

Holy glory

And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.

Isaiah 6:3

As the earthly king Uzziah died and relinquished his temporary position, perceived by the nation of Judah as higher than others, Isaiah received a glimpse of heaven where the seraphim were proclaiming to one another the permanent eternally highest position of the King and LORD of hosts over the whole earth. As we see from our text and further into the chapter, the effect of this scene on the heavenly beings was to recognize and proclaim the LORD's holiness, and its effect on Isaiah himself was to recognize the vast contrast between the LORD's holiness and his own uncleanness. This well-known passage is always an important reminder for all of us to recognize and reverence the unsurpassed majesty and holiness of God. As our culture continues to plunge into the error of self-worship and, therefore, self-centeredness, we must be cautious to not be infected by it, and to maintain the proper view of the holy God of heaven. The glory of this passage is that, as Isaiah recognized his sorry state, he was not left in his seemingly helpless and hopeless condition. The same LORD whose presence brought him to this state also sent the remedy for it and purged his sin and iniquity, equipping him for the purpose to which He was calling him. The power of God's cleansing was sufficient for Isaiah to be able to reply to God's call with a willing "here am I". It was not any self-esteem that brought Isaiah to that point of being able to volunteer for God's service, but his recognition of his great need, and the greater power of God to supply that need. Thus empowered by the mighty hand of his omnipotent Lord, Isaiah would be able to humbly obey, and to "go and tell this people" the words from God that they needed to hear, to bring them also to the same recognition of need and cleansing from sin. May we follow Isaiah's example of spiritual vision, to recognize both our need of cleansing and God's power to purge, empower, and equip, so that we may also obey and magnify His holiness and glory to those to whom He sends us.

Consider

When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?
Psalm 8:3-4

As we contemplate the excellent and magnificent name of the LORD our Lord, the contrast and condescension of His power ought to overwhelm our souls, as it did David's as he penned this psalm. Perhaps David, as a young shepherd watching his sheep under the expanse of the heavens, spent much time considering the work of God's hands as he gazed into the vastness of the universe that he could see, and also observed the wonders of the terrestrial that were about him. The stark contrast between the power of God to create all this compared to the relative minuteness of man led to the clear conclusion of the excellence of the Creator, who has set His glory above all these observable heavens. In conjunction with this contrast, he then recognized the overwhelming position that God gave to man in assigning him dominion over the creation. It is quite a marvel to contemplate this privilege bestowed on mankind. For God to even take thought of man would be one thing, yet to visit him – communicate and make Himself known to him – is another marvelous step of condescension revealing the love of God for man. David recognized through his knowledge of the creation account that the Lord's crowning of mankind with responsibility over His creation is a manifestation of that excellent love.

In our fast-paced world that often distracts us from opportunities to reflect on these truths, we must make time to recognize the grace and mercy of God in His care for us, as well as in what He has entrusted to us. Although through Adam's fall he made mankind powerless to fulfill that role, the writer to the Hebrews makes it clear that God Himself has redeemed that role through the visitation of Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels to become man, yet still God, that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man (Hebrews 2:9). This further condescension has provided salvation for all of mankind who will believe on Christ, so that when He returns again, all who believe will share in His authority over all creation in paradise restored. As we consider this amazing grace, we should echo the refrain that begins and ends this psalm: "O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!"

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Independence Day

Luke 13:16: And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?

She bore her burden conspicuously for eighteen years and now as she approached the Lord, the sight of the affliction evoked immediate sympathy: "Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity". The hypocritical keepers of the law reviled this act of mercy because it was effected on the sabbath day. Here was a woman who had labored for nearly a thousand sabbath days with a weight so heavy that she was "*bowed together*" in a contorted frame that cried out for deliverance and relief. At last the Divine Liberator had appeared to fulfill His previously announced mission "*to set at liberty them that are bruised*".

The weight of sin easily besets each one of us. The devil has forged a heavy chain with which he intends to make our indenture permanent. He would make us to believe that escape is futile and, as he did in the case of the Hebrew internees at pharaoh's slave camps, any attempts will be met with increased labors. How hopeless indeed would our plight be had it not been for the appearance of that One who cut asunder the shackles of our bondage and proclaimed our eternal jubilee. Charles Wesley reveled in this liberation when he penned:

Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray—
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.
Amazing love and can it be
That Thou my God should'st die for me

Though our spirits have been set free, there remains a great day of final emancipation when the whole creation which now is groaning under the strain of the curse will be liberated. "*Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.*" Romans 8:21.
Thank God for that day of absolute independence.

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

Self Esteem

*For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.
– Galatians 6:3 –*

There is no doubt that as believers there is much for us to glory in as far as our redeemed identity is concerned. When we were saved, we were given a new spiritual heart, in addition to the indwelling presence of the Holy Ghost, who seals us for the day of redemption and is our divine Guide who leads us into all truth. The New Testament makes it clear that we are children of God, joint heirs with Christ, and predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son. We are the bride of Christ, His body, a chaste virgin, called to be saints, a kingdom of priests, an holy nation, a peculiar people. All of this is true of the church collectively as well as each member individually.

But we must never confound our redeemed identity with our natural propensities. While we are heaven-bound, we are not yet heavenly, and we will not enjoy the final state of our standing until our last breath on earth has been exhaled. God is doing His work in us and will complete it. But for now, we still have a part to play and an old nature to wrestle with day-in-and-day-out. Paul referred to this as “the old man” and “the body of this death.”

In our modern world, that old man has been pumped up with steroids. At every turn, we are bombarded with philosophic constructs that promote and nourish this fleshly nature. We are repeatedly encouraged and exhorted to accept ourselves, to believe in ourselves, to love ourselves, to forgive ourselves, to assert ourselves, and to promote ourselves. Children are pummeled with Freudian and Jungian “self-esteem” messaging from their most formative years. This sowing of the wind has us reaping a whirlwind that is stunting believers, turning men away from the gospel, and will ultimately help society pave the pathway for the Man of Sin.

As believers, we need to be careful not to play in this arena. We must be continually honest about who we are. We have one redeemed identity with two at-war natures. Our flesh likes to promote itself. This is true of us whether we are babes in Christ or seasoned saints. That old man believes himself to be something. We must actively starve him. In our flesh dwells no good thing. That might sound strange to our modern ears, but it is Bible 101. God is big, we are small. He is everything, we are nothing. Let us not deceive ourselves to think otherwise. Let us consciously walk in the Spirit and seek the low place. This will fortify us against thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to think.

Rich Because...

Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;

Ephesians 3:8

The lure of riches is a powerful attraction to the carnal nature. Money represents the power to obtain material possessions. With enough riches one feels it is possible to acquire almost anything from the physical realm. But even without the biblical warnings, there are inexhaustible examples that reveal the deficiency of material wealth. The bankrupt lives of the rich and famous bear testimony to what Solomon said long ago: *he that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver.*

Today's text reminds us of the true riches that are available to all who believe. The Apostle Paul states that he was commissioned by God to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. The title *Christ*, which is a New Testament form of Messiah, was a foreign concept to the Gentile mind. Even though they rejected Jesus as the Christ, the Jews continued looking for Messiah, the One who was to come from God to set up a heavenly kingdom on earth. Paul was declaring that this Christ *had* come and paid the sin-debt for all mankind, and because of Christ we now have access to the limitless reservoir of true riches. Twice in the book of Ephesians, Paul refers to the riches of his grace. When the unconverted, who are in the bondage of sin and false religion, find the truth of salvation by God's grace, they discover a feeling of satisfaction that was never produced from material possessions. And this same grace continues to surround the believer as they seek to follow the Savior. The power of this grace is greater than the strongest chains of sin as well as the many trials that occur in this life. No matter what sin besets us, just as in the case of the maniac of Gadara or the self-righteous Saul of Tarsus, this grace has limitless power to change our lives. In Ephesians, Paul also refers to the riches of glory in Christ. What we as believers inherit thanks to Christ is beyond description, from the joys and wonders He bestows on us in this life to the unimaginable treasures in the life to come. The depth of the riches of His glory provides His Spirit with the power to strengthen us with might in the inner man.

How blessed we are to be partakers of the vast riches of our Heavenly Father!

J. Ekis

Our Captain

For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

– Hebrews 2:10 –

It struck me on a recent flight as to why I am not a fan of commercial air travel. It is a matter of control. You see, as a passenger, one has no choice but to trust the captain. The passenger's life is completely in his hands. As this flight experienced some turbulence, the captain's voice came over the intercom, calmly assuring us that the bumps we were feeling were not unexpected and that there would be more on the way, but to rest easy because everything was under control, and we would soon be out of the system causing the disturbance. Ultimately, his words proved true on both fronts, and after a short space, we enjoyed smooth sailing until we touched down at our destination.

How much is our salvation this side of Heaven like my experience on this recent flight. Our text tells us that Jesus is the Captain of our salvation. As a Captain, He is not merely seated in some central location, moving us strategically like pieces on a chess board. No – He is incorporated with us, in our vessel, or, if you will, flying our plane. He understands the turbulence. He has experienced all the storms of this life already, was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin. He was made perfect through sufferings and is therefore able to assure us amid their torment of the temporality of their rage, and of His skilled and experienced triumph over them. He does not bid us ignore them, for He has already advised us that in this world we will have tribulation. But He does solicit our trust that they cannot take us off course — i.e., to be of good cheer, because He has overcome the world.

Fellow saints, we try to control far too much of our lives. True faith is repose. It places all circumstances, situations, and outcomes entirely in the hands of the Captain of our Salvation. It is of no use to fret. There will be trials, tribulations, sorrows, and pain. This is part of the turbulence of this life. But though they may jostle us on our way, we must willfully rest in the knowledge that our Captain is at the helm and that our vessel will reach its destination. He that began a good work in us will carry it to completion. Let us resolve to completely trust our Captain as He brings us to glory.

-- D. Murcek

Prone to wander

*With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments.
Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. Blessed art thou, O*

LORD: teach me thy statutes.

Psalm 119:10-12

The psalmist understood the dichotomy of his own desires as he penned these thoughts. As he proclaims the encouraging consideration of the moments in which he had sought the Lord with his whole heart, he may be remembering that great commandment to love the LORD thy God with all thy heart, soul, mind, and strength, and relishing the rewarding realization of when the deeds align with the directives. In Psalm 19 David declared the great reward that comes from the keeping of God's commandments. The implication is not of some external future reward, but of the immediate reward of the soul that knows it has performed that perfect will of God for which He originally designed mankind. When the human spirit, either in response to conscience or by the prompting and power of the Holy Spirit, is brought into harmony with God's principles, it must realize the blessed state of that moment. Yet, the psalmist here also immediately recognizes the danger of wandering from His commandment when left to natural human devices. He therefore follows with the statement of his plan to guard against that wandering by hiding God's word in his heart. He knows his own lack and feeds the need of his heart to have constant reminders from the word to keep him from sin and in tune with the promises of God. Thus, as he blesses the Lord, he continues to ask Him to teach him His statutes, not necessarily because he has not heard or known them, but because he needs that constant guidance for the implementation thereof.

With the psalmist we may experience exhilarating times of knowing when we have walked in the path of God's righteousness and have been used by Him. We may have warm recollections of times of harmonious prayer, study, and meditation, which motivate us to move out in faith and accomplish His tasks that have been revealed to our seeking hearts. Yet we must also with the psalmist remember the need of our souls for the constant reminders and guardrails against the natural tendency to wander away from the truth that we know. Then with the hymnwriter we say, "prone to wander, Lord I feel it, ... here's my heart, oh, take and seal it, seal it for Thy courts above."

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Who Am I?

Ruth 2:10: Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?

Ruth marveled that she, in her lowly estate, should be shown such advantages in the fields of Boaz. To her this was an unimaginable kindness bestowed upon her from a man that ought to have debarred her from his property; she, being an alien, having no right to glean from his fields. And this generosity was but a prelude to what was yet to come in the bestowal of honors and privileges she was to receive at the hand of her munificent benefactor. Here we see a humble, impoverished, outcast, Moabite widow who, what some might say, foolishly cast her lot in with her Israeli mother-in-law, cleaving to Naomi's people and God without any prospects other than a life of hard labor and desolation.

As one reads on, the account will depict a familiar motif in the sacred scriptures namely, as John Bunyan once coined the phrase, "*Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*". Ruth little realized when she made her decision of faith that it would be rewarded with such benefactions; from gleaning the remains in the fields with the indigents to owning the same fields by virtue of her marriage to Boaz, from widowhood and childlessness to honorable remarriage and the prospects of a royal progeny.

God's grace is a wondrous thing indeed. The text affords us a profound illustration of the miraculous reversal of fortunes owed to the grace of a man that saw virtue in the faith of a despised outcast. It is of little wonder that Ruth should ask, "*Why have I found grace in thine eyes?*" And what hope it affords us who have similarly marveled that the God of heaven should lift our impoverished souls and make us sit down in heavenly places with Christ.

In our day and age we are beset by those who feel entitled to advantages simply by being born. Let us not fall pray to this egocentric mindset which, like the horseleach's daughters, is always demanding "*give, give*". Instead follow the humble course that Ruth took and bow with grateful heart before your near kinsman redeemer, wondering how such grace could be shown to a stranger such as I.

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

The Truth and the Liar

Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

– John 8:44 –

The Bible is an intellectually satisfying book. It provides a panoply of explanations of all things that pertain to life and godliness. Its authority is self-evident to an honest seeker, and its words are Spirit-breathed and Spirit-borne regardless of the condition of the heart that hears it. It is no wonder the devil hates it so. Throughout the ages, he has marshalled assault upon assault against God's Book. From Jehudi's penknife to Diocletian's edicts to papal burnings of the scriptures to the militant secularist attacks of today, the devil has been trying to stamp out the Word of God and create a vacuum in the hearts and minds of men in order to prepare the way for his Man of Sin.

It is critical for us to remember that our adversary hates the Word of God because it exposes him. Jesus told us that he is a liar and that there is no truth in him. As a liar, the devil loves to work in the shadows. He more frequently dons a disguise, transforming into an angel of light, than ushering frontal assaults. He whispers, peeps, and mutters. He sows doubt, creates confusion, and delights in discord. He questions, but never provides answers. His strategy is to work like malware within the heart – evading the firewall, and nefariously undermining the operating system. In this way, he can affect believers and nonbelievers alike. In unbelievers, his lies serve to solidify damnation. In believers, they damage the witness, stunt growth, and stifle service.

The devil is no different today than he was when he fell. He is actively working to destroy the foundations in order to confound the righteous and advance the spirit of antichrist. There is a widening acceptance of his lies amongst the rank and file of men and women everywhere. The Bible has been (and is being) denigrated and undermined in the thinking of multitudes. The god of this world is actively promoting his lies to every individual member of Adam's race, and we as believers are not automatically immune to the effects. We must fortify our hearts daily, putting on the whole armor of God. And we must actively and continuously wield the sword of the spirit, which is the Word of God, to stand against him. If we resist him so, he must flee.

Brethren – to the Scriptures!

-- D. Murcek

Imitate

Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. Matthew 11:11

From birth it's obvious that all of us have an innate desire to imitate. Most certainly this was meant for our good; but with the entrance of sin into the world, imitation often copies the wrong examples. Good role models seem to get less recognition, while the more evil and outlandish ones receive the most publicity. We see detrimental influences infiltrating all levels of our culture. As believers we should look to the men and women of faith in the Bible and imitate their godly qualities.

Other than our Lord, what better person to imitate than the one whom Jesus said was the greatest person born of woman. Though there are others who have longer narratives in the Bible about their lives, it is John the Baptist who has the reputation of being the greatest. His life offers several examples which would be profitable for us to follow.

The comforts and attractions of this life seemed to have no power over John. He seemed to spend much time in the wilderness away from the entrapments of this life. His raiment of camel's hair and a leather girdle about his loins bespoke a plain life. John's force and power was obviously from above and not a result of his earthly presentation. The content of his message was simple and to the point - repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. His message spoke of the great need for remission of sin and forgiveness as well as the hope of an eternal dwelling place. John's fear of God exceeded his fear of man and enabled him to speak the truth to the hypocritical religious leaders. He even spoke specifically about the sin of the evil King Herod. Although John had a great following, for the scripture says that many came out to the wilderness to hear him, he did not allow that to sow seeds of pride in his life. John knew that his purpose was to point people to the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. John fulfilled God's purpose and willingly stepped back to allow the prominence of the Lord Jesus to prevail.

We would do well to imitate John's example. Let his statement "*He must increase, but I must decrease*" be true for us. Today, we can exalt the Lord more and more in our life while our self-importance decreases.

J. Ekis

The Potential of Influence

And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go: and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:

Ruth 1:16

Influence is defined as the capacity or power of persons or things to be a compelling force on or produce effects on the actions, behavior, opinions, etc., of others. Sometimes influence is intentionally exerted, but often it is conveyed just by observing how another person conducts themselves. Whether good or bad all people have had someone or something that has influenced them.

The story of Ruth is an example of the potential of influence. Ruth was a Moabitess by birth. The religion of the Moabites centered around the worship of the idol Chemosh. In 2 Kings 3:27, we find that human sacrifice was part of the rites of this false deity. It is not recorded how much exposure Ruth had to this evil practice, but it was part of the culture in which she was raised. Having only the emptiness that false religion is capable of producing, Ruth would have had a longing in her heart to find a relationship with the only true God. Because of a famine in the land of Canaan, Naomi and her family came to dwell in the land of Moab. Eventually Ruth would gain an intimate exposure to the people of the true and living God when she became Naomi's daughter-in-law. Not much is recorded about the early interaction between Naomi and Ruth, but it seems that Naomi's influence had a positive effect on Ruth. Eventually, both Ruth and Naomi became widows. When Naomi prepares to return to her native land, she releases her daughters-in-law from any obligation to her, but Ruth responds by saying that she will abide with her mother-in-law and that Naomi's God will become her God. When Naomi sees that Ruth is steadfast in her commitment she consents and takes Ruth with her. It is there in the land of Bethlehem-judah that Ruth marries Boaz. Through time Boaz and Ruth's great grandson would be King David, from whose lineage would come the Savior of the world, our Lord Jesus.

Our witness is to be spoken and demonstrated by how we live. The influence we have can produce results for years to come. Let the effects that Naomi's influence produced be an encouragement for us to live out our faith so that it may influence others for God's

kingdom.

J. Ekis

Above all

*One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.
Ephesians 4:6*

The admonitions for the unity of the church in this chapter include this statement describing a combination of relationships between God the Father and the body of Christ. He is first the only true God recognized by all those who are His children by faith in Christ Jesus. The common bond of all true Christians is that we have all bowed in heart, mind, and spirit to the one and only God of all creation, who has every right to condemn us forever for our sin and rebellion against His perfect character and revealed law, yet has provided the free gift of salvation by taking on flesh and providing the perfect sacrifice once for all to redeem us to Himself. In Christ He then demonstrated that power to redeem as He rose and ascended back to that place above all. Though He is above all in holiness, righteousness, and power, His love for mankind, whom He created in His own image, extended His grace to adopt us into His eternal kingdom through faith, that we might know Him, the only true God, as our own Father. As Jesus promised the disciples in John 14:23, the transcendent God and Father has come with the Son through the Spirit to make His abode in each and every believer. Not one is left out. Then by His unifying power He manifests His grace through all, according to the measure of the gift of Christ in each one of us, by uniting us for the service of the kingdom. As we each do our part in working out His grace and power through the exercise of His gifts, for the repair of the saints, for the work of the ministry, and for the building of the church of the firstborn, we exalt Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to His power working in us, to manifest His glory in the church by Christ Jesus. What wondrous power is this, that, as He remains above all, He condescends to demonstrate that glory in His own below. Such is the purpose of His grace.

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Obsessed

Psalms 63:8: My soul followeth hard after thee:

In Herman Melville's classic *Moby Dick* the antihero, Captain Ahab was so obsessed with chasing the white whale that he willingly risks, and ultimately loses his limb, his ship, his life, and his crew. While breathing out cursings with unswerving determination he utters: "The path to my fixed purpose is laid with iron rails, whereon my soul is grooved to run". While Ahab's maniacal devotion to so frivolous a quest is condemnable on so many levels, yet we may rightly emulate the zeal with which he pursued his illusive goal.

In a modern context we may observe how the athlete, the businessman, the drug addict, the religious cult member invest their whole being into causes that might be best defined as trivial pursuits. In the parable, "the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light". Though the unjust steward wronged the master, his ingenuity was commended. While the church sleeps the enemy is up early plying his nefarious trade by sowing tares. Walter Martin was an outstanding authority on the cults. In his book *The Kingdom of the Cults* he challenged his readers with this famous quote : "Are we willing to do for the truth what others are willing to do for a lie?"

Single-mindedness was the defining trait of those heroes of the faith that we so admire. David's love for His Lord is encapsulated in his poetic prose: "One Thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after" Psalm 27:4. The apostle Paul poured his life into the pursuit of the God who saved him. "But this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." When queried by the lawyer as to what was the great commandment, without hesitation the Lord responded: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind".

Total devotion to the one true God and absolute allegiance to the cause of the cross requires unflagging devotion. Be assured that the devil will do his diabolical best to dampen the fire of our passion for Christ. The pilgrim journey is fraught with hazards which are designed to waylay us from our intended course. Be determined to follow hard after our risen Lord and at the end of this race expect to gain the approbation: "Well done thou good and faithful servant".

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

Seeking First the Kingdom

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.
– Matthew 6:33 –

One of the most inherent evidences that man is not the product of evolution but is rather made in the image and likeness of God is our tendency to need, want, and desire. All of God's sentient creation, excluding mankind, spend their days in little more than a quest to eat and survive. They have no aspirations for bettering their lives nor any anticipation of better days. They live entirely in the present, either finding or consuming their food, and then awaiting the next meal, or else succumbing to their place within the food chain or nature's course.

But man lives on a plain intrinsically so much higher. Hopes and dreams separate us from the brute beasts. Our most fundamental physical needs of food and raiment and shelter are similar (though not identical) to that of the animal kingdom, but our thriving emanates from something so much deeper and more profound. It is because we are created in His image that we possess this inwardly generated and upwardly pointed mobility. This is true of every nation and people and tribe and tongue. Jesus said, "For after all these things do the Gentiles seek." What fallen mankind cannot quite comprehend is that our hopes and dreams and aspirations and desires cannot and will never be satisfied by this world.

But the ardent disciple of Jesus Christ has found the formula that sates the heart and propels the soul. By seeking first the kingdom of God, the believer aligns himself with Heaven's purpose for his life. Seeking first the kingdom, and His righteousness, means owning one's status as a subject rather than a ruler. It means to desire and delight in the King's will. It means to cease from struggling to fulfill self, and instead finding fulfillment in the Creator. It means that rather than the multitude of things that seem to need attended to, God Himself becomes the focus of each day. Seeking first the kingdom, in short, means inherently trusting the King. And why not? We know Him to be sovereign, good, right, just, loving, pure, and gracious. Could He possibly withhold anything from us that would be to our benefit? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

Brethren, a new day is at hand. Let us seek first the kingdom. Rest confidently that He will graciously and marvelously fill in all the other details.

-- D. Murcek

A Provoking Question

Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?

Matthew 18:33

A good teacher must have a variety of ways to get a point across. A lesson doesn't necessarily have to be boring to lose a student's interest or focus. Sometimes inserting a question can shed light and reveal an obvious answer even when there is no verbal response from the student. Jesus' question in this text exposes the double standard of which we are all quite capable. All are anxious to receive forgiveness and mercy, but are we as motivated to extend what we have received?

The complete account in verses 21 through 35 demonstrates such a case. A servant had accumulated a considerable debt with his Lord and needed an extension of grace for his payment. Fearing that his family would be forced into servitude, he desperately pleads for his Lord to have patience with him. This earthly Lord, representing the Lord of Lords, is moved with compassion and *does not merely extend a grace period for payment, but completely forgives* the man of his debt. The forgiven servant, instead of being thankful and relishing the feeling of being free of his great debt, then goes out and finds a man who owes him a comparably small sum. Forgetful of the forgiveness he had just experienced, he then refuses forgiveness to his fellow servant *and has him cast into prison until the debt is paid*. Jesus ends the story with the question in today's verse. Simply stated – should the servant who received forgiveness show that same compassion to his fellow servant?

It is too easy for us to see our own situation as more important or difficult than that of another. We are also prone to have the same double standard as the forgiven servant had in this account. Do we notice the displeasure the Lord shows when the forgiven servant refuses to extend compassion and forgiveness? If we are the forgiven children of God, we must always remember the great debt of sin we have accumulated. It took nothing less than the Lord Jesus Christ leaving heaven to become the payment for our sins. Our forgiveness was free to receive; but it came at a tremendous cost. The debt of offense that others may incur with us is a small fraction when compared with what the Lord has forgiven us.

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, may we learn to forgive as we have been forgiven.

J. Ekis

Receiving

He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.

Matthew 10:40

Jesus spoke these words to his apostles after a thorough warning about not being received by the world to whom he sent them to preach the gospel. In the beginning of the chapter, he sent them out to preach the kingdom to the lost sheep of Israel. His instructions included shaking the dust off their feet in departing from a house or city that would not receive them or the peace that their message could bring. He then expanded the warning beyond the immediate application of that present campaign, to describe the general hatred of the world that would be manifested in times to come, both toward the apostles and toward those who would come after them preaching the gospel, not only among the Jews, but also to the Gentiles. As he comforted them with the promise of the care of the heavenly Father for them, even when the world would persecute them, he then elaborated with more potentially distressing news that this persecution would even come from their own household family members.

Yet, in spite of these warnings, he now comes to the encouraging truth that to receive them is to receive him, as well as the Father that sent him. In a world that will generally reject the gospel truth that the Father sent the Son to be the savior of the world, there will still be those who receive that truth. How notable it is that the emphasis is on receiving. There are plenty of scripture passages that clearly state that salvation comes through believing the truth, yet this text and context clarifies that truly saving faith involves receiving (see also John 1:12). Just as a person at that time would receive the apostles into their home as part of receiving the truth of their message, so Jesus explains the intrinsic tie between the receivers and the senders. To receive those who bring the message means to receive the Son who is the message and to receive the Father who sent the Son. So Jesus explained in the upper room, "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John 14:23). In a world of persecution, a mere assent to the knowledge of the gospel will not persevere, but faith that genuinely receives the truth of the gospel brings a relationship with the triune God that will endure forever.

Prayer support

O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer.

Nehemiah 1:11

We learn from the very outset in the book of Nehemiah that he was a man of prayer and the word of God. Seven of the eleven verses in this first chapter record one of his prayers. Throughout the accounts given in this book, we see Nehemiah in the midst of various situations uttering brief prayers, as he lives his daily life obviously aware of the presence of the God of heaven. When, in the next chapter, God answers the prayer of our text, and the king asks Nehemiah to present his request, before doing so he lets us know that his first reaction to the king was to pray to the God of heaven, obviously silently from his mind and heart. It was a good idea based on the bold request that he was about to make unto the king of the then-current world empire. In chapter four, when the enemies mock and then conspire to fight and hinder the work of God's people, Nehemiah prays in both instances, while he also continues to work on the wall, as well as to set a watch against the enemies. He also thinks, or perhaps whispers, other short prayers that he records throughout the book (for example in chapter 6).

However, as much as we see Nehemiah praying himself, we can also note the important phrase that occurs in our text, "and to the prayer of thy servants." In this initial prayer that he speaks, this extra phrase makes clear that he knew that he was not alone in his requests to God. Whether "thy servants" refers to those who had brought him the news of the devastation of Jerusalem, who perhaps were now present with him as he prayed, or it refers generally to all Israelites who at that time were zealous to restore the worship and honor of Jehovah in Jerusalem, Nehemiah acknowledged the multiple prayers in agreement with and in addition to his own, for the glory of God. Let us learn the lesson from this godly, bold man, who knew the need for prayer support concerning the vision that God had put upon his heart. While it is very important for us to pray alone, in our quiet places as well as along our ways, we must not forget our need to enlist the support of others to petition the Lord concerning the needs that he brings to our hearts and lives, that he may make many rejoice to the glory of his name.

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Unheard of Glory

I Kings 10:6-7: And she said to the king, It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom. Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and, behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard.

We have a complete revelation from God; that is to say we have everything that God has deigned to reveal to us. Theologians speak of the plenary, inspired word of God, but no one would think for a moment that the Bible reveals all of the mysteries of the kingdom to come. Paul was an eyewitness of the glory realm and he assures us that *"eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."* Like the apostle *"we see through a glass darkly"*.

The faith of every child of God is predicated on a hope of an unseen perfect place. The curse has left an indelible scar on what must be described as a world of frustrated potentiality. All of creation is groaning for its quintessence-its final deliverance from the inhibiting powers of death. All things here and for now fall short of its intended glory whether it be the dying embers of a shooting star or the fading, falling pedals of a delicate rose: beauty submits to deformity. What might have been succumbs to the harsh realities of what inevitably must be.

The queen of the south beheld a kingdom that had reached its maximum potential, at least as far as can be accomplished in this temporal state. She, like Job, had heard *"by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth"*. What innumerable marvels await our curious eyes when at last we arrive at that predestined terminus and enter that city *"whose builder and maker is God"* and behold the exquisite spectacles that no earthly evangelist could begin to describe. Oh! the half has not been told.

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

Members in Particular

*Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.
– 1 Corinthians 12:27 –*

The human body is a confounding piece of workmanship. God has fashioned our frames as miniature universes – abounding in complexity, cohered in fragility, and yet astoundingly efficient in operation. Even the slightest involuntary function of the human body engages multitudes of cells, synapses, impulses, and reactions, all working together in syncopated harmony via an inscrutable timing. Multiplied trillions of tiny members work together for the advancement of the whole. The simplest disturbance in function of the smallest parts can (and frequently does) begin a chain of events that brings deleterious effect to the individual.

When Paul refers to believers as the body of Christ, and members in particular, it is to remind us of multiple spiritual truths. As individual members, we need not compare ourselves among ourselves. Every single member is vital, endowed by God Himself with unique functional abilities, wildly diverse from those of fellow members, and specifically designed to contribute toward the advancement of the collective whole. We each must find *our* particular place, and then comfortably, confidently, and passionately execute *our* specific role. Pastors, teachers, poets, thinkers, writers, singers, cleaners, drivers, cooks, helpers, administrators, greeters, counters, builders, handy-men, *ad infinitum* are all so vastly different, yet all so very necessary to advance the Kingdom of God. Additionally, we must never esteem ourselves sufficient. While we each focus upon what we have to contribute from our sector, we must continually recognize that we have critical need of others' talents and abilities as well. Like in the human body, a lapse in one part can create a chain reaction that brings serious consequences. We must not denigrate the gifts and contributions of other members, but rather embrace and rely upon them. This is how a healthy body functions.

Brothers and sisters – how are you doing as a member of the body of Christ? Are you zealously contributing toward the Kingdom? God has gifted you to provide a service to your Savior and to your fellow saints – are you continuously about it? And do you delight in the successes of others' efforts for the Master? If we could each tune our hearts so, the cause of Christ would advance, and all Hell would recoil. With God's help, let us get about it.

-- D. Murcek

Only Jesus

Because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him. - Mark 5:4

Of the many entertaining and amazing acts found at a circus, the performance of the lion tamer is often the highlight of the show. The fact that a man willingly enters a large cage and is surrounded by vicious carnivores seems to defy all reason. Watching ferocious animals perform acrobatic exercises at the command of the tamer mesmerizes the audience. As difficult as it may be for man to tame one of the wildest of beasts, there is one creature that can only be tamed by the Lord Jesus Himself.

Prior to the deliverance of the maniac of Gadara, though this may insult our fleshly pride, we see an accurate picture of us before our conversion. In the account we find a deranged man whose dwelling was a graveyard. He would often bring harm to himself, and any attempt to prevent him from doing so was resisted. As the text states, no man could tame him. Although others were incapable of doing anything to help him, it was Jesus, and only Jesus, who held the cure for the maniac's condition.

The taming of our conflicted sinful lives does not cease when we are born again. After we exercise true belief in Christ as Savior, we find forgiveness for our sins after which we begin a long journey of daily sanctification. We find that the old nature and its many tentacles will continue trying to surface throughout our lives. Pride, selfishness, anger, unkindness, and apathy, are just a few of the things we must yield to the Lord if we want a fuller spiritual life. Self-determination is good, but it alone is insufficient to tame us. The comfort and encouragement of others can also be helpful, but that still lacks the power to deliver us. With the sweet conviction of the Holy Spirit and the strength of God's grace, we can deal one by one with the things that are detrimental to our spiritual prosperity.

It is only at the feet of Jesus that the maniac was able to find deliverance, and it is also at His feet that we can find daily liberation from the things that beset us.

J. Ekis

Pondering the Path

Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established.

– Proverbs 4:26 –

Some of the most successful people in this world are strategic thinkers. They look at their trade as a chess match, carefully navigating the moment to secure better position in order to obtain the intended goal in the future. They think three or more steps ahead, continually planning while carefully moving. They may not gain ground immediately, but there is a reason behind their every move. They are engaged with, yet not consumed by, what is happening right now, while they actively anticipate what could happen shortly or down the road a bit. This is how they best avoid derailment and turn yet-to-be-transpired events to their advantage. By operating with this mindset, they gain leverage over the unknown, and in so doing, weaken their opposition while advancing toward their objective.

The Christian life ought to be lived strategically as well. The true believer's hopes and dreams are encapsulated in the first glimpse of Jesus in glory followed quickly by his verbal approbation. This is the heartbeat of the redeemed soul and therefore the goal of this life. As *such, everything we do in life matters*. We should therefore ponder the path of our feet daily, soundly establishing our ways before Him. There is nothing trivial about how we navigate each twenty-four-hour period because they all collectively comprise the life that we will present before our King. Each day offers us an opportunity to better position ourselves to ultimately hear His "Well done." We know that our Lord is watching, and we know that our Enemy is plotting. There are traps and snares and pitfalls galore that await us at morning's light. The Devil has been laying them overnight, or many times years in advance. It is critical that we advance with heart and mind anticipating where they may be strewn, relying upon our inward Guide and His sage consultation to not only avoid them, but to plan our next moves in such fashion as to thwart our demonic foe's strategy and give hell a headache.

The devil is a formidable opponent, but if we belong to Christ, he is not playing for our souls any longer. He wants our witness tarnished and our crowns relinquished. This is fair game. Pondering our path daily defends against his devices. This strategy ultimately becomes a counter-offensive. Our ways become iteratively established, and we make advancement for the Kingdom, reclaiming territory from hell, and pleasing our Lord. Let us carefully ponder today's moves, and then plan on our next something to do for His Kingdom. This will undoubtedly bring a smile to His blessed countenance.

-- D. Murcek

Be filled

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.

Romans 15:13

After a fourfold recitation of Old Testament passages reminding his Gentile readers of God's promises that they would glorify Him for including them in His merciful plan of redemption, the apostle Paul pens this prayer for them to fully reflect the fruits of the hope shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Spirit. The two main fruits he requests for them here are joy and peace. He also connects the root of these fruits to believing. This somewhat echoes his proclamation to them in chapter five of the hope that makes them not ashamed, because of the love of God that is realized through faith in the Christ who died to justify his enemies and rose again to save them. From that initial and continuing faith, the God of hope through His Holy Spirit would fill them with these fruits. The joy that He gives goes far beyond just the happiness that the world seeks through circumstances. It is the abiding joy that Jesus promised His disciples that no man could take from them (John 16:22). This is that joy that Paul, James, Peter, and John all extol in their epistles. It is joy unspeakable and full of glory. He adds to that the peace that comes from abiding in Him through faith. Jesus promised to give His disciples a true peace, which the world cannot give. This theme of peace is included in almost every New Testament epistle. It is the calm within the heart of every believer, even, or especially, when in the midst of storm. Paul prays for the fullness of these fruits, so that they would abound in hope, just as Jesus promised abundant life (John 10:10). While the world system continues its attempts to threaten and frighten in pursuit of control of mankind, let us extend our requests with the apostle for our fellow believers to be filled with these fruits, which freely come through the power of the Holy Spirit in us, so we all may fulfill the exhortation to "Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people" (Romans 15:11).