

# Pastors Thoughts of the Week

## **Joy Unspeakable**

*Luke 2:10: And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.*

Four hundred silent years passed since the last words of the prophet Malachi were heard in the land. They had all but forgotten that word of promise "the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple". Even the priests, those stalwart stewards of the mysteries of God, went about their assigned duties in a heartless, perfunctory manner. A spirit of gloom and pessimism pervaded the people of the covenant. Spiritual apathy added to resigned complicity to the customs of their Roman captors deflated any hope of a Messianic deliverance. Into this miasmic atmosphere of despair was the angel sent to the temple wherein Zacharias, the priest performed his liturgical obligation. Suddenly his service was interrupted by a divine intruder who greeted him with this unexpected salutation "thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John."

Gabriel expected his words to be met with the same enthusiasm with which it was delivered, but instead, Zacharias remained incredulous and could not muster the faith to believe the seeming impossibility of the promise. In petulant response, the angel smites the faithless priest with speechlessness until the days of accomplishment would be fulfilled. And then, as predicted, "thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth."

Now consider the utter frustration that beset the old priest. The angel vanishes as suddenly as he appeared, and Zacharias is left with the impossible task of communicating what had just transpired to the waiting people who, by now, wondered why the appointed ministration had taken so long. We can imagine his excited (though silent) retelling of this divine event using gesticulation in place of articulation. The pantomime was so animated with joy that they deduced that he had seen a vision- a vision that bore glad tidings for the nation. It would be nine months that the old priest would have to serve his sentence of silence, but then with the birth of John, his tongue was given rebirth and he could finally express, by the fullness of God's Spirit, that God "hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us."

Peter, in his epistle, reminds us that there is a "joy unspeakable and full of glory". This joy is worn on the countenance and has no syntax with which to communicate its presence. All believers who have received the hope of God's promises will have that same unspeakable joy until that day when we stand "faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy" and our faith is rewarded with reality. Then shall our tongue be released and that which was heretofore inexpressible will find utterance and eternal praise in our Living Lord.

May His choice blessings be yours today,

*Pastor*

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

## Questioning God

---

*Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?  
– Luke 1:34 –*

---

A marked contrast, written for our learning, is found in the earliest moments of the nativity account. Gabriel breaks four hundred years of divine silence by bringing vibrantly wonderful news to both Zacharias and Mary – news so incredible and immensely impactful that only faith could begin to grasp it.

For Zacharias, the angelic prophecy was that he and his beloved-yet-aged-and-barren wife Elizabeth would conceive, and she would bear them a son. As difficult as this may have been to apprehend, such miraculous births, while rare, were not completely unheard of in the annals of God's chosen nation. Abraham and Sarah should have immediately stood out in Zacharias' devoutly-educated mind's eye as the most notable testament of God's kindred work. What's more astounding is that Zacharias seems to have never given up hope of having a child with Elisabeth, and had even been specifically praying for such a miracle (Luke 1:13). Yet, to our shock, we find the priest, faithful as he was, backsliding into a momentary yet inexcusable and soundly disappointing posture of unbelief with his questioning of the angel, "Whereby shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years" (Luke 1:18). His lack of faith and acceptance is met immediately and decisively with a chastisement of nine months of silence – a silence that was only broken after John's birth, when Zacharias publicly acknowledged the angel's prophecy by adamantly confirming the divinely chosen name for the boy.

Mary, on the other hand – a young maiden and not nearly as well versed in the Scriptures – was the recipient of even more unfathomable news from the same heavenly messenger. She, a lowly and poor peasant girl from Nazareth, would conceive the long-awaited Messiah? Thoughts must have been swirling in her mind and heart, not from a stance of IF the angel's word would transpire, but more so out of a sacred curiosity as to HOW it would come to pass, given her virginity. Her immediate reception of Gabriel's supernatural explanation tells us that Mary was full of faith in what her God could do, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38).

This contrast teaches our twenty-first century minds a significant lesson about questioning God. So many in our skeptical age have justified putting the Almighty to inquisition. It really has become the accepted norm of our day. But God is under no obligation to explain Himself to mortal men. Nonetheless, He has been infinitely gracious to reveal so very much about Himself and His thoughts toward man. When faith cannot be mustered, as in Zacharias's momentary lapse, or when it is devoid altogether, Jehovah will meet man's questions with incredulity and icy silence. But when a faith-filled spirit is present, like that of Mary's, He delights to not only entertain our questions, but to further divulge the riches of His grace to genuine souls.

Let us approach God today with our sincere questions and a right spirit, confident that He does all things well. His answers will undoubtedly be the joy and rejoicing of our hearts. -- D. Murcek



# Pastors Thoughts of the Week

## I've Got A Secret

*Revelation of John 19:12: He had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.*

God Has been very gracious to His people in that He has revealed so much of His mysterious workings to those who make an effort to search out the deep things found in the Word. And yet, that said, so much more is intentionally shrouded in secrecy. The essence of faith is implicitly trusting in One who dwells in the "secret place of the Most High". Again, God has been quite generous in His revelations but we, finite creatures, must never forget that "the secret things belong unto the LORD our God".

Manoah hoped to ascertain the name of that ethereal presence that brought to him the impossibly good news of the birth of a champion in the camp of Dan. The angel rebuffed him with the curt reply: "Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret?"

So there are things not meant to be revealed to the curious, probing mind of man. The process of acquiring information through questioning is an innate characteristic of all of Adam's race, but it must be tempered with discretion. The Omniscient God says "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further". We that would be wise servants must patiently, yea reverently, wait to see the end of the matter. In His good time, the Master will reveal the wisdom of the trials and tribulations that so often beset us in this sin-cursed world. Too often does the devil provoke us to question the wisdom of God's ways. Lest we be wise in our own conceits, let us recall what God said to Job: "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding.

And so, let us be content to "receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls" acknowledging that much of what we are trusting cannot be empirically proven. Knowing the absolutely good character of the One who has vouchsafed "exceeding great and precious promises" we are assured that "He hath done all things well".

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,

*Pastor*

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

## Repeated Resolution

*I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee*

*Luke 15:18*

The narrative of the prodigal son is one of the most well-known in the Bible. It conveys lessons about God's permissive will and His longing for His wayward children. The impact of sinful choices, repentance, and sibling jealousy is seen through the interactions. The key to the account is when the prodigal at the lowest point in his life resolves to turn from his selfish choices and return to his father. Confessing his unworthy state, he is welcomed home.

"I will arise and go to my father" is a resolution that will benefit us for the rest of our lives. When first the Spirit of God convicts and draws us to the point that we are resolved to go to our Heavenly Father, we are adopted into the family of God. That resolve of being aware of our sin and the determination to turn away from it and return to a close fellowship with the Lord goes beyond our salvation experience. At those times throughout our Christian walk, when we find some interruption in our intimacy with God, we must be resolved to confess whatever hinders the communion, and humbly return to our Father. We may find ourselves just going through the motions in the Lord's service. When this revelation dawns on us, we must be resolute and run to our Father. When the pleasures of the flesh become more important than obeying the Lord's will, it is time to confess and return to the one true source of pleasure. If anger and pride rear their ugly heads and smudge our testimony, we can find restoration in the Father's presence. During times of trials, when fear, worry, and doubt can arise and obscure our vision of our Heavenly Father's promises, may we come to ourselves and return to child-like faith in God and His Word. Like the prodigal, we are not able in our own strength to make right the sins that so easily beset us. If we are tired of repeating over and over the things that displease the Lord, by God's grace may we find the strength to firmly say "I will return to my Father."

As we embark on a new year, it is a good time to reflect on the past and to look for ways to *grow in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ*. New Year's resolutions are often quickly forgotten and people return to their old ways. Today, let the example of the prodigal inspire us with the spiritual determination to return to a close relationship with our Heavenly Father. *If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son, cleanseth us from all sin.*

J. Ekis



## Repeated Resolution

*I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned  
against heaven, and before thee*

*Luke 15:18*

The narrative of the prodigal son is one of the most well-known in the Bible. It conveys lessons about God's permissive will and His longing for His wayward children. The impact of sinful choices, repentance, and sibling jealousy is seen through the interactions. The key to the account is when the prodigal at the lowest point in his life resolves to turn from his selfish choices and return to his father. Confessing his unworthy state, he is welcomed home.

"I will arise and go to my father" is a resolution that will benefit us for the rest of our lives. When first the Spirit of God convicts and draws us to the point that we are resolved to go to our Heavenly Father, we are adopted into the family of God. That resolve of being aware of our sin and the determination to turn away from it and return to a close fellowship with the Lord goes beyond our salvation experience. At those times throughout our Christian walk, when we find some interruption in our intimacy with God, we must be resolved to confess whatever hinders the communion, and humbly return to our Father. We may find ourselves just going through the motions in the Lord's service. When this revelation dawns on us, we must be resolute and run to our Father. When the pleasures of the flesh become more important than obeying the Lord's will, it is time to confess and return to the one true source of pleasure. If anger and pride rear their ugly heads and smudge our testimony, we can find restoration in the Father's presence. During times of trials, when fear, worry, and doubt can arise and obscure our vision of our Heavenly Father's promises, may we come to ourselves and return to child-like faith in God and His Word. Like the prodigal, we are not able in our own strength to make right the sins that so easily beset us. If we are tired of repeating over and over the things that displease the Lord, by God's grace may we find the strength to firmly say "I will return to my Father."

As we embark on a new year, it is a good time to reflect on the past and to look for ways to *grow in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ*. New Year's resolutions are often quickly forgotten and people return to their old ways. Today, let the example of the prodigal inspire us with the spiritual determination to return to a close relationship with our Heavenly Father. *If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son, cleanseth us from all sin.*

J. Ekis

## Beam harvesting

*Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.*

*Matthew 7:5*

We often hear this verse and its context quoted and applied with an emphasis on its first part. That emphasis is right and proper, especially in the bigger context of the sermon on the mount, in which Jesus condemns hypocrisy in various applications, which were exemplified by the scribes and Pharisees of Israel. These men had set themselves up as the spiritual leaders of the Israelite people, and, as such, had defined their own set of religious guidelines and extended rules upon which they based their own measures of holiness. In addition to their hypocritical exercises of alms-giving, public prayer, and feigned fasting, all for the purpose of being seen of men (Matthew 6:1, 5, 16), they had used their rules of “holiness” for the purpose of judging others, their “brothers,” against themselves. We even see accounts in the gospels of them using this tactic against Jesus and His disciples. Yet in this warning, Jesus exposes their sin problem, with the “beam” metaphor, against the sins, or “motes,” of those they chose to judge. A significant aspect of their beam was that the standards they created were ones that they could observe and count for themselves, while by their manner of maintaining them they completely missed the true spiritual points of God’s law. Jesus elaborates on this hypocrisy when He addresses them later (Matthew 23:23, etc.).

It is notable here that Jesus does not stop with the first part, but goes on to provide the positive extension of His admonition. He does not only condemn their beam. He also gives them a good reason to cast it out. As in the entire sermon, He calls those listening to a nobler cause, which is to be a true help to a brother who needs humble correction. But there is no path to such humility without recognizing and removing the grievous beam that we bear within ourselves. Yet, to heed His warning is to always first judge ourselves, for the purpose of being purged by God, not to flaunt our cleansing, but to recognize in fact the beams of our own weakness, that we might become useful to God, and therefore to others. This is the spirit of meek restoration to which we are called in Galatians 6:1. Let us therefore be about the business of the deforestation of our own eyes, that we might fulfill the whole of Jesus’ command with meekness and gentleness.

## New World Order

---

*Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.  
– Matthew 6:10 –*

---

Over the past five to six decades, the devil's puppet-show of world leaders have frequently touted the emergence of a "new world order" (...one might stop and ask, What exactly was so bad about the old one? But we digress...) They have been arduously working toward amalgamating men and nations into a neo-Babel of global governance, and they are making rapid strides in that direction in our current day. Many Christians are unfortunately oblivious to these hellish designs, while others are equally overly anxious about them. At the end of the day, the Word of God confirms for us that they will succeed, but it also assures us that the success will be very short-lived and ultimately decimated by the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior.

But unbeknownst to the political and cultural elites, there is a spiritual new world order that was birthed over two thousand years ago that is still very much alive and active in our day. Its beginnings were in a little town called Bethlehem where a virgin-born Babe graced a cattle's stall. As He became a Man, this new world order began to dawn. It emanated forth as He vividly alerted mankind to the fact that, while we were at enmity with God, God was very much for us and desirous of reconciliation. Because of His identity, the god of this world tried to undermine Him by offering Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. But He categorically and summarily rejected that world order. Then, with a tiny retinue of twelve devoted followers, He taught all who would listen about a Kingdom not of this world – one that is open to all who will humble themselves as little children to enter its invisible gates. He secured the eternal establishment of this new order by offering Himself upon a lonely hill outside of Jerusalem as a propitiation for the sin of mankind, thereby placating God's wrath. He then proceeded to defiantly humiliate the prince of this world by rising triumphantly three days later. His subsequent ascension to the right hand of God birthed an invisible, global, spiritual organism, against which the gates of Hell itself hold no power. Even to this very day, men and women from every tribe and kindred and nation and tongue, by receiving His gracious offer of salvation, are adopting this new world order into their very being. And while they anxiously await the day when His will is universally done in earth as it is in heaven, they, as strangers and pilgrims here, rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory – a joy which their King Himself declared no man can take from them, neither in this world, nor in the one to come.

Brothers and sisters, let us rejoice that the King has come, and let us ardently await the soon coming revelation of His universal Kingdom! -- D. Murcek



# Pastors Thoughts of the Week

## The Good Fight

*1 Corinthians 9:27: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection*

The enemy of all things spiritual is the old nature that rises up within all of us to challenge any advance we would make in the kingdom of God. The demons have made a careful study of our vulnerabilities and laid gins to ensnare us. The devil knows too well that all of Adam's fallen race are given to various, sinful proclivities and so have gone about their fiendish assignments to weaken the believer's witness. To those given to appetite, he prepares banquet tables laden with exotic foods. To the drunkard he legalizes the poisonous drafts and presents them as elixirs of joy. To the covetous he glorifies possessions. To the carnal he fans the flames of lust through immodest fashion and pornography (*pleasant pictures Isaiah 2:16*). To the proud he tempts with the prospect of power and glory. To the worldly-wise he exalts the acquisition of "science falsely so-called". And so to keep under the body from such devices is no small task for "to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not."

The monastic monks devised, what they thought was, their own remedy for defeating the prevailing lusts of the flesh, namely self-flagellation. By flogging the body with barbed chains they believed that they could sublimate the flesh and win the battle over carnal propensities. Little did they realize that "we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Mere humans are no match against such imposing forces. To win this war the saints of God must depend upon the Captain of their salvation who long ago entered the fray being "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin".

Now, this is not to say that the believer has no part in his own sanctification. The Holy Spirit is sent to the heart and we, in corporation with Him, can gain the needed victories. The Lord does not take anything from us that isn't first willingly yielded up. The free will of man is sacrosanct. Let us also be reminded that victories over the "belly god" are only temporary. We may win a battle, but the war rages on. The present tense of the text speaks of this as Paul's continual practice which clearly implies a continual need. What may be won today, might soon be lost tomorrow. After pummeling the Lord with forty days of temptations, to no avail, the devil "departed from him for a season". Satan is not easily discouraged and after he has discovered our weaknesses, be assured, he will be back to put our resolve to the test. The whole armor has been provided to us but it is our responsibility to put it on and fight the good fight of faith.

Have a victorious day

Pastor

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

## ***Spiritual GPS***

*For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.*

*Romans 8:14*

One of the marvels of today's technology is the GPS. GPS stands for global positioning system, which uses satellites to coordinate and locate desired locations. When information is typed into the system, it is transferred to the satellites that are circling the globe, and then the program maps out a route to follow to reach a prescribed destination. We now have a guidance system from above with our cell phones or the car's computer that guides our travels.

Believers, at the moment of their conversion, receive a heavenly guidance system in the person of the Holy Spirit. After adopting new believers into the family of God, the Holy Spirit can steer the newborn in a route that is designed to teach and strengthen them. There will be daily lessons to learn. Now, as a child of God with His guidance from within, we are equipped to have our sensitivity heightened to the negative desires and reactions that are ingrained in our carnal nature. Other lessons may come from the variety of people whose paths we cross. With insight from the Holy Spirit, these encounters offer instruction either through their words or the example of their lives. Some of these will be examples or warnings of lifestyles to avoid, while others will inspire us to greater endeavors. God's inspired Word also serves as a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. The Holy Spirit uses the Word to guide us through the darkness of this present evil world. It is imperative for believers to read the scriptures, but it is equally important to allow the Spirit to guide us in what portion to study and to reveal the depths of its truth. Different needs and circumstances require the proper scriptures to fit the current needs. Being confronted by the crossroads that life presents requires the Spirit's leading to make the right choices. We can't see all the future ramifications of choices we make; because of that, we must pray and be sensitive to the Spirit's leading. Often, we plan out the schedule of our day, yet those annoying unexpected interruptions come. In those moments, we must seek the Lord to know if He might be leading us to shine some light on a person in need or even to learn some edifying lesson. Hopefully, if we mature as believers, we will learn to recognize and yield to the Spirit's leadership.

Today, whether you have a busy schedule or one of those off days, seek the Spirit's leading to guide your steps. As you read portions of His word, look for its truth to be reinforced in situations throughout your day. When the day concludes, may we have the sweet satisfaction that we were led by the Spirit.

J. Ekis

## **Led to follow**

*And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee.*

*Matthew 2:21-22*

We see in this text two of four times within the first two chapters of Matthew's gospel where Joseph responded promptly to God's leading. In at least two of those instances, he was led by messages from God that resolved dilemmas that Joseph was facing. The first, in chapter one, was indeed the most perplexing, as he was dealing with the situation of Mary's pregnancy and his response, both in the eyes of people and in the eyes of God. There is much that we are not told in the account, but as Matthew notes that Joseph was a just man, it had to have been a painful struggle for him to know what to think, whom to believe, and ultimately what was the right thing to do. God was merciful in sending the angel in a dream to tell him the right answer. In the last, Joseph was in a quandary about where to settle in Israel with the relative threats of Herod's sons ruling in different territories. All four times we see Joseph obeying what God said in the dreams. It is also interesting that the dream messages came through an angel the first three times, but no angel is mentioned in the last one.

Joseph teaches us a lesson with respect to the leading of the Lord. As a just, or righteous, person, Joseph desired to do right, which always coincides with the will of God, since His will defines right. Evidence of Joseph's character is revealed in each case as he does, at his first opportunity, just as he was instructed. Philip Keller has stated something to the effect that "you can know the will of God, if you want to know the will of God to do it, not to vote on it." This principle is exemplified in these four instances of God leading Joseph. By contrast, we can sometimes be caught in the situation of seeking God's will before we are willing to obey whatever He says. Such an attitude should not expect to be led. Let us instead learn from Joseph to be willing always to do what is right according to the Lord, then look for His leading in our lives, through His word and His Spirit.



## Bring Him Unto Me

---

*He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you? Bring him unto me.*

*– Mark 9:19 –*

---

The scene at the base of the mountain following Christ's transfiguration is a pathetic one. The multitudes were gathered, and there was some commotion about a man with a demon-possessed son. The spiritual affliction was self-destructive. This devil not only made his host deaf and dumb, but would often drive the young man to throw himself into the flames, or to cast himself to drown in deep waters. It had been a years-long ordeal. What exactly this young man had delved into during his boyhood in order to invite such an evil presence into his life, we are not told. Given our contemporary societal condition, however, and being witness ourselves to the devil's increasing enchantments of young minds, we can imagine the type of occultic influence that must have ceased hold of this man's heart at an early age. Whatever it was, this demon had an open invitation and was not letting go. The lad's father in desperation came seeking Jesus to release him from this hellish possession. When he arrived, only nine disciples were present. But they would do, would they not? After all, they were Jesus' hand-picked men. He brought him to them, only to be sorely disappointed that the demon proved tenaciously more committed to continue to cling to his son.

When Jesus arrives with Peter, James, and John, the father desperately accosts Him, "Lord, have mercy on my son!" And then the inadvertent yet stinging indictment, "And I brought him to thy disciples; and they could not cure him." Jesus' response is so august and authoritative, it makes us wonder in worshipful admiration, "Bring him unto me." The Lord's subsequent command elicits a violent exit of the demon, but all is soon well. The young man is cured, and like the maniac of Gadara, once again in his right mind. So simple, yet so powerful – that's our Christ. What no man can do, He can. What depths of hellish evil are overcome and dismissed in humiliating defeat by merely a commanding word from the Son of Man.

How often do we find ourselves like the nine disciples, willing to assist yet so helpless to do so? How often do we identify with the scant faith of the father of the demon possessed, believing Christ can help, yet needing help ourselves for our remaining unbelief? How many hopeless cases do we come across in our lives? Loved ones who will not listen? "Bring them unto Me." Beloved friends who are sorely afflicted? "Bring them unto Me." Heart-breaking situations where it seems no one can help? "Bring him unto Me". Our wayward nation? Let us pause and listen. The Master is nearby. "Bring her unto Me." The same power He demonstrated in our text is emanating now from His residence at the right hand of God. Let us bring our hard cases and the most difficult burdens of our hearts unto Jesus. He will do what neither we nor anyone else can. -- D. Murcek

# *Pastors Thoughts of the Week*

## **Never Alone**

*And he said, My presence shall go with thee Exodus 33:14*

Those who choose to live without God, live alone. The sad plight of the unregenerate is that they must fend for themselves. They have no recourse to the Almighty and no vouchsafed guarantees as to the abiding presence of the Living God. That is not to say that they are not partakers of the common grace bestowed upon all of God's creatures by which all men "live, and move, and have our being". But those that are truly His enjoy the special privilege of His abiding presence. They are acutely aware of the requisite gifts that are imparted in the potential form at the moment of their conversion. Within these earthen vessels, He has shared, in part, the excellent treasures of His glory. Our countenance, which once bore the fretful furrows of worry, now bears the impress of eternal hope. Our words, which once were characterized by gloom, bitterness, and despair, are now seeking to give expression to unspeakable joy. Our thoughts, which were once muddled in the confusion of philosophical relativism, are now permeated with the assurance of the mind of Christ. Our plans for the future, which once were egocentric delusions of temporal fame and fortune, are now filled with the prospects of eternal felicity.

Before ascending back to the right hand of the Majesty on high, Jesus promised His followers "I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world". That promise would sustain that fledgling church through the multiplied trials and afflictions that accompanied their noble evangelistic enterprise. As they encountered the violent reactions of Jewish councils, pagan idolaters, venal Roman magistrates, and even "false brethren" who sought to undermine their efforts, they took solace in the knowledge that the Lord would never leave them nor forsake them.

The apostle Paul found himself in numerous calamities because of his unabating zeal for the gospel. When others fainted, fled, and forsook him he remained resolute in the cause because the presence of God upheld him. II Timothy 4:16-17: At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me;

These many centuries later, the believer still has the grand consolation that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit "will come unto him, and make our abode with him". We may proceed with all certainty because "My presence shall go with thee".

Have a blessed day,

*Pastor*

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

## For the Right Reason

*Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.*

*Acts 8:21*

True Christianity is an attractive thing. What clear-thinking person would not want forgiveness of sin, eternal life, and a personal relationship with God? Christianity also offers a true sense of belonging and fellowship and an important sense of lasting purpose. Jesus' invitation to follow Him is wrought with difficulties, yet it offers temporary and more importantly eternal rewards. With all of these strong appeals, there will still be some who show interest for the wrong reasons.

Peter's words served as a warning not only to the sorcerer; but for all to examine their motives for coming to Christ. The text brings to light the necessity of having a pure and sincere heart in following the Savior. It is apparent that Simon the sorcerer merely sought another means by which he would be able to control people and elevate his self-importance and every element of his request reveals the motive of his heart. Throughout the scriptures, the heart is used to metaphorically describe the innermost sincerity of a person. True belief is to emanate from the heart. Confessing with our mouth the Lord Jesus based on that which we have believed in our heart is what produces true salvation. Later in this same chapter, Philip's life divinely intersects with the Ethiopian Eunuch who is a genuine seeker of God. When the eunuch inquires what hinders him to be baptized, Philip says he may if he believes with all his heart. And we should not forget the greatest commandment, which is to love the Lord God with all our heart, soul, and mind. Selfish and prideful desires can often usurp the proper motives for coming to Christ. Reputation, praise of men, or prideful self-gratification can subtly blind someone in rendering their service to God. When a believer casts off these counterfeit homages and humbly and willingly surrenders to the Lord, they then offer true and pure service to the King. It will no longer be important if others know or see what they do. Seemingly insignificant acts that we do produce satisfaction in knowing that we are serving the Lord Christ.

Today is another day to offer service in honor of the King of Kings. Pray that God uses the light of His Word and the conviction of the Holy Spirit to root out any lingering selfish motive in our service. Whatever is done this day, let it be done solely and sincerely from the heart to the glory of God. J. Ekis



## Life lost and found

*He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.*

*Matthew 10:39*

This sublime paradox can stop us dead in our tracks each time we encounter it in our reading. Jesus defines discipleship in terms of positives and negatives and in the contexts of the present world and the next world. After sending the twelve out to duplicate His work among the people of Israel, He follows in the balance of this chapter with warnings concerning the negative reception to be expected from the present world. He tells them to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves, as sheep in the midst of wolves (v. 16), and warns of persecution by men of authority as well as by close relatives. The context obviously goes beyond the immediate experience of the twelve, and applies beyond the twelve. It is in the verse previous to this text that He introduces the disciple's cross, at a point where no one else even had an inkling of His cross. Then here in our text, He appeals to the seeking heart to understand what is meant by life – the one to be lost and the one to be found. In one stroke of expression He defines both. The life to be found as defined by the world is not worth having, and the life that He gives in exchange for that life is the only one worth finding.

This truth applies not only to the life after death that is readily associated with His word and promises, but also applies to finding the abundance of true life in Him now, which sustains the disciple through the present negatives. Only this truth can explain how our brethren of the past, and abroad even now, face the injustices and attacks of the world, as He predicted in this chapter, with confidence and peace unknown to natural men. It also challenges us to reassess often which life we are seeking to find in our present endeavors. Is it that life that is offered to us continually by this present world, which is not worth having? If so, we will be losing it. Or is it that life bestowed within by His grace through faith in His sacrifice and resurrection? If so, we will be finding it. Even as we wait for the future tense of that kingdom life, He has said that the kingdom of God is within you. As the apostle summarized: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:1-3).

## Sweet Sleep

---

*When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid; yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet.  
– Proverbs 3:24 –*

---

The teenagers in our Youth Group at church often complain that they cannot fall asleep at night. I half-jokingly tell them they are not tired because they do not have enough to do! I say half-jokingly because I know my own experience. I recall being a teenager and lying awake in bed until the early hours of the morning. But once I became an adult, and particularly after I got married and started a family, falling asleep rarely, if ever, has been problematic. The day's commitments usually produce exhaustion, so my head hits the pillow, and the body begins to sink into deep rest until the morning's light. All of that said, insomnia can be a very real issue for some people. The reasons are various, but the condition is identically frustrating no matter the cause. Looking for repose and finding none is difficult to the point of exasperating. But an even greater source of consternation is when the soul cannot find rest.

Our text is not merely speaking about sleep. It is using sleep metonymically for peace. The believer possesses something the world can never offer – a peace that passes understanding, one that defies fear and faithfully trusts in our Father's care. God Himself has promised this spiritual rest to His children who walk in communion and obedient fellowship with Him. The Word of God witnesses over and over again to this wonderful gift of spiritual rest and abundant peace. Below are just a few examples....

"The LORD will give strength unto his people; the LORD will bless his people with peace." (Ps. 29:11)

"Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace." (Ps. 37:37)

"Be still and know that I am God..." (Ps. 46:10)

"Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them." (Ps. 119:165)

"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Mt. 11:28)

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you..." (Jn. 14:27)

"These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." (Jn. 16:33)

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Rom. 5:1)

"For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." (Rom. 8:6)

"...but God hath called us to peace." (1 Cor. 7:15)

Christian – there is no need to worry and fret. Our spirits need not toss and turn. The sweet peace of the Lord is ours. Live in it! -- D. Murcek

# *Pastors Thoughts of the Week*

## **Two Evils To Avoid**

*Jeremiah 2:13: For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.*

In April 1985, 175 patients were admitted to hospitals in Stafford England with chest infections or pneumonia-like symptoms. A total of 28 people died. Medical diagnosis showed that Legionnaires' disease was responsible and the epidemiological investigation traced the source of the infection to a contaminated water system. These water supplies were immediately shut down, and the citizenry was warned to assiduously avoid the noxious area.

Jeremiah's indictment presents what seems to be, on the surface, a risible calamity. Who would make such an idiotic choice? Through the cracks of a broken cistern, all sorts of pollutants could find free passage into the reservoir and thus contaminate the whole supply. The stagnant water would breed a plethora of infectious bacteria threatening the health of anyone foolish enough to drink therefrom. And making the situation even more outrageous, not far from the polluted pool was a fountain of effervescent, living water-a fountain often used in the past, but now forsaken.

The spiritual parallels are unmistakable. All of Adam's race are born with innate spiritual thirst. But God never creates a need where He does not provide the fulfillment. Men arrogantly forsake God's gracious provision and hew them out broken cisterns from which to imbibe their polluted waters. Since the Tower of Babel men have constructed their own way to heaven only to find that they fall appallingly short of the glory of God. Satan, the arch-imitator, has his fabricated fountains from which he offers the unsuspecting dupes his baleful quaffs. And all the while, in plain view, there flows that fountain of living water with the gracious invitation "let him that is athirst come". How foolish the one who would wrongly choose with so evident a contrast before them.

The Samaritan woman hoped that the well of Sychar would satisfy her thirst. To her surprise, she met the One who gave her access to the living water. In the excitement of her discovery, she left the water pot and returned to her village to give witness that she had found the source of everlasting satisfaction. In his beatific vision, John beheld the pellucid streams of the "pure river of water of life". All who believe are promised to likewise drink from "the fountain of the water of life freely". In stark contrast, those who foolishly imbibed from the befouled cisterns will be eternally begging for one drop of the living water.

Blessings to all who read,

*Pastor*

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



## Conquering With Words

*Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.*

*Acts 11:14*

The Old and New Testaments complement and support each other while at the same time demonstrating a drastic difference. The difference can be briefly summarized by John 1:17 *For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ*. The first five books of the Old Testament record the development of the nation of Israel and are followed by the book of Joshua which records the conquering of the heathen to acquire the Promised Land. The four Gospels of the New Testament record the foundational development of Christianity, after which the book of Acts records the conquering of Satan's kingdom of darkness with the message of the crucified and resurrected Savior. Aided by God's miraculous interventions while using their earthly weapons, the Old Testament soldiers advanced into the Promised Land. The New Testament saints filled with the Holy Spirit penetrated the darkness of heathendom with the power of salvific words. The Old Testament records the conquering of the surrounding heathen and the setting up of an earthly kingdom that lasted for several hundred years, while the early Christians went forth with the Gospel which influenced and impacted multitudes of souls for an eternal kingdom. The power of that early message continues to this present day and will continue until Jesus returns.

Peter's words that were told to Cornelius in Acts 10 are the same words that believers throughout the ages have embraced to receive eternal life. The Acts of the Apostles record the conquering power of those words. Its chapters document the conversions of myriads of people with varied backgrounds, such as the Roman centurion and a Philippian jailor, thousands of Jewish believers in Jerusalem, a seeking eunuch from distant Ethiopia, the first European convert Lydia, polytheistic adherents of Athens, and those benighted by the magical arts at Ephesus. The Roman Empire persecuted Christians who conveyed these words, yet the converting power of their words eventually conquered that empire. A cursory glance at world history reveals the obvious influence that the message of those words of the Gospel has had on the nations.

As believers in our generation, we must value the delivering power of these words. Yielding to this message liberated us from the clutches of Satan and entered our names in heaven's register. These words can continue to equip and energize us on our Christian journey. They can conquer our fears and worries while continuing to remind us of the hope set before us. As Peter spoke these words to Cornelius, we can give those same words to those that the Lord ordains to cross our path. May the Lord lead us this day to someone who is waiting to hear the life-giving words of the gospel.

~ J. Ekis

## Greatness

*And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren.*

*Matthew 20:24*

The reaction of the other ten disciples to the request by James and John in this account is, unfortunately, not surprising. These two disciples had come with their mother to put in an early request to sit on either side of Jesus in His kingdom. This request may have been prompted by Jesus' answer to Peter's question at the end of chapter 19. After witnessing the dejected departure of the rich young man, who was not willing to exchange his riches for the privilege of following Jesus, and hearing the subsequent teaching on how difficult it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven, Peter recognized that he and the other disciples had, at least externally, "forsaken all and followed" Jesus. As a result, he asked what the disciples would have in return. Part of Jesus' answer included them sitting on twelve thrones judging Israel, when He would come to sit in His throne of glory in the regeneration. James and John may have been contemplating and discussing this, evidently even with their mother, since that time, and had decided to attempt to reserve their seats. In this account, Jesus told them that they didn't know what they were asking, and they in fact agreed to the resulting "cup" that they also did not understand (vv. 22-23).

Once the remaining ten recognized the transaction, their indignation was kindled. The word for "indignation" here is described as "a strong word for angry resentment." In our current language, it also implies a perception of unfair treatment. Why were the ten indignant? Perhaps because they all were aspiring to the same privilege, but had not the fortitude to make the same request. It was not fair that they had missed the opportunity to ask, as they all perhaps now esteemed themselves above the rich man. They had no inclination to promote the two.

The disciples continue to remind us of the true nature of the human condition. Here were twelve men who had forsaken their way of life to follow one whom they believed to be the Son of God. Yet in the midst of their faithful endeavor, they had been succumbing to sinful visions of greatness for themselves. This sadly also followed another of several admonitions from Jesus predicting His passion, which they continued to misunderstand or dismiss. On this occasion, it is significant that Jesus took another opportunity to remind them that greatness in His kingdom is not measured by dominion, but by service to others, for which He provided the ultimate example (vv. 25-28). Let us be warned by them of our potential human frailty even as faithful followers, and be encouraged by Him to pursue the greatness of humble service.

# Pastors Thoughts of the Week

## Encouragement in a Discouraging World

*and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way.  
Numbers 21:4:*

Maintaining a sanguine outlook in a cursed world is not an easy task. The devil makes certain that to each life, problems shall come. Since Adam fell, all of his progeny would have to face the inevitability of thorns and thistles impeding their progress. The burdens can seem overwhelming at times as calamities often befall us in multiplied varieties. Becoming a Christian does not exempt us from misery. The gospel is not a magical panacea to dispel all worldly distress. Alas, many who make a start for the kingdom( like Pliable of Pilgrim's Progress) once confronted with difficulty, throw up their hands in disgust and discouragement. As discouragement continued to fester in the minds of the children of Israel, the hue and cry was to desert the cause and return to the bondage of Pharaoh.

The "way" is often not easy. The Master warned us "In the world, ye shall have tribulation". In the context of our passage, the people of God were much discouraged "because of the way". They were undoubtedly elated when the Lord made "a way in the sea, and a path in the mighty waters" and led them out of the clutches of Egyptian slavery. They expected that their journey forward would be one of ease and would require of them no exercise of their faith. But faith, if it is to be of the truest designation, must be tried in the furnace of affliction.

Must I be carried to the skies  
On flowery beds of ease,  
While others fought to win the prize  
And sailed through bloody seas?

Are there no foes for me to face?  
Must I not stem the flood?  
Is this vile world a friend to grace,  
To help me on to God?

Since I must fight if I would reign,  
Increase my courage, Lord!  
I'll bear the toil, endure the pain,  
Supported by Thy Word.

So Saints, though the devil would antagonize us and fill us with discouragements; when he would fill our thoughts with recriminations against our benevolent Redeemer, let us hope against hope and as Eleazar (II Samuel 23:10), cling to the sword of God's word until the time of testing is past and we stand complete in His divine presence.

Be blessed in your walk today,

*(r) Pastor*

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

## Spiritual ADD

---

*And they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry.*  
– Matthew 17:23 –

---

It is so easy to “pick on” the disciples. Their bumbling is manifest throughout the gospel record. But then again, honest hearts find it just as easy to identify with the foibles and fumbles of the Twelve, for we often repeat the same mistakes these first followers committed.

Today’s text is a reminder of just such a propensity. Jesus had just predicted both His death and His resurrection to His apostolic pupils. Their reaction is immediate and profoundly pathetic. They have no counter question, no inquiry into the meaning of the Lord’s words. They simply seemed to have latched on to the first portion of His prophecy, “And they shall kill him,” and were swallowed up with sorrow. Yet they completely and utterly missed the central truth the Lord was revealing, “and the third day He shall be raised again.” (No wonder they were so surprised and confused when resurrection morning came!)

What an astounding moment, pregnant with instruction. It is entirely possible to listen to the Lord and wholly miss what He is saying! We need look no further than our daily Bible reading to see how prone we are to this spiritual weakness. How often do we read the Word of God, and all but immediately forget what we have read? Or how frequently do we read something therein or take in preaching on a text that we don’t quite understand, but proceed no further to study the matter out in order to gain the sense of what the Spirit is telling us? This spiritual attention deficit disorder is a real and widespread phenomenon that can plague even the most devout believer.

Consider the following. How often do we find ourselves concerned about world conditions and political gyrations, when Jesus told us, “But when ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified” (Lk. 21:9)? How frequently do we worry and fret about this or that, yet Christ has said, “Let not your heart be troubled” (Jn. 14:1)? How prone are we to be taken off guard when trouble comes our way, when all the while the Lord already exhorted us that “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (Jn. 16:33)? How often do we stress that the devil seems to be winning the day, when God’s word assures us that “evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived” (2 Tim. 3:13), and that “the devil that deceived them [shall be] cast into the lake of fire and brimstone” (Rev. 20:10)?

There is no need to be exceeding sorry, no matter what the news or trial of the day. Christ is risen! Let us resolve to discipline our hearts and minds to fight our spiritual ADD, listen closely to our Lord, and live in the victory He has secured for us. -- D. Murcek



## Minding Your Own Business

*Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do?*

*John 21:21*

Today's text comes at the end of the Lord's earthly ministry. With His mission completed, the resurrected Lord Jesus spends some intimate time with His Apostles before His ascension. Commissioning them to continue the work of advancing the Gospel, Jesus informs Peter of some of the troubles that would lie ahead for him. When Peter hears the alarming words, he asks Jesus what will happen to John. In today's vernacular, the Lord tells Peter to mind his own business and just focus on following Him. The apostles and all who will follow Jesus will each have their own race to run in service to the Master.

One of the troublesome habits inherited from the curse of Adam's transgression is mankind's comparative nature. People tend to look at and compare themselves with others for different reasons. Sometimes it's with a spirit of envy when they perceive another to be in a more favorable position; other times it is from feeling a level of superiority when they see another struggling. Comparing ourselves with others detracts from our focus on the Lord and His specific plan for our life. By comparing oneself with someone who lives a wicked life, a person ignorantly tries to justify themselves. This spirit of comparison can lead to giving way to pride, envy, jealousy, bitterness, and complaining in our hearts. If left unchecked it will lead an unwary believer down a path away from God's perfect will. A person who fosters the spirit of comparison will become frustrated while looking at others instead of following the plan set for them. The Apostle Paul warned the Corinthians that *measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves was not wise*. If the young shepherd boy David compared himself with the seasoned King Saul, he may never have volunteered to go to battle against the giant Goliath. As a late-comer to the Apostleship, Paul could have seen himself inferior to the original Twelve because he previously persecuted Christians. Paul knew that the Lord does not *save us and call us to an holy calling because of works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began*.

The Lord places other believers in our lives so that we might learn from them; not become just like them. We should glean what we can from others and apply it so that we may better follow the path God has set before us. As we run to the finish line, remember that the runners before, behind, and beside us must run their own race. We do our best when we keep our focus on the Lord as we proceed to the finish line. ~J. Ekis

## Unaware

*Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?*

*Matthew 25:37*

This response of the righteous that Jesus described, as He set the scene of the final judgment of the nations, reflects a lack of knowledge that is desirable. These are they whom the Son of man shall set on His right hand, as a shepherd would his sheep to divide them from the goats. They will not attain that position of their own accord. He determines their position. Then with them there, He pronounces to them their blessed estate, and commends various characteristics of their behavior towards Him. Our text is the beginning of their response to Him, requesting to know when they exhibited this list of behaviors, to which He replies that in doing so to the “least of these,” they had done so to Him. The exchange reveals their ingenuous spirit in pursuing acts of kindness and mercy. They had not done them in pursuit of righteousness or of commendation. The evidence of this is their lack of awareness or memory of what had been done. They had simply carried out what the Lord had revealed to their souls, to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God (Micah 6:8), without “keeping score.”

On the other hand were the unrighteous, as the shepherd’s goats, who are condemned to everlasting punishment. Conversely, they are unaware of their neglect of the same behaviors, and the connection thereof with their view of the Lord. Could this be because they had pursued their own system of establishing their own righteousness, and had not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God (Romans 10:3)? Will they in fact have a long list of accomplishments upon which they are counting, so that they can’t imagine where they had failed to see what else could be done, while they neglected to recognize the value of a right spirit before Him?

Let us allow such questions to always challenge our hearts, minds, and motives. Are good works performed for the purpose of gaining commendation from God or from others? Or are we instead pleased with our God and His gift of righteousness, so that His salvation works out from our thankful hearts (Philippians 2:12-13)? Let the hymn’s message resound within: “Do then the best you can, not for reward, not for the praise of men, but for the Lord.”