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.

Matthew 22:29

Today's text brings to light that religion does not make one know the scriptures, nor does it help for one to actually know God's power. In this verse Jesus is rebuking a group of Sadducees. An official definition of the Sadducees tells us that they were the party of high priests, and aristocratic families which were the wealthier segment of the population. Their beliefs denied the resurrection of the dead, the existence of spirits, and the obligation of oral tradition, emphasizing acceptance of the written Law alone. The Sadducees insincerely presented Jesus with a hypothetical situation concerning the resurrection. Before Jesus answers their question, he first points out that they erred because of not knowing the scriptures and the power of God. The Lord's rebuke and answer silenced the Sadducees, while the rest of the multitude were astonished at his doctrine.

Though the depths of God's word are unfathomable, Christians should seek to gain a workable knowledge of the scriptures. We should develop a daily regiment of reading God's word so as to acquire as much spiritual knowledge as possible. Reading the Word often will lead to searching for a deeper understanding of its truths. Then meditating on it will firmly plant those truths in our souls so we can have a reservoir of comfort, strength, and guidance for our lives. The prophet Jeremiah said that when he found God's word, he would consume it, and it became the joy and rejoicing of his heart. To help us become more familiar with scripture, God will often allow us to be confronted with a question which we stumble to answer. This should motivate us to go searching for an accurate biblical answer. As we seek the help of the Holy Spirit to answer challenging questions from another, we learn the answers for ourselves as we search the scriptures with purpose. The verses of the foundational truths of the scriptures should become deeply rooted in us so that we can know and support what we believe. Can we name and reference the verses that support salvation by grace, blood atonement, or verbal inspiration, just to name a few?

It has been said that "knowledge is power", and what great power there is in knowing the Word. Search it today and may God help us to know it, love it, and live it. - J. Ekis

Lies

And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

– 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12 –

It began in the Garden (Genesis 3:1-5) with the characteristic subtility of the Serpent, questioning the word of God, “Hath God said...?” Our primal mother engaged the notion of whether she and her husband had clearly heard God’s commandment, thus beginning her confusion.

The devil then moved to his next tactic of deception via obfuscation. “Ye shall not surely die...”. What did God mean by “surely die?” It is likely that Eve understood this to portend complete and immediate destruction. We have no record that she and Adam inquired any further. And so, the Devil played upon her innocent yet self-limited knowledge of God’s word.

He then moved his temptation toward justification. Was there not a reasonableness to desire to disobey God’s word? “Your eyes shall be open...”. Was God withholding something from them? (Indeed, He was, but nothing good. Only the knowledge of evil).

The Serpent’s final blow completed the temptation – raising expectations with an empty promise that could never be satisfied. “Ye shall be as gods.” This would henceforth be the birthday-present of all human progeny – an inherent belief that self is god, a lie that spawns all human sin, all the while exposing itself by the blatant inability to become absolute masters of our destiny or undisputed captains of our souls. The devil has been cackling for millennia.

There is a desire for and a pleasure in unrighteousness that drives unregenerate mankind in its quest for godhood. We are living in a generation where the velocity of this ignorance of truth is leading toward God’s cataclysmic judgement. This will begin with God Himself providing a strong delusion. Think about that a moment. He will ultimately permit mankind to have what it recalcitrantly desires – a Satanically borne lie. Human history began with a willful embrace of falsehood. It will sadly end for those who received not the truth where that embrace is consummated (Rev. 22:15).

By the blood of Christ, we know something that our first parents forgot – that our God’s truth is infinitely greater than our enemy’s lies. We are not ignorant of his devices. Until the trumpet sounds, let us expose the farce. Let us challenge the darkness. Let us be a brilliant people of truth.

Assumptions

The LORD God of gods, the LORD God of gods, he knoweth, and Israel he shall know; if it be in rebellion, or if in transgression against the LORD, (save us not this day,)... And Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest said unto the children of Reuben, and to the children of Gad, and to the children of Manasseh, This day we perceive that the LORD is among us, because ye have not committed this trespass against the LORD: now ye have delivered the children of Israel out of the hand of the LORD.
Joshua 22:22, 31

This account is a reminder of a common aspect of human nature that can be the cause of untold conflicts if not put in check. After the years of conquest in Canaan had finally ended, and the enemies of Israel there were generally subdued (Joshua 21:43-45), in this chapter Joshua released the warriors from the tribes that had been given inheritance on the east side of Jordan – Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh – so that they could return to their homes and families there. They had kept their promise to Moses and Joshua to leave all behind and come to help the remaining tribes fight for their inheritances on the west side of Jordan. As they returned, they had built a huge altar on the bank of Jordan where they crossed that resembled the actual altar in the tabernacle in Shiloh. Very quickly, as word of this structure reached the western tribes, they reversed from blessing the eastern warriors to preparing to go to war against them, assuming the new altar was erected as an alternative to the official one in Shiloh. As we read the account, it reveals how the mere hearsay of the altar at Jordan had been extrapolated into a number of assumptions, which had been built upon past experiences of the Israelites, culminating in the final assumption of rebellion by the eastern tribes. The account demonstrates that all of the assumptions made were wrong, and could have caused a civil war among God's people. Fortunately, before going to war, the western tribes sent representatives to question the inferred rebellion. As a result, as we see in our text, the assumptions were all proven wrong, and a tragedy was prevented.

All of God's people need to learn the lesson of this chapter and apply it freely in our own experience. While we all are averse to having our own motives misjudged, when the roles are reversed, it seems that human nature is predisposed to make wrong assumptions about the motives of others' actions. Sometimes there is even past experience where the assumptions were applicable, but may not be in the present. Then, often the wrong assumptions lead to other wrong assumptions, to the point that "war" is determined (see James 4:1-2), and conflict results from a false construct. Let us learn instead to give the "benefit of the doubt," and when necessary obtain clarification rather than assume. It is notable that the Israelites were all pleased that their assumptions were proven false. May that be our desire, and may the Lord fill us all with a lasting dose of Ephesians 4, Romans 12, and Matthew 18, for the application of this passage written aforetime for our learning.

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

As Long As

II Chronicles 26:5: And he sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God: and as long as he sought the LORD, God made him to prosper.

Uzziah began well for he sought the Lord in all his business and God made him to prosper. The lesson though is found in that conditional phrase-“as long as he sought the Lord”. Eleven verses later we sadly take note.”But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction.” He became untethered from the source of his strength, taking for granted the living presence of God’s Spirit and consequentially met with an ignominious end - from the throne to a several house where he died of his leprosy.

Complacency is the bane of the Christian walk. Too often we think we are standing when, in fact, we are in a free fall. It is of vital importance that we keep ourselves in our most holy faith. When the perfidious Delilah shouted “The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him.” Even though we have that better promise of the abiding Spirit of God, it is possible that we can also “fall from your own steadfastness” as Peter warned. Only as long as we seek the Lord can we expect to reap the benefits of a prosperous life.

*Because he hath inclined his ear unto me,
therefore will I call upon him
as long as I live.
Psalms 116:2*

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

Hearing His Voice

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

– Revelation 3:20 –

Our risen Master had many words of warning and encouragement for the seven churches in Asia Minor. What is unique about His concluding promises to the church of the Laodiceans is that they are directed primarily to the individual rather than the collective body. “If any *man* hear my voice...”.

This worldly church had lost its power and influence, being more comfortable with the life that now is than aspiring for the one to come. The salt had all but lost its savor. Its spiritual lukewarmness emanated from its compromised doctrine and its tainted membership rolls. It was a spiritual and fleshly admixture – believers and imposters, wheat and tares. A little leaven had leavened the lump.

Yet Christ still loved and longed for communion with those who truly belonged to Him in this corrupted body. They were there, perhaps incognizant of the depth to which their fellow congregants had assimilated with the world and the dearth of real and redemptive faith present in their assembly. Jesus shocks these true disciples out of their stupor with a significant warning and condemnation, and then beseeches each of them – *individually* – to listen. His knock was accompanied by His voice, the same voice that He previously said was known by His sheep (John 10:27). He was calling His own. If they would but listen and open, despite their compromise, they could enjoy restored and full fellowship with their Savior. This no doubt would be the first step to remediating their undiscerning hearts and correcting their ineffective lives.

The church of the Laodiceans was a foreshadowing of Christ-professors just prior to the time of Jacob’s Trouble. It may well be that we find ourselves in the age that will usher in Christ’s return, for it is difficult to fathom how much more effete and compromised the professing church can become. We must be vigilant. It is easy to become people of our times and indulge in the spiritual lethargy of the age. Beyond the clamor and din of problems great and small, and the confusion coming from an ever-compromising Christendom, the Master can be heard. Jesus is still calling. His desire is for nothing more than our undivided hearts. Dear reader, can you hear Him?

-- D. Murcek

Salt of the Earth

Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt have lost his savior, wherewith shall it be salted?

Matthew 5:13

Salt plays a prominent role in the world. Seventy percent of world's surface is covered with salt water. In most households it is in the cupboards and on the table. Salt enhances flavors and preserves foods. It is valuable commodity in many cultures, and sometimes used as a medium of exchange. In today's text Jesus used its qualities to describe believers.

At the conclusion of the beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells the believers that they are the salt of the earth. The principles of the beatitudes are not only beneficial for those that apply them, but also for others who are exposed to the lives that live them. Just as salt enhances food to make it more desirable, those who live by these principles make Christianity more attractive to an unbelieving world. As our culture becomes more secular, the preserving power of Christianity's influence diminishes. Today, the antithesis of the beatitudes has risen to a greater prominence. Pride and arrogance have replaced meekness, desire for worldly possessions has usurped hungering for righteousness, anger and aggression supplant peacemaking, rejoicing in evil is substituted for mourning for sin, and revenge is valued more than mercy. The fallout of this is apparent throughout our country. God's plan is for us to live out the principles of the beatitudes in our lives, so that the preserving influence can help and attract others to our God. Interacting with others with a spirit of meekness shines more light on the Savior than our selves. Our remorse and sorrow for sin may bring a ray of conviction to one who is in need of repentance. Hunger and thirsting after righteousness show that the Christian has heavenly interest, and has escaped the worldly entrapments that bind so many. Being pure in heart with our desires helps the unconverted to see sincerity of faith. Enduring persecution, mild or severe, demonstrates that the believer's kingdom is not of this world.

It is important for us to always remember that the lost around us are hurting. They are trying to stay positive while they are alienated from a true relationship with the Savior. We have an opportunity to exert a preserving influence by living out our faith. By experiencing the blessing of these principle, ourselves, we then are better equipped in helping others. Remember; we are the salt of the earth!

J. Ekis

There is a Savior

... for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.

Luke 2:10,11

The glorious long-awaited announcement, though made to the lowly Galilean shepherds, still resounds to us today. The fact that the birth of the Savior was purposed by God to bring joy to *all* people leads us to conclude that every person ever born is in need of this Savior. From the four corners of the earth, whether in the remote and uncivilized rain forest of the Amazon Basin, or in the most prosperous industrialized nation, *all* people everywhere need the Savior.

Throughout His earthly ministry, every person with whom Jesus came in touch, was in need of Him. Whether the need was for salvation, deliverance, direction, comfort, fellowship, or healing, only the Savior could satisfy their need. It was the Savior who came to the friendless invalid's rescue at the pool of Bethesda. Both the guilty adulterous woman as well as her self-righteous accusers, though their situations differed, had the common need of a Savior. The insincere religious leaders whose questions were designed to trap Jesus did not realize that the answer to their own problems stood before them. Seekers like Nicodemus and Zacchaeus, and rejectors as Herod and Pilate were *all* in need of the Savior. The unnamed rich man who fared sumptuously every day, and the leprous Lazarus who sat begging at his gate each needed Jesus. Lazarus found paradise because of a Savior, and the rich man found out too late that he needed the Savior. One thief on the cross repented and embraced the Savior, while the unrepentant one perished in his rejection of the Savior. The disciples in the ship needed someone to save them in the midst of a turbulent sea, while the maniac needed to be saved from the oppression of demons within. Bartimaeus in his blindness sought the Savior. The outcast lepers sought the Savior. The Syrophenician woman desperately sought the Savior. Money could not save the rich young ruler, positional power could not save Caiaphas, and religion could not save the Pharisees; they all needed to know there is a Savior.

Two millennium ago, Jesus Christ left heaven and came to this world to give His life as a sacrifice for sin so that mankind could be reconciled to God. His death and resurrection completed the eternal plan. He is still the Savior for our sins; He is ever the Savior for our problems. For all who are broken, distressed, fearful, desperate, burdened, alienated, and hopeless; take comfort knowing that there is a Savior. ~J. Ekis

Trust in the LORD

Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the LORD.

Psalms 4:5

This psalm provides a number of reminders for us to put our trust in the Lord. The psalmist David begins by acknowledging that God is the source of his righteousness (verse 1). Then, as our text describes, because he has received righteousness from God, he can understand that the sacrifice offered in and of itself is not what pleases God, but it is the trusting faith that motivates the sacrifice. "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). He also reminds us to trust the Lord to hear us when we call unto Him (verses 1, 3), knowing that we are the recipients of His abundant mercy, having been adopted through faith as His children (Matthew 7:7-11). We can also trust Him to show us good (verse 6), and to fill our hearts with gladness that exceeds any temporal happiness, esteemed by the world based on the increase of material things (verse 7). The gladness and joy that He gives is eternal and abiding. Jesus confirmed to His disciples, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (John 15:11). Finally, he describes the peace and safety that trusting the Lord brings. He can sleep without worry or fear, knowing that the Lord is truly his only source of safety. There may be many devices that man may invent to try to provide protection from various maladies or menaces, and to somehow sustain some sense of peace that these will not harm or detract from his peace. Yet, putting trust in man instead of the Lord is cursed by the Lord (Jeremiah 17:5-7). With all that mankind may try to offer, only the Lord God is worthy of our trust for peace and safety, for now and for eternity. Let our trust be only and fully in the Lord.

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Receive Him

John 1:12: But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

No amount of man's effort can satisfy the demands of a holy God. It is Christ's substitutional death and imputation of his righteousness to the account of the sinner that justifies him at the judgement bar. (Romans 3:23-28) But that salvation must be appropriated by the faith of the penitent sinner who recognizes his jeopardized condition.

The sinner's mind is blinded to the penalty awaiting him at death. The preaching of repentance awakens the conscience and alerts the man to seek a remedy for his perilous condition. So we might employ these various expressions: "surrender, or give up their sin, or call out to God and really mean it, or that you need to (fill in the blank) to get under Christ's blood, or that you need to ask Jesus into your heart, or make him your Lord and Savior" all of which are designed to stimulate the sinner to come to Christ. If there is nothing for the sinner "to do" then we are either left with universalism or the Calvinistic notion of unconditional election.

Why did John preach "repent ye, and believe the gospel Mark 1:15" unless the people needed to do something in preparation to receive the gospel? Peter at Pentecost preached a message of condemnation and conviction and elicited a response: Acts 2:37: "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." The sinful people were culpable of the death of Christ and were made to feel the guilt of their rejection. Peter instructs them that the forgiveness had been purchased and that it remained their choice to appropriate it or reject it. He urges them to "Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." In this specimen of gospel preaching we find all the needed elements to effect the saving of souls: 1. preaching that convicted the heart 2. sinners seeking a remedy for their sin 3. the gospel of the death and resurrection presented 4. the minister of the word urging the sinner to repent and believe the finished work 5. some, not all, choosing to receive that good news. This paradigm is repeated throughout the book of Acts.

No, salvation is not effected by the will or the works of man but by the finished work of Christ. Man has nothing to do with the payment of our salvation that is what John 1:12-13 is pointing to: "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." We must receive Christ which means exercising our free will to believe the gospel. The power to "born" us into His family was not by the will of man but by Christ surrendering His will to die in our place and God's will to accept that as a satisfaction for His demands. John 6:29: "Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." So believing or rejecting is our choice which is an act of our free will. We are not compelled to believe. The gospel, which was not at all accomplished by the will of man, must be appropriated to be effectual.

There are many "whosoever will" passages that would militate against the notion that man's will plays no part in our appropriating God's salvation. Revelation 22:17: And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. These urgings to willfully come must be considered to be genuine offers lest we accuse God of proffering an invitation that is impossible to obtain.

Admittedly, there are some mysteries involved in reconciling the sovereignty of God and the free will of man. John 6:37: All that the Father giveth me shall come to me (sovereignty); and him that cometh to me (free will) I will in no wise cast out. All those who have studied the Word in depth have encountered this conundrum. Suffice us to say the the secret things belong unto God whose thoughts are not our thoughts. Some seemingly contradictory matters will most certainly find their resolution in that place prepared where Christ shall be our eternal teacher

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

Being Still

Be still, and know that I am God...
– Psalm 46:10 –

I have always admired hunters and fishermen. I cast a line many times with my boys when they were younger, but quickly realized within my heart that they were going to need to learn these skills from someone other than their dear old dad. I am adept at neither sport because I intrinsically lack a requisite amount of the fundamental characteristic required to bag a deer or catch a fish. I simply do not have the patience to wait in one place long enough to be rewarded.

But being still and patient is not just part of triumphant outdoorsmanship. It is a vital spiritual discipline. And unlike hunting or fishing, it is not optional in the Christian walk. Life is going to inevitably bring us to a set of circumstances where we will have to exercise one of two diametrically opposed options – to impatiently move forward, imposing our own will and initiative, or to be still and wait for God. The Lord often permits us to flail in the former and less logical choice for some time, but He will invariably bring us to a place where we will be so spiritually exhausted that we can do nothing but stop and remember Who holds us. It is here in this stillness where earth and heaven meet. Like the children of Israel on the shore of the Red Sea with Pharaoh's hordes fast approaching, we will find ourselves in a place where no matter what course of self-directed action we take, it will lead to our demise. We will need to remember at that moment that if we simply stand still, we will see the salvation of the Lord. The only pathway of deliverance is to know that He is God. It is not an initiative of mind or body or will – but simply of faith. Faith that God Himself sees us. Faith that He knows our peril. Faith that He who has been with us before will be with us now. Faith that in human terms, all help has passed and all hope is lost – but that God is still God. It is in this moment of internal quietude where the Master will prove Himself faithful to His beloved.

You may be facing a storm. Financial distress, physical disease, personal loss, etc. have claimed many a sailor and may be now targeting your frail bark. You are wishing for former days and smoother waters, toiling to get back to them. But your best efforts will be to no avail. This trouble is here, and it is gathering strength. Stop wishing, hoping, pushing, fighting. Be still. The One who loved you enough to purchase at Calvary has not forgotten you. You know that He is God. Permit your heart to remember what that means. The Lord of Hosts is with you. The God of Jacob your refuge. Selah.

-- D. Murcek

God's Plan Prevails

There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless, the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand.

Proverbs 19:21

No one likes to have their plans interrupted, yet interruptions happen to all of us. They can come from any direction at what frequently seems to be the worst times, often causing us to be frustrated because our course is altered forcing a change of plans. Even when we have prayed about a course of action, we may find that our path is diverted. Why does this happen? Consider that we do not always have perfect knowledge of what to do or where to go. As believers we should accept the fact that God has a higher plan for us.

It can boggle the mind when we think that God's eternal plan works in tandem with man's free will. This process was worked out in our conversion to Christ. Whether we had an organized and specific plan for our lives or were just aimlessly drifting through life, we all received a divine interruption when we came to Christ. Often our free will took us in wrong directions, all of which usually produced a sense of disappointment or dissatisfaction. God in His mercy would use this as a means of causing our heart to be more open to spiritual things. Although we didn't plan on a certain day for our conversion, the Lord in His grace would intervene so we might yield to His plan. How many of us when reminiscing about our conversion can now clearly see the Lord's hand working out His plan?

After we are born again God continues to work out His plan for us. With the Holy Spirit within and the Word to lighten our path, we still do not have perfect knowledge to be certain of what direction to take. As we mature as believers, we gain more knowledge to help make better plans for ourselves. Often, we can feel the leadership of the Lord; but there are still times when the Lord overrides our plan with His best plan. It may even come in the form of an interaction with a stranger who crosses our path. This person may need Christ, or maybe they are sent to teach us some lesson. How often our lives are blessed by someone we never intended to meet. The apostle Paul never planned to go to jail at Philippi, and yet it was there that he experienced divine deliverance and was able to tell the jailer about God's plan of salvation.

The next time an interruption comes your way look for the Lord to bring a lesson or an experience that will bring you closer to Him. When we surrender our plan to His, we find Him working out His will in our life.

J. Ekis