

Deep unto Deep

Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me.
– Psalm 42:7 –

Evolutionary mythology masquerading as science has baptized multitudes into mass confusion about our identity as human beings. Yet the Bible makes it clear who and what we are. By honest reason alone it should be grossly apparent that we are so much more than animal. Made in the image and likeness of God, we walk uprightly, stretching toward the heavens, from whence we came and for which we were designed. There is a depth to human existence that plays out nowhere else in sentient creation. Love, humor, sorrow, reason, thrill – these are but a few of the self-evident marks of our distinct identity and eternal purpose.

There is a yearning in every human heart for deep communion with our Maker. It is solely the redemption found in Christ that is able to satiate this innate longing. In these days of half-hearted commitment to God amongst those who claim to know Him, it is important that we take inventory of ourselves. Discipleship means that we build our lives upon a foundation that has significant depth as its chief characteristic (Luke 6:48). Without it, the Word sown takes no real root and is soon scorched by temptation's intense rays of persecution, riches, and cares of this life (Mark 4:5). A truly born-again believer is in possession of the Holy Ghost and is therefore a custodian of the deep things of God (1 Cor. 2:10). He or she is planted, as it were, by the rivers of water, bringing about a continuous yielding forth of abundant fruit as evidence of the depth of the salvation experience (Psalm 1:3). Regular Bible study, sincere Christian service, frequent and earnest prayer, heart-felt praise and adoration, and both individual and corporate worship – all born out of a deep and abiding love for God and sincere charity toward our fellow man – are the result of the deep-and-ever-deepening presence of the Holy Ghost within the center of the soul. If these are not consistently present and proliferating, we must in turn search deeply to find out what is wrong.

Upon our repentance, God threw our sins into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19). Is it not logical to expect that one who has experienced such a benevolent forgiveness should reciprocally harbor a well-rooted allegiance to his or her Creator? True conversion runs deep in the human soul – very deep. Dear reader, how deep is your salvation experience? How deep is your commitment to Him who loved you and washed you from your sins in His own blood? Let us look to wade still deeper today into the marvelous fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel's veins. -- D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Go and Tell

Mark 5:19-20: Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee. And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel

The maniac of Gadara, who once terrorized the countryside with ravings and violent acts, now sat composed and in his right mind at the feet of the Lord of Hosts. No more bestial howling at midnight, no unpredictable outbursts of outrageous calamities, no further, futile attempts to bind the madman with ineffective chains, for with one powerful command the devils were cast out and the victim was delivered. A man who once lived only to satisfy his own craven desires now wished to follow the One who broke asunder the bonds of dereliction and charted a new course for a soul adrift and bereft of purpose and positive destiny. But curiously, the Lord refused his application to join the college of the twelve. There was a greater mission to be accomplished by his remaining in Decapolis and providing a constant witness to the saving power of the gospel of Christ. What a marvel he was to those who knew of this infamous menace. All efforts to convert the lunatic proved to be ineffective. No program of rehabilitation, no amount of incarceration, no effete pagan incantations proved effective in soothing the savage spirit that raged within the restless bosom of the maniac of Gadara. Only Jesus could have done this "great thing" and the maniac was only too willing to give Him the credit as he published the good news throughout those ten cities that he once terrorized.

The dramatic conversion of a demon-crazed man should have brought great joy to the community of the Gadarenes, for here the greatest menace to the area was brought to a place of docility and calm. One would think that Jesus would have been honored and praised for the miracle, but instead, they bade Him "to depart out of their coasts". Behold the contradiction and folly of unbelief!

Though it may be met with ridicule, scorn, and unbelief, we are instructed to "Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee". The account provides no more details of the effect that that one conversion might have had upon those friends and relatives that witnessed the transformation of this liberated maniac.

Be a good witness today,

Pastor

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

Prophetic Paradigms

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass...

– Revelation 1:1 –

There is no doubt we are living in the last days. The student of Scripture knows that the last days began when Christ ascended to Heaven. We cannot know when Jesus will return, we are just to be watching. That said, we are closer today than yesterday, and it could be today that He comes for us!

The understanding of biblical eschatology is greatly enhanced by studying what God's Word says about our Adversary who plays a great role in the unfolding of prophecy. Satan is genius, but limited – a finite being whose power with men is neither all-encompassing nor irrevocable. With these parameters around him, he must "practice", as it were, in order to get better at deceiving mankind. He's been doing it for millennia. The arch Fiend has prepared many antichrists throughout the ages. From Nero to Hitler, history affords us ample evidence of the working of hellish principalities and powers in the governing affairs of men. With the advancement of Artificial Intelligence and the budding scientific field of "transhumanism", our Enemy is working overtime in our generation to prepare the way for his Man of Sin. It appears that the rider on the first horse may be in the wings (Rev. 6:2).

Speaking of those mysterious horsemen in Revelation 6, we see some other paradigms unfolding in our day. That second rider has power to take peace from the earth (Rev. 6:4). The Russia-Ukraine conflict has produced multiple headlines about a possible third World War. It also has us talking about food shortages and famine. The words behind the third rider with the balances have never been more eerily applicable in modern times, "A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine" (Rev. 6:6).

Jesus Himself told us that the days preceding His return would be marked by widespread pestilence (Mt. 24:7; Lk. 21:11). We have just gone through a global pandemic. The world has certainly seen these before. But what gives me pause to ponder the prophetic implications of this most recent one is the syntax of so many of the elites. Early in 2021, just as Covid-19 was named a pandemic, Dr. Fauci said that we are in "the era of pandemics". What does that mean? And Bill Gates has recently been touting the "next" pandemic. It makes one wonder, what exactly do these Satanically controlled people know?

Mankind is increasingly comfortable with making war with the Lamb (Rev. 17:14). These and other prophetic paradigms will continue to unfold and gain steam until they are either interrupted by a sweeping revival amongst God's people, or until the Lord comes to catch us away. I welcome either. How about you? – D. Murcek

Divine Understatement

And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads.
– Revelation 22:4 –

Understatement is sometimes an intentional literary or linguistic device, but in common parlance, it is more frequently the passive result of the disparity in knowledge between speaker and hearer. For instance, a nuclear physicist, in relaying some of his work to someone of lesser schooling in the sciences, may well understate certain items because he does not recognize or simply forgets the lack of specific training in his audience. This makes these aspects of the presentation seemingly incidental, while they are actually of critical import to the general topic being presented.

The Holy Spirit has filled our Bibles with understatements. These are both intentional and meticulously placed in order to elicit our meditation upon the chasm that exists between our mortal finitude and His eternal excellence. The first chapter of Genesis is teeming with examples. One of those is found in 1:16 "...he made the stars also". The unengaged reader misses it. The intellectual mocks it. But the believer stops in awful wonder and ponders. If the vast expanse of the universe, with its galaxies, and blackholes, and supernovas, et. al., is incidental to this God, just how awesome He must be! And that he devotes so much more of His time to explaining the creation of man and woman, how important we must be to Him!

Perhaps the densest utilization of understatement in the Bible occurs in the gospels. Just a few instances to consider would be...

"And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them..." (Luke 2:51). Think about it – as a boy, the Son of the Living God obeyed his godly yet fallible parents!

"And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue..." (Luke 4:16). Stop and ponder. Jesus formed customs or habits – good and right and wonderful holy habits. What an example! What condescension!

"Jesus wept" (John 11:35). Often quoted, frequently repeated, yet do we really understand the depth of meaning in these two words?

"He is not here: for he is risen, as he said" (Matthew 28:6). What restraint by these heavenly visitants. They must have wanted to say more. But the Spirit would leave it for the Apostle Paul to later codify the import of this simply matter-of-fact (!) angelic informative.

Finally, we turn to our text in Revelation. "And they shall see His face." What aeons of anticipation and everlasting joy are encapsulated in those few words, only the true disciple can barely begin to grasp. -- D. Murcek

A Formula for Seeing His Glory

***And Moses said, This is the thing which the Lord commanded that ye should do:
and the glory of the LORD shall appear unto you.***

Leviticus 9:6

When a certain topic strikes our interest, we often look more deeply into the subject. We pursue avenues to gather as much information as we can to increase our knowledge. Tourists who are planning to see the Grand Canyon for the first time will research information about the National Park. They may search for the best trails or observation decks that showcase the grandeur of the park. In the same way, believers should be captured by the wonders of our Savior, and God has provided ways for us to peer more deeply into the glory of His presence.

The book of Leviticus lays the groundwork for the office of the Priesthood. Qualifications of the priest and the animals that were to be sacrificed are described in detail. In chapter nine, Moses instructs Aaron on what he must do so that the glory of the LORD would appear unto him. Aaron was to make a sin-offering and a burnt-offering as an atonement for himself and the people. As a type of the Lord Jesus, the offerings enabled priests and people to be in the presence of a holy and righteous God. When the offering was completed, Moses and Aaron would bless the congregation and the glory of God would appear to all the people. Through the atonement of the sacrifice, forgiveness would flow and bring the congregation near the presence of God and allow them to see His glory.

A very similar formula is required for us to see God's glory today. Recognizing our sin and placing our faith in the Lamb of God who was sacrificed for our sins brings us close to His glory. Hopefully, we never grow complacent in our relationship with the Lord. The ordinance of the Lord's Supper was instituted to keep the significance of the crucifixion fresh in our minds. The wonder of the time when we first came to Christ is preserved when we take time to meditate upon the broken body and the shed blood of our Savior. Likewise, every day we can take advantage of returning to the time when we first caught a glimpse of the Savior. Meditating on the sacrifice wrought at Calvary and keeping it fresh in our minds and hearts, should deepen our appreciation for the forgiveness we have been given and give us a renewed awareness of the Lord's glory.

May God graciously grant us a vision of His glory today, and may that vision increase our hunger for more. J. Ekis

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

When the Lord Hides Himself

John 8:59: ... but Jesus hid himself

In the context of our cited verse, Jesus understandably withdraws Himself from those who had every intention of killing Him, but, as in a number of other references, "His hour had not yet come". What folly of those benighted Jews to want to extinguish the light of the world! In response to their vehemence, Jesus hid himself from them, as He does with all those who reject His claims. The famous mathematician and atheist, Bertrand Russell (co-founder of analytic philosophy), was asked about what he would say if he had to stand before God one day to give account for his unbelief. Said he: "I would ask him: "Sir, why did you take such pains to hide yourself?"

In theological or philosophical terms, this dilemma is called *The Hiddenness of God*. In reality, God is not hidden, and if He were any more open, then belief in Him would border on coercion instead of free will. As in our text, He is only hidden from those who have already rejected His claims. *Matthew 11:25: "At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes."*

In another sense, how close the Lord seemed to us when the Holy Spirit first bade us come to Christ. Just as a mother hovers over the newborn, tending to his every need and filling every anxious agitation with maternal assurances, so the Lord spent such familial affections on us, his adopted children. In those halcyon days, as we reveled in our new birth, every event seems to be saturated with the presence of God. But then, just as certainly as a parent must wean the child of such doting lest their maturity be forever stunted, so must the Lord hide Himself, as it were, to foster our growth in faith. Our faith must not be dependent on the evidence of signs and wonders. If we are to grow in faith we must "endure seeing Him who is invisible" and "walk by faith not by sight."

David prayed, "Hide not thy face far from me". He enjoyed a unique relationship with his Lord and so formed this desperate prayer lest the Lord should depart from him. David felt that he had done something that would incur God's disfavor and break the fellowship that had been forged by his faithful obedience.

So many times did Israel intentionally offend the Almighty and brought the incumbent and remedial reaction from the Lord: *Isaiah 54:7: For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee.* The frantic Shulamite awakes to find her lover gone. And so forthwith she scours the streets and asks every citizen if they had seen Him whom her soul loveth. *"But I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go."* With the Master seemingly at a distance from us, much the more do we ardently seek Him until we find Him and never let Him go!

Let us seek and find him

Pastor

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

Validating the Message

And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. ~ Matthew 9:35

Two millennia ago, the Lord Jesus left the glories of heaven and descended to this corrupt world to offer His life as a sacrifice for the sins of all mankind. Before accomplishing His mission, he lived a human life in perfect obedience to the Heavenly Father defeating all of the devil's temptations.

After His temptation in the wilderness, Jesus went about teaching the coming of a better kingdom and instilling hope for burdened people. His acts of lovingkindness supported His teachings and also confirmed that the Messiah had come. In His brief visit to this earth, He secured eternal life for all who would trust in Him, while also setting the example for His believers to emulate.

As God's children, believers are to walk in the teachings and example that Jesus has set. Though He was God in the flesh and performed miraculous works that we could never repeat, yet still we are to align our lives to His divine pattern. His teachings have stood the test of time, and they are just as significant today as when He uttered them. We must not add to His Word, but we can extend the freedom they offer as we repeat the Word to others who are bound by this current spiritual darkness. We are to offer others the hope that God so loved the world, or that the weak and heavy laden can find rest, or that in the Father's house are many mansions, and many other words of eternal truth. The words of salvation and hope that we can bring are to be bolstered by our charitable deeds. We cannot raise the dead, but with God's power, we can help raise the spiritually dead by the life-saving truth of the Gospel. We cannot give sight to blind eyes, but with the light of God's word, we can help others to see the Light of the World. We may not be able to feed five thousand, but we can share our food and tell others about the Bread of Life. We can be a good Samaritan to someone who is beaten and left for dead by others on the road of life. By giving a cup of water in Jesus' name we can demonstrate the love for others that God has placed in our hearts. We can forgive others who have wronged us and tell them of the One whose forgiveness flowed from the cross.

Just as Jesus went about the regions of Galilee teaching and performing good deeds, we have the opportunity to do the same. With God's help may we look for opportunities to share the Gospel and do some good deed today in Jesus' Name.

J. Ekis

Fruitful faith

*For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.
II Peter 1:8*

With the apostle's reminder of our Lord's exceeding great and precious promises, which make us to be partakers of the divine nature, it seems odd that there exists the possibility implied here that we could be barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of Him. But while God does all the saving and all the sanctifying, the context preceding our text demonstrates that, beside this, there are choices on our part that promote the growth of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. We are to add to our faith, which is that initial step into sanctifying grace that changes our position before God, from an outcast to His child, and joint-heir with Christ. The things to add are virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity. And not only are we to add these, but we are to add them with all diligence. Why? Because it is possible while we continue in this earthly tabernacle to be or to grow stagnant, even in faith and knowledge of the truth. Even in the beautiful growth that we witness about us in nature we can see some places where potential growth was stunted, or initial growth has been devoured by an adversary. So the gardener must add to the still-existing life those things that will bring revitalization, growth, and fruit. Likewise, in our spiritual life is the need to pursue these necessary fertilizers and fruits that the Spirit supplies. And not only that they might be in us, but be in us and abound. He came that we might have life, and have it more abundantly. Let us shun spiritual barrenness, and give ourselves wholly to the upward call of His precious promises unto these sanctifying fruits of His divine nature.

Fathers

Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long...
– Exodus 20:12 –

Father's Day is around the corner. I frequently exhort young people to beware of dishonoring their fathers and mothers. There is a special, life-long blessing attached to the soul who genuinely magnifies his or her parents' noble and good influence, and likewise minimizes their faults and shortcomings.

My dad suffered under the twin terrors of Alzheimer's and Parkinson's for the last decade of his life. I learned many lessons from him throughout his life, even (and perhaps especially) by that bed of affliction. I tried to condense my gratitude in the following that I wrote for him on what would be his last Father's Day before he graduated to glory. I pray it blesses...

*When mirror's image stares at me upon each passing day,
And I muse afresh upon what down beneath the surface lay
I find a confidence about the man I've come to be
Because it is my dad's reflection in my soul I see
He taught me strength and beauty, the sound ethics of a king
Lessons which through daily life so resonantly ring
His example, back to which time after time I quickly tread,
Was wrought within my soul through youth's fast-flowing riverbed
And now through the strange conduit of suff'ring's icy hand
He's teaching me new lessons I just ne'er would understand
For see, 'tis by this bed where I have opportunity
To lift up supplications like those he once said for me
And as we wait for Jesus to eradicate the Curse
Which villain is to friend and foe alike so coldly terse
I find great consolation that on Heaven's blissful shore
My hero shall again be what he was, and even more!
But until then by faith we simply press on, being true
Mindful that our Savior knows well what we're going through
And He, the greatest Hero that all earth has ever had
Shall abundantly reward one day my most heroic dad
So, if you wonder why the next you suffer some hard thing
Rest assured that to the Lord you may like a child cling
For He oft permits the hard things to the noblest of the race
So that we may learn yet even more about His matchless grace
And so, to all who read these words please lend me now your ear
I owe more than could be repaid to the hero who lies here
And though he cannot talk to you, this seed I now have sown –
My dad is just the greatest mortal man I've ever known
And now each day as I reflect so oft upon his love
Which served as earthly vestibule to the Father's from above
I'm grateful with more earnestness than ever I have had
For this gift from God's most gracious hand – my most heroic dad*

-- D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Excelsior

Philippians 3:14: I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

The master of lyric poetry, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow employed his unrivaled talents to craft the poem Excelsior. He poignantly captures the pertinacity of a young man who braves the formidable challenge of scaling the Alps so as to plant at its summit a banner with the inspiring word: Excelsior. In this single Latin word was found the motivation that impelled the young climber forward despite a litany of difficulties, dangers, and disparaging tempters from which lesser men may have succumbed. Excelsior: "Ever Upward"! He repeated the sacred mantra when each withering temptation bade him quit. At the last, his goal achieved, he spent his life as:

A traveller, by the faithful hound,
Half-buried in the snow was found,
Still grasping in his hand of ice
That banner with the strange device,
Excelsior!

There in the twilight cold and gray,
Lifeless, but beautiful, he lay,
And from the sky, serene and far,
A voice fell like a falling star,
Excelsior!

Believers are called to fight the good fight and finish the course that is set before him. One must expect resistance at every leg of the journey, for the adversaries of truth have littered our way with snares and nettles. Every hero of the Bible faced what for the moment seemed to be insurmountable obstacles, but by the grace of God they "pressed toward the mark for the prize". In an age where determination is such a rare commodity, we might take inspiration in the thought of persevering until a goal has been accomplished. Christians have the supreme exemplar in the Lord Jesus Christ, who never once became "weary in well-doing" but pursued His mission of seeking and saving the lost until He exhaled those final victorious words: "It Is Finished". Those who would follow in His footsteps must likewise face the incessant call of compromise, the siren voice of self-gratification, and a thousand other devilish stratagems designed to deter us from reaching the summit of God's purposes .

Ever Upward!

Pastor

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

A Controlled Storm

And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full. And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow...

Mark 4:37,38a

Storms can be fearful events for several reasons. We not only dread their potential for great destruction but also that we are proven helpless when in the pathway of their wrath. Storms are indiscriminate in the scope of their damaging force affecting all ages and all property. Adam's transgression brought a curse that interrupted the perfection of man and his environment. Yet God, who is ever the supreme superintendent of all creation, allows storms for His intended purpose.

In today's account, the Lord Jesus used a storm as a lesson designed for the apostles and us as well today. The magnitude and intensity of the storm brought fear to the apostles, including those who were fishermen. Amid this distressing situation, Jesus was fast asleep on a pillow in the back of the boat. Having already witnessed His divine healing power, they awaken the Lord, appealing to His ability to deliver them from the ravaging storm. Rising, the Lord utters those three powerful yet comforting words "peace, be still". As a great calm suddenly occurs, He then questions the apostles concerning their fear and their faith. The Lord's probing questions bring to the surface their underlying fear and deficient faith. They did not respond to His questions but marveled among themselves that the wind and sea obeyed the Master.

When we became believers, we also were being called to the other side of this life, to set our feet on heaven's shore. The Lord will travel with us on our journey. There will be times when unexpected storms will arise that can cause fear challenging our faith. The storms of life come in different forms and fashions, sometimes external and other times internal. Health, relationships, finances, and other forms of threats can interrupt our peace and assault our faith. At times it may even appear that the Lord is sleeping, but in reality, He neither slumbers nor sleeps. The One who promises to never leave or forsake us is still with us in the ship, and He is still in control of every situation. These out-of-our-control storms are meant to teach us to be more dependent on the One who is in control. Calling out to Him and awakening Him is always our best option.

No matter what situation confronts us today, or shortly, let us remember that the Lord who uttered "peace, be still" is in complete control of our situation.

J. Ekis

Right righteousness

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

Judges 21:25

These concluding words of the book of Judges are repeated from Judges 17:6, providing commentary on the outlandish and extreme events recorded in these chapters that describe the fickle and lawless nature of the Israelite nation of those days, after the death of Joshua's generation. Chapter 19 describes a heinous crime committed by evil men of Gibeah, a city of Benjamin. Chapter 20 then describes the civil war that resulted as the Benjamites defended Gibeah against the remaining tribes of Israel, who had determined to execute judgment against the evil done in Gibeah.

Although the crimes committed were worthy of judgment, God allowed the outnumbered Benjamites who defended Gibeah to inflict heavy losses against the eleven Israelite tribes, in spite of their efforts to enquire of the LORD before each of the first two battles. Having just cause for retribution against the abominable crimes committed, in their first visit to the house of God (Judges 20:18) they simply asked the LORD which tribe should lead the charge. They had already presumed their major course of action before coming to ask the LORD for this detail. God gave them the answer, after which they lost 22,000 men in the first battle against Benjamin. As they prepared to reset the battle lines, they enquired of the LORD again, as they wept and asked if they should go up against Benjamin, "my brother," again (20:23). This reveals a new sensitivity that their judgment was being waged in a familial context. They received an affirmative answer, and proceeded to lose another 18,000 soldiers to Benjamin in the second battle. It was not until the third battle, where their approach to enquire of the LORD was accompanied by brokenness, humility, fasting, and confession and offerings for sin, that the Israelite nation received a promise of victory from the LORD that was realized in that final battle.

While there are many lessons to learn from this account, a significant lesson is gleaned by comparing the attitude of the tribes united against Gibeah in each approach to the LORD. Although the LORD was favorable to their just cause, which was based upon principles of His law, we see from the progression of their enquiries and results that He was not favorable to their attitude, until their third approach. Perhaps we have a New Testament corollary application in Galatians 6:1, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." In both cases, the attitude and spirit with which we execute a righteous action is also tied to the acceptability of the action. We may see ourselves as right in our own eyes, but what matters is the sight of the LORD. Therefore, in the correction of wrongdoing, which is right and necessary, let us learn to grieve over the sin of the offender, as well as our own sinful propensities, as we seek to effect judgment and justice for the benefit of all.

Contentment and Peace

*Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself.
Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.*

– Matthew 6:34 –

There are various and sundry disciplines to the spiritual life. The serious disciple of Jesus Christ is continuously engaged in the battle between the flesh and the spirit. As such, we learn that there are things that, when practiced with regularity out of an earnest and sincere heart, bring victory over the flesh and conformity to God's will and purpose in our lives.

Jesus outlined and instructed us in many of these spiritual disciplines in the Sermon on the Mount. For instance, He taught us how to properly give of our resources, without ostentation and with great charity. He taught us how to pattern our prayers in what has been come to be commonly referred to as "the Lord's Prayer." He tutored us in how to properly fast so as to gain Heaven's attention and intervention in extreme exigencies. And He revealed that if we prioritize and align our hearts such that God is pre-eminent, we would be better equipped to live in a state of mind and heart that is unmolested by the cares of this life.

Some of us are worrywarts by nature, and most of us are worrisome to some degree or another. Our peace is not only easily disturbed by the slightest of unexpected occurrences, but we also actually look for things to fret about by living in the land of "what if". Some even feed this self-destructive disposition by consuming a steady diet of "news" which is designed precisely to stir up concern, dread, and fear within the psyche so that we enter into a continuous loop of depending upon its very purveyors to calm us, from calamity to calamity!

Life here under the sun is obviously strewn with dangers, toils, and snares. Concern with pending danger that leads to effective planning against disaster is undoubtedly prudent. But giving ourselves over to constant worry and fear is nothing short of fleshly and carnal. Jesus pointed out the futility of fretfulness chimerically when He asked, "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature?" And he rather starkly called attention to how antithetical worry is to a life of faith for His Jewish audience - "...after all these things do the Gentiles seek." He then frankly reminded them of their privileged position, "For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things."

Putting Christ first and choosing to trust God moment by moment is the certain cure for worry and care. It is a discipline we must engage in volitionally, like prayer, fasting, and giving. Let us resolve to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and to trust that our good and gracious Father is working all things together for our good. This will most assuredly keep our hearts in perfect peace while we pilgrim here in this foreign land. -- D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Give Us A King

1 Samuel 8:18: And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the LORD will not hear you in that day.

The uniqueness of the the nation of Israel is that they were governed by the invisible, omnipotent God. It required faith rather than sight to be contented with the divine arrangement. Their history of God's protection and benefit should have given them all the confidence needed to be assured that God would continue to guide the people into future prosperity.

But the people grew impatient with this Theocracy and with their prophet/judge, Samuel. They wanted to be "like all the nations" who boasted of some self-proclaimed Uberman who would solve all the ills of the people in exchange for their unflinching devotion. The Vox Populi demanded "Give us a king"; a king they could see and glorify with worldly accoutrements. One who would don the noble crown and bear the golden scepter. One who, once ensconced on the jewel-encrusted throne, would embody the hopes and ideals of the aspiring nation.

This demand was met with Samuel's displeasure and elicited God's resignation: "they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them". Such a rejection by any nation is a formula for failure. Psalm 9:17: "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God".

Indeed, a nation that rejects God will face the consequence of having to endure evil men ruling over them, bringing in their wake a flood of immoral edicts, burdensome taxes, and the usurpations of individual freedoms. They may come to their senses and rue the choice they have made, but the Lord will not hear them!

When the true King of the Jews made his appearance two thousand years ago, he was rejected partly because He did not arrive with the proper pedigree and did not present Himself with regal habiliments and angelic hosts. It required the eye of faith to determine the validity of His government. "We will not have this man to reign over us" was the hue and cry from the recalcitrant multitude and then adding to the insult: "We have no king but Caesar". Forty years later Caesar marshaled his forces against them and crushed them in return for their loyalty.

True believers understand that our kingdom is "not of this world" nor is our King. Our hopes do not rise and fall depending on the momentary success or failure of some flawed messianic politico. We are commanded to pray for our earthly potentates but our ultimate allegiance belongs "unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen".

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

Pastor

Have a blessed week,

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

Out of the Comfort Zone

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

Matthew 16:24

With our varying personalities and abilities, we tend to gravitate to interests and activities that suit our areas of comfort. A shy person will try to avoid situations where they must confront people, and clumsy people often shy away from athletics. Overcoming our fears may allow us to learn new things. The same can be true in following Christ. Growing in our faith may require that we break out of our comfort zone.

The early followers of Jesus were called disciples; it wasn't until the early church was growing that they began to be referred to as Christians. The word Christian means follower of Christ and only occurs three times in the New Testament. The choice to follow Christ in the first century required believers to step out of their comfort zones. While most people had a difficult existence in the first century, all who chose to identify with Jesus Christ knew they would face the probability of severe persecution. There also was the challenge of crucifying the carnal nature and learning to live by the faith of the Son of God. Early believers accepted the difficulties that came their way trusting that God was working out everything for His glory. Even when believers were scattered abroad because of persecution, every place they went was used as an opportunity to preach the Word. Because some early disciples were willing to cast off the familiar, they were able to turn the world upside down for Christ. Saul of Tarsus left the prestige of being a Jewish leader to become the apostle to the Gentiles. Matthew left a lucrative yet dishonest position as a tax collector to follow the One who had no earthly dwelling. Peter forsook a family fishing business to become a fisher of men.

Today, as believers we must also leave the false security of familiarity and walk by faith to follow Christ. When we hide behind our feelings of inadequacy, we hinder the work Christ wants to do through us. If we feel unworthy to serve the master, we must remember that He didn't call us according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace. By sending His Holy Spirit to live in us, we are empowered to do the work God has ordained. It is not by our might, nor by our power, but by His spirit that we can step out of our comfort zone and overcome hindrances to following Christ.

J. Ekis

Ingratitude

And Joash did that which was right in the sight of the LORD all the days of Jehoiada the priest.

II Chronicles 24:2

The words of this verse exactly reflect the character of Joash king of Judah, and are very similar to the same summary of his reign in II Kings 12:2. However, Chronicles supplies more details that explain how Joash did not own his right behavior. It was only right when Jehoiada was his mentor, as II Kings clarifies, "all his days wherein Jehoiada the priest instructed him." It was in those days that Joash and Jehoiada planned and completed repairs of the temple that were needed because of its pilfering by wicked Athaliah, Joash's grandmother, who would have killed him along with the rest of the sons of Ahaziah, if he had not been rescued by his aunt, the wife of Jehoiada. Young king Joash learned to do right and promote the worship of the Lord in the land, as he began his reign at the age of seven under the influence of the godly Jehoiada.

Yet, after the death of Jehoiada, the princes of Judah did not take long to convince Joash to forsake the Lord and serve the idols of the heathen, probably reinstituting the evil that had been eliminated with the destruction of Athaliah. And even though the Lord sent prophets to warn them of their evil, Joash and his new influencers ignored the warnings, to the point where Joash commanded that Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, be stoned in the temple because he prophesied against them. So Joash exhibited the height of ingratitude toward all that Jehoiada and his wife had done to preserve and enrich his life spiritually.

While such an account seems unfathomable, it illustrates the power of influence upon a heart that will not own the truth and be truly thankful for the grace of God. It is not enough to simply do right because of the influence of another person. That may be a good start, especially for young people, but it will have no permanence unless the motive transcends the superficial and becomes truly owned by one who is surrendered to the supreme influence of the Spirit of the Lord. Otherwise, a heart not owned by the Lord can be influenced by any other person when the godly mentor is removed. Yet, when the spirit is truly thankful to receive the gift of God's grace, He is the true and permanent influencer of the good works (Ephesians 2:10), which are borne by gratitude: "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Colossians 3:17).

Eternal Sabbath

*There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.
– Hebrews 4:9 –*

When our God created the universe, He chose to rest on the seventh day. But He that neither slumbers nor sleeps is in no need of respite. He neither tires nor grows weary. He obviously was establishing a precedent for the crown jewel of His handiwork, mankind. Recurring periodic cessation from labor and toil is necessary to a healthy human life. He further ensconced this necessitous paradigm into the fabric of His chosen nation, Israel. In the Law of God, Israel was prescribed a weekly Sabbath Day, periodic sabbath rests, as well as recurring periods of celebratory release such as Jubilee. These are not just earth-side accommodations, but signposts for the believer, whether Jew or Gentile, of something so much better. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.

Human existence was never intended to be difficult. Our father Adam traded occupation for labor and fulfillment for toil. The grind of life under the sun is arduous. We move from one trial to the next, and nothing is ever easy. Our way is strewn with snares, and our path with obstacles. As quickly as we find a moment's peace, life seems to present us with some new struggle. The ebb and flow of the troublesome wave of human pilgrimage tends to wear us down. We fight and claw and reach and pine, only to realize that there is more to be done. Ultimately, the honest traveler begins to realize that security on planet earth is wholly elusive. This is all meant to turn our expectancy from life here, to the one to come. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.

Our Lord said, "Come unto me, all ye that are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Salvation secures the earnest of the purchased possession and vouchsafes it in the innermost chambers of the converted soul. No matter the velocity, magnitude, variety, or multiples of any present distress, the heart remains at perfect peace, like Jesus asleep in the tempest tossed boat. The Spirit of Peace within the breast steadies the heart. Yet while He reminds us we are safe, we nonetheless realize that we are not home yet. When we stop long enough to meditate, we yearn to be clothed upon, and for death to be swallowed up of life. We intrinsically know that this momentary peace that passes understanding is merely a down payment of something so much better and enduring – an everlasting rest, an eternal Sabbath, where we shall forever behold the face of our Lord and find ourselves securely fastened in His omnipotent presence. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.

Today is one day closer to that everlasting rest, burdened friend. It shall not be very long before the trials of this life are the thing of a vanquished and distant past, and the eternal now will be one of continual peace and rest. Until then, be resolved to let your heart go on singing.

-- D. Murcek