

Sensational Not Necessary

Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, if they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead. ~ Luke 16:29-31

Jesus' teaching in Luke 16 contrasts the lifestyles and destinies of two men. An unnamed rich man and Lazarus present two extremes of living conditions and belief systems. It can be assumed that both men grew up in Israel with Judaism as their religion. The rich man lived a life that many people of the world envy - a seemingly problem-free and luxurious lifestyle provided by his abundance of riches. Lazarus on the other hand experienced a life of poverty accompanied by poor health. As with all of us, the earthly existence of both Lazarus and the rich man was only temporary. The Book of Proverbs teaches that the way of life is above to the wise. Lazarus's condition could have been a contributing factor for him to embrace the true faith produced by the Holy Scriptures. The rich man seemed to fall into the trap that his riches provided. Having all of his earthly needs met, he invested all of his capital in this life, because he failed to clearly see and humbly embrace the teachings and promises found in the scriptures. Both men had an appointment with death, and the moment that occurred each realized the results of their life choices. Though Lazarus had his disappointments and problems, he had no regrets as he experienced the eternal realities of paradise. But the moment the rich man departed this life, he had nothing but regrets. Knowing it was too late for him to change his own circumstance, he implored Abraham that Lazarus might be sent back to warn his brothers about the reality of hell. Thinking it would have a greater impact if one came back from the dead to warn them, he is reminded by Abraham that his brothers have the writings of Moses and the Prophets to warn them and that some extraordinary event would not convince them. Both the rich man and Lazarus had the opportunity to hear the Word of God and exercise their faith in its truth, and this account glaringly reminds the reader to make the right choice.

Today, most Christians would do well to take note of this text concerning the power of hearing and applying the truth of God's word. God has ordained that faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. This is the engrafted word which, if received with meekness, can save the soul. Illustrations can be helpful, music can warm the soul, and miraculous things can inspire, but it is the word that enlightens and produces faith to believe. The many miracles of Jesus and even the empty tomb did not cause all men to believe, but those that heard His word and let it sink into their hearts found true belief.

God's word is what affected our spiritual birth, and it is His word that continues to nurture our spiritual growth. Read it, meditate on it, believe and obey it, then share it. We do not need sensational means in trying to convey the gospel; we only need to be sincere as we share the simple yet powerful Word.

J. Ekis

Thieves and robbers

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.

John 10:1

Although very useful for finding passages and aiding mutual study, sometimes the chapter divisions in our Bibles may obscure important contextual connections if we are not careful. Such is the case with this introduction to an important parabolic teaching of Jesus. We must look to the end of chapter nine to observe the main recipients of this teaching. Jesus is continuing to address the question of the Pharisees who had asked Him, "Are we blind also?", to which He replied, "If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth." These Pharisees were members of the group that had just cast out of the synagogue the man who was born blind, whom Jesus had healed on the sabbath. They had cast him out after he had made the logical deduction that if Jesus could heal his blindness that He must be of God. Yet, while this simple man could draw such an obvious conclusion, the self-deceived Pharisees remained blind to the truth of His identity, as well as to the way into the kingdom of God.

Just as thieves remain blind to the illegitimacy of their approach to obtain material possessions, the Pharisees were blind to the illegitimacy of their concocted schemes for the attainment of righteousness. They had reduced the supreme law of God, which was designed to bring men to realize their utter inability to keep it and to seek Christ's righteousness by faith (Galatians 3:24), to a system of rules and traditions through which they thought they could attain righteousness before God (Romans 10:3). As a result, they were trying to climb into the sheepfold of God's flock by some other way, instead of submitting themselves to the righteousness of Christ, who had repeatedly demonstrated who He was.

And with whom do you identify, dear reader? Are you proudly going about to establish your own righteousness through your own system of works, rituals, and deeds, blind like the Pharisees to the true door of the sheep (John 10:7, 9)? Or will you, like the man born blind with his sight now restored, enter in by the only true door, recognizing that there is no other way into righteousness? Allow His glorious light to remove your blindness today, through the power of the perfect risen Christ to make you whole, through the gift of His righteousness imparted to your soul (Philippians 3:9).

The Congregation of the Dead

*The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain in the congregation of the dead.
– Proverbs 21:16 –*

The devil is not a creator, but he is an inventor. He invents evil things by confusing, confounding, conflating, and perverting all that is good and right. He attempts to mock God by aping Him – mimicking the divine purpose with his diabolical counterfeits. This paradigm is played out manifestly in the Scriptures as point-and-counter-point between heaven and hell. God has His plan, and Satan his schemes. If Moses and Aaron perform miracles by the hand of Jehovah, Jannes and Jambres meet them with an occultic response. God offers fullness of joy, while hell guarantees the beginning of sorrows. There is a mystery of godliness, but also a mystery of iniquity. If we read of a virgin birth of the Savior, we see that Antichrist will be the uniquely originated seed of the Serpent. Jesus is the Son of Man, the Lamb of God, Him which is, and which was, and which is to come; the Antichrist is the Man of Sin, the Beast from the Earth, he that was, and is not, and yet is. Likewise, if God has His assembly of the saints, we can expect that Satan will boast a congregation of the dead.

This congregation is in every way antithetical to the Church of the Firstborn. It is certainly more diverse in thought and practice than God's assembly. Entry comes not by an exclusive act of faith in a singular divine redemptive work, but by merely wandering off the path of understanding. Not that faith is entirely eschewed here, but it is not necessary, either. There are many other virtues of equal and opposite selection. Human reason, atheism, superstition, narcissism, cynicism, skepticism, stoicism, mysticism, etc., are as vibrantly authorized and represented in this congregation as devotion to any one or more of its multiple deities, be they the Buddha, Allah, Ormazd, Moroni, et. al. When it comes to human emotion and relationship, this body of unbelief is characterized (as mandated by the devil himself) by almost everything imaginable – envy, hatred, variance, emulation, strife, seditions, tumult, lust, concupiscence, lawlessness, and such like. In all the diversity, however, there is something that is not only uniquely lacking, but forthrightly barred from Hell's great assembly. It is the love of God. God's gracious love for sinners is the one thing that cannot be found in any form of representation, vouchsafing its eternal and sulfuric imprimatur – the congregation of the dead.

We see and interact with them daily, the members of this congregation. We should be able to recognize them, since we were once part of the same membership roll. Some are loose affiliates, actually difficult to discern, betraying themselves only after significant conversation. An increasing number of this assembly, however, are becoming deeply associated with the corporate body's soullessness, wearing their lostness, confusion, and frustration on their countenance and in their comportment. They have so obviously wandered out of the way of understanding, and they appear (to themselves) to be confined to and confirmed in this congregation of the dead. Unless we intervene. And we are commissioned by Heaven to do just that. By showing them the only thing they will recognize as different from what they already know – the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge – can these congregants escape their master's clutches. Which of its members will we have influence with today? --- D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Is This the Worst of Times?

Psalms 42:5: Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance.

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way." This is the famous, oft-quoted first paragraph of Charles Dickens', *A Tale of Two Cities*. It is an apposite description of these strange times in which we are living. Some of you may wish to take umbrage with this notion and might protest that it is "*the best of times*" but if we obey our text you will see that the Lord has no desire to see His children caught in a labyrinth of hopelessness.

The devil delights in keeping believers bound in the dungeon of despair. For what good is the witness of a discouraged Christian? People of the world are already depressed and so we should be able to offer the true deliverance from this mental malaise. The media makes billions of dollars promoting fear-mongering. They can gin up trepidation in the first two minutes of the nightly news and talking heads have become multi-millionaires by fanning the flames of fear, all in the name of keeping the people "informed". Believers must avoid these snares and maintain a spiritual equanimity if we are to have any impact upon this lost generation.

How very dark the times were in those incipient days of the early church. Roman culture was reduced to flagitious catering to the lusts of the flesh. The Roman Senate, once known for being the paragon of justice, had been degraded by electoral venality and equestrian influence. Diocletian asserted the right of the Emperor to take power without the theoretical consent of the Senate, thus depriving the Senate of its status as the ultimate depository of supreme power. One is hard put to imagine a more decadent epoch in human history.

But we could point to that protracted period of time known to us as "The Dark Ages" where for nearly a millennium the Roman Catholic Church ruled with a ruthless ferocity over the consciences of men, subjugating them by superstition, ignorance, and obsequious submission to the pope. Surely this is in competition for the very worst of times. But then again, there are so many candidates competing for the title. What can be said of the centuries of evil slave trading, the bloody wars that continue unabated, the times of economic depression, and the moral turpitude that has characterized each successive generation with the present one outdoing the former in perverseness.

And so with all this catalog of evil threatening to extinguish all traces of Christian morality, the church triumphant must never lose sight of the Lord's promise that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it". Let us cling fast to the blessed hope that is set before us and refuse the vain babbling of the satanically inspired purveyors of gloom. It may well be the worst of times yet at once, the best of times for believers to hold forth the words of life.

Have a blessed weekend,

Pastor

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

That World

But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry; nor are given in marriage:

Luke 20:35

In this chapter, our Lord is being confronted in succession by his adversaries who are coming at Him with questions from differing angles, all of which were intended to entangle Jesus in His answers. In this text, the Pharisees, who denied any resurrection, attempt to trap our Lord with a hypothetical account challenging the regulations concerning widowhood and remarriage. Using only carnal and earthly rationale, they try to prove the belief in the resurrection to be unrealistic. In His response, Jesus points out that in *that world*, meaning the endless age to come, things will be much different from what now exists. That eternal world is where everything in this life, which has been tainted and corrupted by the curse, will be perfected. The purity of Eden will be restored in *that world*.

Many of the Bible's lessons come in the form of contrast. The pre-cursed world compared to *that world to come* illustrate the drastic difference between the believer's temporary and permanent dwellings. The present time in which we live is described in the scriptures as *this present evil world*, but with the imparting of God's divine nature, we can escape the corruption that is present here. This evil and corruption are repeatedly exposed throughout the Biblical narrative. After Adam's sin and banishment, Cain's jealousy fuels him to kill his brother. From that point, the continuation of the curse proliferates throughout the Biblical record. Wars, brutality, famines, disease, perversion, and idolatry seem to dominate wholesomeness and righteousness. In the midst of all of this spiritual and moral darkness, the Light of the World arrived. Jesus brought relief for the oppressed and the afflicted, but more importantly, He brought a future and eternal hope. His atoning death on the cross provided the payment for the sins of the world, but it did not yet remove the curse of this world. For all of us who are willing to come to Him, Jesus becomes our Savior and Good Shepherd who will help guide believers to do God's will while navigating through this evil world. *That world to come* can be a source of comfort to help overcome the burdens of this life.

The contrast between *this world* and *that world* should ever be in our thoughts as reminders that we are merely pilgrims passing through. *Here* there is pain, *there* it will cease, *here* there are tears, *there* they will be wiped away, *here* there is war, in *that world* only peace, *here* there is poverty, in *His house* are many mansions, *here* there is death and a curse, and *there* only life and righteousness.

Today, as we follow God's plan, we can have confidence that when trials and afflictions assault us, we have a sure and enduring hope. As we traverse *this world* let our focus be on *that world!*

J. Ekis

Preparatory promises

For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.

John 16:27

This last discourse that Jesus shared with His remaining disciples in that upper room, after Judas had departed to betray Him, is filled with precious words of comfort, command, encouragement, warning, and promise, as He prepared them for both His near-term departure in His passion and death, as well as His permanent bodily departure after His resurrection and ascension. As He returns to describing the promise of the Comforter, connected to the necessity of His going away, a number of parting promises are added in this final chapter of the discourse.

He first prepares them for the near-term loss in verses 20-22, with the promise that “I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.” This was a necessary anchor point for them as they were launched into the incredible scene of His passion and crucifixion, so that when He actually did see them again, the connection could be made in their disheveled minds and hearts, though it took some time to bring them around, even as “they believed not for joy.”

Then He follows with the long-term promise of the precious privilege of prayer in verses 23-24, continuing the theme from John 14:13-14. He describes their access by faith to the Father in His name: “Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.” Through His procurement of the gift of righteousness for those who believe on His name, that name becomes the authority of the disciple’s access to the Father by a new and living way. The description of that new relationship is found in our text, which explains that the connection of faith and love which is in Christ Jesus is the basis upon which the Father loves each disciple. What a glorious privilege we have to enter in to the throne of grace for mercy and help!

His final contrasting promise is peace, compared to the tribulation that would and will come to the disciple from the world, which He has overcome. He concludes that all that He has shared in this upper room discourse is so that they might have peace. This is not a state of peace that is absent of trouble. It is a peace that remains even in the midst of tribulation, through our connection to the love of the Father and the Son by faith.

Precious Things

Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal...

– Revelation 21:11 –

Something that is precious is extremely valuable, highly esteemed, or deeply cherished. Frequently, we think of preciousness in very temporal terms, like gemstones or valuable metals. We also think of things with deeper meaning yet of finite endurance, like the nature of a newborn, or the love of family. But the Bible sets forth a voluminous list of items that are of sublime and eternal value. It is humbling as well as deeply moving to meditate upon how precious God regards us, and the precious things He has committed to our trust as His children...

How God views man's eternal soul – "For the redemption of their soul is precious..." (Ps. 49:8)

The death of a believer in the sight of God – "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints" (Ps. 116:15)

The gospel in the hand of a soulwinner – "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him" (Ps. 126:6)

God's thoughts toward the believer – "How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them!" (Ps. 139:17)

The Holy Ghost's wisdom in the believer – "She is more precious than rubies: and all things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her" (Prov. 3:15)

The blameless reputation of the believer – "A good name is better than precious ointment..." (Ecc. 7:1)

The very faith we hold as believers – "Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:1)

Our sincere works of faith – "Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood hay, stubble" (1 Cor. 3:12)

The trials of our faith – "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:7)

The blood of Christ – "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:18-19)

Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself – "Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner" (2 Pet. 2:7)

Let us fix our eyes heavenward upon the priceless nature of this wondrous salvation. It will elicit joy unspeakable in our hearts. Oh, precious is the flow, that makes me white as snow! --- D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Turning the World Right Side Up

Psalms 146:9:but the way of the wicked he turneth upside down.

The symbol of Satan is an inverted pentagram partly owed to the image of Lucifer as a fallen star from heaven. The devil is the ultimate contrarian, the veritable author of all confusion-wrong is right, evil is good, darkness is light, deceit is truth. He is a twisted genius whose sole purpose is to subvert man and to prove God to be a liar. The first question ever uttered came from his cynical lips: "Hath God Said?" He spends his time undermining the ways of righteousness.

In the topsy turvydom that we call American society, we behold the fulfillment of Isaiah 5:20: "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" To the astonishment of morally-minded people, we have beheld the oddity of a man who thinks he is a woman being voted 2023 Woman of the Year. In what state of insanity could killing a baby in the womb be called "Reproductive Rights"? How does one legitimize the evident contradiction of anarchists burning cars and breaking windows in a "peaceful protest" while claiming to be "Anti-Fascists"? How can any sane person behold the spectacle of hypocrites demanding free speech for themselves while advocating a "Cancel Culture" that bans Facebook and Twitter accounts and YouTube videos that don't espouse their liberal party line?

The paradox of a world spinning out of control is owed to the evident demise of a spiritual ethos that provides a mooring to the absolute truths of God's word. Jeremiah unsuccessfully tried to call his backslidden nation to repentance but they stopped their ears to his warnings: Jeremiah 6:16: "Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said We will not walk therein." America is dangerously close to the same peril. Let us model after that first-century zeal that propelled the apostles to proclaim the right ways of the Lord to a libidinous and pagan culture. We, as they did, must face the scorn and rejection of the unrepentant; and perhaps even persecution. "But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also." Acts 17:5-6:

Pastor

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

Never Stop Growing

But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.

2Peter 3:18

Physical growth and spiritual growth are two different things. For human stature genetics seem to play a much larger part than nutrition. Proper nutrition is necessary for the proper development of the human body, but the height of an individual seems to be determined by heredity. Diet and exercise have a bearing on one's overall condition, but as the scriptures say, *Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?* Somewhere in the second decade of life, a person will usually reach the peak of their physical height. However, on the spiritual side, a person does play a part in how long and how much they can grow.

This last verse in Peter's second epistle admonishes the readers to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It's obvious from this admonition that believers play a part in their spiritual growth. Willpower alone is not what makes a person grow spiritually, but the will can determine to take advantage of what God has provided for spiritual growth. The nutrition of His Word is available. Peter says that we should *desire the sincere milk of the Word that we may grow thereby*. In this context, *desire* indicates a thirst that causes us to go beyond just casually skimming over its pages; rather, we should consume it and allow its truths to saturate our minds and souls so that we might absorb every ounce of it for our nourishment. The Word is not only to be harbored in our minds, but it is also to be obeyed and put into action so that we receive its full benefit. As the fish and bread were multiplied to feed the five thousand, so God's Word is never depleted and can feed us for the rest of our lives. God has also given us exceeding and precious promises to help us escape the corruption of this world and enhance our spirituality. Being sensitive to the Holy Spirit who indwells us will greatly assist our growth. Allowing our steps to be directed by Him will take us into situations that the Lord has designed for our good and His glory while being aware of the people whom the Lord has to cross our paths knowing that they all have lessons to teach and temper us. If we walk with wise men, we will be wise, but our spiritual life will be destroyed if we are the companion of fools. Daily, there are lessons to learn that help the old nature to diminish and allow the new nature to be nourished. Recognizing when we are grieving the Holy Spirit will help us to repent and avoid the things that are detrimental to our growth. Also learning to realize when we are working and relying on the flesh can help us to be more aware to shift our dependence fully on the Spirit of the Living God. The Spirit will also remind us when our pride rises to usurp God's position in our life. Pride will interrupt an intimate relationship with our Heavenly Father which will cause a spiritual decline. Spending time in the prayer closet will help us to grow past superficial and pretentious communication with God. Having no one to impress, we can have an unhindered and uninterrupted time in His presence.

Today is an opportunity to apply the truths that we have learned from the Lord, and it is also another opportunity to learn more from Him. By allowing our inward man to be renewed every day, we can continue to grow spiritually until our race is finished.

J. Ekis

Reminders

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldst: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldst not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me.

John 21:18-19

As the apostle John penned this account, he was revealing the importance that reminders can play in influencing our attitudes, actions, and accomplishments. First, it is evident that John recounted this after the death of the apostle Peter; otherwise, he would not necessarily have known precisely to what Jesus was referring by this statement in verse eighteen. He could have at least connected this prophetic word to Jesus' three-fold exchange with Peter just before this, concerning his relationship with the Lord and its permanent influence on the ministry that Peter would accomplish, leading to some loss of freedom later in life. But John would not be fully aware of those accomplishments in Peter's life until later, when he could look back and make both connections with Peter's ministry of love for Jesus and those He came to save, and with Peter's manner of death as a result of that ministry. Thus, at this later time, John had been reminded of Jesus' words, as he recounts and reflects the impact of both statements.

The second reminder in this text is composed of the simple words to Peter, "Follow me." Peter had heard those words from Jesus previously, evidently multiple times, and had endeavored in those times to obey. His commitment to do so was evident earlier in Jesus' ministry, when he questioned the Lord, as they watched the rich ruler walk away with dismay, regarding the reward for the disciples' decision to leave all and follow. Yet, in this scene where he has yet again been found by the Lord back with his fishing nets, even after at least two previous visits from the risen Christ, those words again come echoing that familiar call. The later accounts of Luke reveal Peter's response, enhanced by the power of the Holy Spirit, to this final call. This call was Peter's reminder, though he had failed in his denial of the Lord, that the gifts and calling of God are without repentance, and that He who began a good work would continue to perform it. In addition, we may also see Peter's own remembrance of the enigmatic words concerning his death, as perhaps he alludes in his second epistle (II Peter 1.14). Was this Peter's prison epistle?

Although these apostles were specially inspired by the Holy Spirit as they recorded and reflected on these reminders, we can learn the lesson from them to allow our reminders from the word of the Lord to be the encouragement we need to remember and follow His call. As Peter also states in that second epistle his desire to stir his readers to remembrance and to be established in the present truth and blessed hope (II Peter 1.11-13), let us be thankful and encouraged in these reminders.

The Great Commission

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

– Matthew 28:19-20 –

I recently attended my son's commissioning as an officer into the United States Marine Corps. The event was obviously a proud moment, but it also got me to musing on an even greater Commission – the one our Lord gave all believers before He ascended to the right hand of the Father. The Navy/USMC ceremony brought certain hues of Christ's final command to the fore for reflection and meditation....

The Great Commission is a solemn charge given to each of us from our Lord Himself among many witnesses. There is no mistaking what Jesus expects every believer to do with His gospel. It is not ours to keep within the confines of our homes or church walls, but to take to the highways and hedges. It began in Jerusalem, was spread to Judea and Samaria, and is to be sowed into the uttermost parts of the earth. This is an awesome, ongoing responsibility for every one of us who names Him as our Lord.

The Great Commission anticipates a faithful execution of our duties as followers of Christ. We publicly vowed our allegiance to His cause when we entered the waters of baptism, so this commission is ours to carry out just as much as it was the apostles'. There is no discharge in this war.

The Great Commission highlights the warrior-class status that we don as believers. There are intrinsic dangers to commissioning as ambassadors of Heaven into a devil's world. We must be circumspect because our adversary as a roaring lion is walking about. We will need to endure hardness throughout the days of our service. Our Lord trained us to be wise as serpents, yet harmless as doves. All that we do must be to please Him who hath chosen us to be soldiers.

The Great Commission has an end. Eternity will prove the collective accomplishments of all believers of all ages who took up ranks in the Master's army. Our individual commitment is until we each arrive at Heaven's shore to receive our Lord's personal commendation for service rendered, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

May the Captain of our Salvation find us faithful. --- D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Eternal Words

John 6:68: ...Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.

William Shakespeare was renowned for the might of his pen. 400 years after his death multitudes continue to ponder his prolific works including 39 plays and 154 sonnets. Many hail him as a transcendent genius—a master wordsmith that employed the perfectly crafted couplet to express his intriguingly, profound thoughts.

Yet for all the effusive praise with which he was lauded, he spurned the notion of being crowned the “Bard of Avon”. In a scene from his most famous tragedy, Hamlet is found contemptuously perusing a book. Polonius asks him what he is reading to which Hamlet sardonically replies “Words! Words! Words!” It was Shakespeare’s wry way of saying that words which are written by men are just that — “words, words, words”. In modern vernacular we might say “blah, blah, blah”.

Was it not the sagacious Solomon that wrote “of making many books there is no end”? Library shelves abound with the musings of philosophers, poets, historians, and dramatists, but the Bible is the only book that can make the claim of divine origination. Embedded in its sacred pages are the answers to man’s most earnest interrogatories. Men’s words are the expression of the finite mind and heart of the writer and so appear trite and vapid. In contrast, God’s word is recondite and vivifying.

Sir Walter Scott, a famed British novelist and poet, was also a committed Christian. On his deathbed Scott is reported to have said to his secretary, “Bring me the Book.” His secretary thought of the thousands of books in Scott’s library and inquired, “Dr. Scott, which book?” “The Book,” replied Scott. “The Bible — the only book for a dying man!” And the committed Christian would have to add that the Bible is not just for a dying man, but it’s the only book for a living man, because it is the Word of God.

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

Our Guiding Principle

For we walk by faith, not by sight

2 Corinthians 5:7

Believers and unbelievers can argue about the reality of an unseen world, or the immortality of the soul; but one thing is certain, life in this world contains many things and situations that are unseen. The past is unseen to us who are in the present; and although past events can be recorded and documented, the actuality of those past events remains unseen to those who were not eyewitnesses. Though documented, some still doubt the veracity of man landing on the moon. Even after witnessing Jesus' power and hearing His teachings, Thomas refused to believe Jesus had resurrected unless he touched His nail-printed hands. An element of faith is required in many situations of life.

It seems apparent that the Lord would have us exercise and live by faith in this life. The Lord does not overwhelm us with a preponderance of visual evidence to cause us to believe in Him. Not one of us today has witnessed a body of water dividing, bread falling from heaven, a person walking on water, or one being raised from the dead; but we see the heavens declaring God's glory, and the earth showing His handiwork. We can either express the wonder of God's creation or rationalize it by the Theory of Evolution both of which require us to exercise faith in something unwitnessed. To the spiritually blinded or the hard-hearted, the miracles of the spiritual new-birth of a Christian convert, or the unexplainable disappearance of a tumor in a cancer patient would seem to be easily explained away by a justifiable reason. Whether they will acknowledge it or not, unbelievers exercise some kind of faith every day of their lives, just not faith in Jesus Christ.

Faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is what brought us to true salvation; and it is faith that is to carry us through till we reach heaven's shore. When trials and tribulations arise and vex us, it is faith in the eternal promises of God that generates hope and confidence that our Good Shepherd will restore our souls. When the future seems cloudy and uncertain, it is faith that the Lord will guide us to fulfill His perfect will in our lives that motivates us to keep going in hope. The times when we come to a crossroads, faith can direct us to take the right path. In the countless decisions that are necessary for our lifetime, it is faith that enables our belief that God will grant the wisdom from above to make the right choice. Faith is the engine that drives believers to prayer, knowing that our Heavenly Father hears and answers our requests. Christians scatter the seed of God's word, having the faith that it will not return unto Him void, but it shall accomplish that which He pleases. And ultimately, when we go through the valley of the shadow of death, we will fear no evil, because we have faith that His rod and His staff will comfort us.

Because we do not know what a day may bring forth, it is best for us to trust in the Lord with all our heart, having the faith to know that He will oftentimes reveal Himself to us as He works all things together for our good. Having His word as a lamp for our feet and a light for our path, let us walk by faith today.

J. Ekis

Supreme motive

Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.

Psalm 119:11

This very familiar verse reminds us of the importance of God's word for our lives, even as does the balance of this Psalm. We may hide something to keep others from finding it. However, the implication of the word here is to hoard or reserve, even to esteem, as one would hide a treasure. Thus, storing the word of God within our inner man guarantees a supply of truth upon which we can draw in time of need. Many are the events in life where we need to lay hold on one of the promises of God to sustain us through challenges or difficult times. The Lord is our Rock to give us peace, hope, and security in these times. It is good for us to commit to memory many of His precious promises.

However, while we can find many good and substantial reasons for hiding His word in our heart, this text supplies the supreme motive. We have no other source to keep us from sin than the One who has no sin. He who loved us enough to redeem us from the destruction of sin and into His eternal keeping has provided the equipment to keep us from the daily threat of the combination of temptation and the weakness of our flesh. As the apostle thanked God for the power of Jesus Christ our Lord to deliver him from this wretched body of death, where the sin principle continues to struggle to take back its throne, we can share in that thanksgiving for the treasure of scripture that He has provided to keep us from sin. We can also be thankful for His blessed Holy Spirit, who, just as promised, will bring to our remembrance these guards and guides in those times of need.

As we love Him because He first loved us, let us determine each day to continue to add to this treasure stored up in our hearts, and then run to that treasure chest in every time of need, that we may walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called. He is more than worthy of such love, and we are blessed by such consistency.

Additions to Faith

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.

– 2 Peter 1:5-7 –

Salvation is by faith alone through grace alone. But a faith that saves will not remain alone. Spiritual growth accompanies genuine redemption. The process of sanctification is the sure and certain work of the Holy Ghost in tandem with the volitional action of the believer. We control the throttle. There are many graces that ought to characterize our redeemed lives, and it is very much our business to ensure that they do. Peter outlines seven (there are many more), and exhorts us to give all diligence to pattern our earthly lives after these things. It serves as a good checkpoint for our spiritual walk to consider all seven...

Virtue – as in moral behavior. Does my life exhibit the highest standard in terms of morality? Is there any dichotomy between my public and private actions? Are my thoughts, words, and deeds demonstrative of my Christ at all times?

Knowledge. What do I put into my head? Do I hunger after God’s wisdom as revealed in His Word? Do I know more about the things of God, or things of the world?

Temperance. Do I exercise restraint in subjective matters? Are there things that I allow in my life that are not pleasing to God, not beneficial to fellow believers, or a bad testimony to lost souls?

Patience. Am I waiting for God to move, or am I self-willed? Do I rest upon His promises, or do I think He needs my help for Him to fulfill them for me?

Godliness. Do others see more of Jesus or me in my life? Am I known to be a genuine Christian?

Brotherly kindness. How earnest is my love for my spiritual brethren? Do I think the best of each of them? Am I annoyed by my church family, or do I seek to be of service to them in whatever way I possibly can?

Charity. How fervently do I love people? Jesus had compassion on the same multitude that ultimately crucified Him – do I have at least an inward desire to strive to do the same?

The Spirit tells us that if these things be in us and abound, we will be fruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus. Let us open the throttle and permit the Spirit to have His way in our lives, that our God may be glorified. --- D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Immutability

*Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.
Hebrews 13:8*

In the summer of 1968, I was playing in my rock band for an agent who booked us as promotional entertainment. In our repertoire was a selection that aptly described the spirit of the times:

How Can I Be Sure
In a world that is constantly changing?

Admittedly, at that time, I was identifying with those expressed sentiments. The world was chaotic and confusing. War, assassinations, violent protests, nuclear proliferation, draft dodgers, the drug culture, and the hippie movement dominated the headlines fueling a pervasive feeling of despair and hopelessness, especially among the young. Traditional virtues, respect for authority, and the rule of law were mocked as irrelevant and neolithic. Academia abandoned any theistic basis for knowledge, opting for a progressive, non-absolutist approach to education. We learned to question everything and to trust no one leaving me with no answer for the musical question posed by "How can I be sure in a world that is constantly changing?" When one poses a question of such import, it is reasonable to expect an answer. But, alas, like most of the songs of that generation, it provided no assuring answers to the issues that it raised. The song quickly devolves into a paean of irresolution leaving the songwriter with his "head up, upside down", not to mention anyone who may have hope for an answer.

So what attracted me to Christ in that tumultuous summer of '68 was the absolute certitude with which the gospel spoke to the needs of my heart. In Him, I found a sure foundation that would never budge with the ever-shifting sands of time. I found, in a word, immutability. And what assurance this brings to the diligent seeker; that in the midst of a world that is in constant flux, whose citizens vacillate to comply with the latest philosophies that are in vogue for the moment, that we have an "anchor to the soul both sure and steadfast".

What enduring confidence has been vouchsafed to the believer in Christ. All His promises are yea and amen. He has affixed his immutable imprimatur to the written word: "For I am the LORD, I change not" Mal. 3:6. As we lay aside the well-worn habiliments of this temporal tabernacle and hasten to the finish line, let us do so with the utmost assurance that He who is the "same yesterday, and to day, and for ever" shall be there to keep his never-changing promise of eternal life.

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see;
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.

Pastor

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

Factor of Greatness

Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation: and thy gentleness hath made me great. Thou hast enlarged my steps under me; so that my feet did not slip.

2 Samuel 22:36,37

Gentleness and greatness do not seem associated in our modern-day context. Oftentimes, great people of the world climbed to the pinnacle of success in their field because of drive and aggressiveness mixed with a large dose of pride. Gentleness is an excellent quality, but it usually does not fit in with the secular perception of greatness. From a Biblical perspective though, gentleness and greatness are very much aligned. The word used for gentleness in this text has the connotation of condescension and also is sometimes translated as *humility and meekness*. In this verse, the primitive root for the word great means *to increase* and is often translated as *multiply*. The context of this verse is found in David's song of Deliverance. In this song, the soldier David reflects on the many times God came to his aid by giving divine strength and victory over his enemies. These victories would establish David and enlarge his kingdom. These verses also have spiritual significance that can be applied to our life.

Just as Jehovah heard the cries of David and descended to become his shield and salvation, the Lord Jesus Christ humbled Himself to die on the cross for the salvation of the world. The day we called upon His name for salvation the Lord lovingly came to our rescue. As new believers, we miraculously become citizens of a heavenly kingdom, yet we are living in a hostile world. The increase or growth of our spiritual life depends on the Lord hearing our prayers and providing us with His necessary assistance to defeat our enemy. As David had to be aware of many enemies assaulting him on different fronts, so we also must walk circumspectly and, with the Lord's divine help, be ready to confront whatever comes against us. For us to increase, we must by God's strength successfully confront temptations, discouragement, distress, doubt, and the numerous weapons in Satan's arsenal. With faith as our shield and His Word as our sword, we must call out to our Lord to defeat our enemy so we can greatly increase. There will be countless times when we will need the Lord to come down and deliver us from the enemy's assaults. Every battle provides an opportunity to exercise our spiritual muscle and trust God, and in so doing we will increase in strength. With each victory, we should become more experienced as soldiers for Christ.

Though every day there is some degree of a battle, we need not fear; for as God was ever available for David's many conflicts, so His ears are open to our cries for help. Pray that He enlarges our steps under us so that our feet do not slip.

J. Ekis

Obedient discernment

*While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them.
Acts 10:19-20*

In this familiar account of the conversion of the house of Cornelius the Gentile through the preaching of the apostle Peter, these verses provide the last instruction given to Peter regarding his assignment. He had just experienced the strange vision on the housetop, where he was told three times to kill and eat animals that were unclean according to the Mosaic law. Upon his pious refusals, the voice responded, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." At the same time, Cornelius had sent the three men to retrieve Peter, as instructed by an angel in his own previous vision. Beyond the point of our text, Peter received no additional instruction. He was left to contemplate the vision while following the command to go with these three strangers.

When he arrived at the house of Cornelius and was greeted first by Cornelius, and then by the crowd that was gathered there, it is evident that Peter was still trying to understand the plan. He had at least understood that the vision was not about him simply renouncing his Jewish dietary law, when he said, "God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean." Yet he was obviously still not clear on what to do, when he said, "I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?" Then, after Cornelius explained his own vision, Peter finally put it all together, and preached the gospel to these Gentiles, accomplishing a significant milestone in the mission of the church.

Whether it be a first century apostle with a vision or a twenty-first century believer with the completed canon of scripture, it is imperative that we see our responsibility to seek discernment, walking according to the light provided to us. We may often need to put together the principles or precepts of what the Lord has said to us in His word with the circumstances into which we are led, to finally understand what He would have us do. Peter's example is instructive, in that he obeyed at least the command of the Spirit to go, while he continued to contemplate the relationship of the principle he had been taught by the vision. Similarly, let us spend much time in God's word to develop discernment, as well as cultivate an obedient heart that will know when or where to go, that we might accomplish His plan and be useful in His service.