

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

How Long?

LORD, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph?

Psalms 94:3:

In the current state of affairs, as the devil's agents advance their agenda with the rapidity of a devouring beast and with "evil men waxing worse and worse", we are apt to pose this same rhetorical question - Lord, how long? All lovers of the truth and justice have patiently awaited a retribution for the evil doers of our generation. How many innocent babies have been slaughtered without a retributive response from the Creator of all life? We have watched with astonishment as treason has been perpetrated in the highest echelons of our republic and yet, to date, there has been no commensurate judgement meted out against the perfidious perpetrators. Venal politicians have been caught peddling influence to our avowed enemies while padding their own bank accounts and yet they continue to hold public office. Even a former president perjured himself by lying to a grand jury and yet he remains a respected leader in his party and still garners exorbitant speaking fees. And still all of this nefarious activity has proceeded unabated without any just recompense. Must God be charged with miscarriage of justice? How long shall the wicked triumph?

What one inspired writer asks, another often answers: "The triumphing of the wicked is short" Job 20:5 Our problem is that we are an impatient people. We expect a swift response to an evil action, but God is in no hurry to avenge evil. Ezekiel 33:11: "Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." We must learn to stand in awe of His patient restraint. There will be a "due time" and we are assured that justice will ultimately be established.

David had within his grasp the opportunity to rid himself of his wicked adversary. Saul and his protectors pursued him without cause and meant his destruction, but while they succumbed to the soporific effects of the dank cave of En-gedi, David's "heart smote him" and he refused to execute the demands of righteous vindication. Instead he deferred to His God whose "ways are not our ways". In due time God would avenge David of his adversary.

We dare not confuse God's patience with ambivalence. The righteous martyrs of the tribulation justly echo the cry of our text: "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" The divine response to evil will come in "a little season". We must not forget that it has been two millennia since the world rejected and crucified the Son of God. No retribution has been applied to satisfy the injustice of that cruel act. But a day of reckoning is coming "Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness". The believer is to rest in the knowledge that though they may suffer many unredressed injustices - "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."

Have a blessed week

Pastor

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

Manasseh

Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh...his prayer also, and how God was entreated of him, and all his sin, and his trespass, and the places wherein he built high places, and set up groves and graven images, before he was humbled: behold, they are written among the sayings of the seers.

– 2 Chronicles 33:18-19 –

Between the marvelous revival periods spear-headed by Hezekiah and Josiah in the history of the Kingdom of Judah, there is a fifty-seven-year period of climactic national decadence, most of which drew its inspiration and momentum from the wickedness of King Manasseh.

Manasseh was the son of Hezekiah and the grandfather of Josiah. Born three years into the decade and a half reprieve of life granted by God to Hezekiah, Manasseh would have known his godly father for the first twelve formative years of his life. For whatever reason, Hezekiah's faith did not take root in Manasseh. After Hezekiah's death and upon ascending the throne at twelve years of age, Manasseh chose to follow every inclination of wickedness in his heart, leading a decades-long, regally authorized national rebellion against Jehovah. His reign was a brazen affront to heaven, even sanctioning witchcraft and institutionalizing the mass slaughter of innocent children, including his own, in the worship of Molech (2 Chr. 33:6). The sin reached such a zenith that the Lord refused to pardon the nation's participation therein (2 Kings 24:3-5).

Yet late in Manasseh's reign, God used the Assyrians to humble the heart of this evil man. They carried him in fetters to Babylon where, in true humility and contrition, Manasseh besought the God of his father. The Lord graciously heard Manasseh and restored him to his throne. The veracity of his conversion was attested to by his restorative acts – removing the strange gods from the land, repairing the altar of Jehovah, and publicly worshipping Him (2 Chr. 33:15-16).

Upon Manasseh's death, his wicked son Amon reigned for two years, reversing all reforms. But eight-year-old Josiah, Manasseh's grandson, would subsequently ascend to power, whose heart was tender toward Jehovah. Josiah would be used by God to usher in an unparalleled time of national revival. It is highly probable that young Josiah's knowledge and faith in Jehovah was a direct derivative of his interaction with his converted grandfather, Manasseh.

Our usefulness to God is never irretrievable. Manasseh sadly wasted the vast majority of his life and his sinful ways had disastrous repercussions upon a nation. Yet in his last years, he turned to the Lord and gave Hell a significant headache, probably more by simply being a godly grandfather than anything else. God is never done with us until our final breath. Let us seek to serve Him with our influence in the lives of others. You never know if a Josiah's heart may catch fire for the Almighty when we simply live for our Redeemer before them.

-- D. Murcek

God of All Grace

But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.

1Peter 5:10

The growth of first century Christianity surged during a time of persecution. Satan's attacks of persecution caused the early believers to scatter carrying with them the good news of the resurrected Savior. Through Peter's epistle these dispersed believers are made aware that the trials of their faith have an eternal design, and in the last chapter of his epistle Peter reminds them that their calling to eternal glory came from the God of all grace. When we think of grace we often think of pleasant circumstances; but in this verse we see that even difficulties are used as a means of God working His grace in our life.

Thayer's definition of grace is *that merciful kindness by which God, exerting his holy influence upon souls, turns them to Christ, keeps, strengthens, increases them in the Christian faith, knowledge, affection, and kindles them to the exercise of the Christian virtues*. In today's text we see that though we are called to eternal glory, we also will have times of suffering as we travel through this life. The fact is that we as redeemed children of God, still live in a world that is affected by the curse. We will at some time or another experience varying forms of persecution from the unregenerate of this world. God in His grace uses some of the hardships of this life to perfect that which He started in us. We may have to search the scriptures more deeply to defend the faith or just learn to stand firm on the narrow path. The difficulties of life often cause us to depend more on the spiritual strength supplied by the Lord than our weak fleshly resources. Through these trials we gain valuable experience which develops spiritual insights while also learning how to utilize the whole amour of God. An unlimited reservoir of grace is available to supply and strengthen us that we might be truly settled in our faith. It is God's design through the trials of this life to supply us with an abundance of grace that helps us to become stronger, settled, stablished, and complete. Let us remember one of the verses of Amazing Grace that says: Through many dangers, toils and snares we have already come, 'twas grace hath brought us safe thus far, and grace will lead us home. ~ J. Ekis

Walk as He Walked

He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

1 John 2:6

From the earliest years of our lives we seem to have the propensity to emulate. At first, we model our parents then later other prominent people in our lives. As we grow and our world expands, we are exposed to a broader range of influences to mimic. Someone's attire or manner of speech may catch our attention, or their mannerisms or interest may inspire us. This innate desire to emulate was most certainly meant for our good, but with our fallen nature we are sometimes inclined to copy ungodly examples. Today's text reminds us of the best and greatest example to emulate.

If we are to walk as Jesus walked it is important to study His life to see how He conducted himself while treading this earth. As we study, we will see how His entrance into this world was wrapped in humility; the Eternal Son covered in swaddling clothes lying in a manger. When tempted of the devil for forty days and nights, He utilized the power of God's word to defeat temptation. Though He was sinless Jesus walked among sinners and earned the reputation of being their friend. His steps led Him to places where He would perform acts of compassion that would bring relief to the physically and spiritually oppressed. His *meat* being to do the will of God, He committed His steps to walk in obedience to the will of the Father. He was a man of prayer, He taught prayer, He walked in prayer, and Jesus spent protracted times alone in prayer communing with His heavenly Father. The words that proceeded from His mouth brought hope, peace and comfort to seekers and conviction to the wayward. When he looked at people, He was moved with compassion toward them, because He saw them as wandering sheep in need of a shepherd. And certainly, His life demonstrated forgiveness from beginning to the end.

With His Word as a lamp unto our feet and walking in the fullness of the Holy Spirit, let us emulate the greatest One who ever trod this earth and walk as He walked.

J. Ekis

Honesty

And Jacob said unto his father, I am Esau thy firstborn; I have done according as thou badest me: arise, I pray thee, sit and eat of my venison, that thy soul may bless me.
Genesis 27:19

It is quite appalling to read here such an audacious lie. Not only does Jacob risk being found out and cursed by his almost blind father, but he practices this insidious deceit in search of a blessing. The whole ordeal in this chapter is one that can make us scratch our heads in wonder that God would still work his plan through these children of Abraham, in spite of their highly dysfunctional character. From the outset, Isaac and Rebekah favored different sons. Now Jacob follows his mother's deceitful plan to the point of the outright lie in our text. And they both do so in seeking a paternal blessing for Jacob, not recognizing the contradiction. Even though Jacob at first protested Rebekah's plan, not with a desire for truthful living but in fear of being recognized and cursed, it does not take much for him to finally follow her bad example. This is the plight of man's sinful nature.

We need not look far from our current state to see that not much has changed in the human race with respect to our propensity for dishonesty. In realms of politics and some business, our culture often expects lying to be the norm. There are many who would use their objections to governmental flaws to justify their own dishonesty in evasion of taxes and other requirements. In these cultural circumstances, if we are to follow Christ, we need to especially examine our own attitudes and ways to ensure that we are not brought under the influence of this prevailing acceptance of dishonesty. In Proverbs chapter six, in the list of things that God hates, at least two and possibly three are related to lying. Our New Testament epistles contain clear and direct commands to lie not. So instead of falling in step with those who would provide subversive justification for dishonesty, let us follow in the steps of our Savior, "who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth." Let us check all by the prayer of the psalmist, "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer."

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Give Us A King

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Have a blessed week,

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

Freedom: A Reminder

If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.

– John 8:36 –

We are living in historic times. A strange alliance of entities line both the left and the right of the nation's political spectrum, while a league of devilish forces is tearing at the country's fabric. Many of us had fathers, grandfathers, siblings, and the like that have fought to preserve the way of life we have enjoyed for generations, and we may feel as though the era of that way of life may be drawing to a sad close.

As Christians, we must take a conscious and prayerful step back. We can and should love the American ideal. The Gospel itself birthed Western Civilization, and the United States became that civilization's apex, vanguard, and beacon. Founded upon a bedrock of biblical principle, the nation has thrived for over two centuries, and we have been her beneficiaries. Yet we must also keep in mind that this world is not our true home. We are citizens of another country. God's purpose for the nations is subservient to His purpose for the Church of Jesus Christ.

The nations were created by God after man's rebellion at Babel. God's intention was and remains to prevent mankind from globally unifying under fallen conditions and evil leaders. The Kingdom will eventually visibly come, at which time Christ will bring the necessary righteousness for mankind to live in global unity and peace. But until then, the nations serve at His order to curb man's evil heart. He chose Israel as His national witness to mankind and, upon her rejection of Her Messiah, He sanctioned His glorious Church – comprised of people from every kindred and tribe and nation and tongue – to carry the gospel to the ends of the earth.

In America, we have enjoyed something that most of our spiritual brothers and sisters through the ages have not – political and religious liberty. And yet this liberty, as precious as it is, is temporary, imperfect, and transient. It is not the liberty that Christ's salvation promises – the liberty of spirit bestowed upon us when He saved our souls. We have unfortunately mistaken our comfort for our peace, our prosperity for our fulfillment, and our vocation for our purpose. It is perhaps time that we recall that we are the freest of men not because we are Americans, but because we are Christians. By doing so, we will rediscover that our trust is wholly in Heaven, not in men or nations.

If Jesus tarries, the next chapters of history may be volatile. Yet our position as His property forbids us to despair. We do not shrink from darkness – we dispel it by virtue of the light within us. After all, the nations are a but a drop in the bucket to the God that we know, the Christ that we serve, and the Spirit that we obey. Let us not be entangled with the affairs of this life, that we may please Him who hath chosen us to be soldiers.

-- D. Murcek

Experiential Faith

O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.

Psalms 34:8

There are many different ways of learning, but hands-on learning is probably the most commonly beneficial. Surely most of us can recall the experience of enduring a lesson via written or verbal instruction while anxiously waiting to personally apply that information. Remember turning sixteen and reading a driver's manual? All the instruction, though useful, could not achieve what actually happened after placing our hands on the steering wheel and our foot on the gas pedal.

This also applies to our faith. We are meant to personally experience God Himself and His ways! Many Christians prior to conversion have either a superficial form of religion or, at the very least, a general mental assent to the existence of God. Although these conditions may provide some basis by which the true gospel is able to penetrate hearts, it is not until the essence of the gospel is actually absorbed that the reality of God is manifest. True faith is supposed to take us beyond the factual knowledge of God into the realm of tasting and seeing His goodness through eyes of faith. The purpose of the Bible is not merely to give us spiritual information, but to inspire us to put God's ways into application. In Matthew 6, we can read the Lord's instruction on how to pray, but if we never pray, we will be deprived of experiencing intimacy with God through prayer. The Bible tells us to wait on the Lord and He will strengthen our heart, and yet if we become impatient and give up, we will stop short of appreciating the valuable beauty of watching God work through a situation in His time. We will understand that the Lord is good when we put His kingdom first and then see how He adds the things to our life that we truly need. By practicing forgiveness, we have the opportunity to comprehend a little more about the depth of His forgiveness. When we apply God's ways to our life, we not only profit from the results, but it helps to motivate us to trust Him more.

Each day presents more and varied life situations to taste and see the goodness of the Lord so that our faith may be strengthened through experience. ~J. Ekis

Countenance lift

*For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts,
to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.
II Corinthians 4:6*

The psalmist argued with his own soul's despondency when he declared, "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" (Psalm 42:5). As he remembers the days of sweet fellowship with the multitude of the worshipers of God, he is perplexed by his personal reaction to a season of grief brought on by life events. His remedy is to remember the help of God's countenance. And as he continues in his mind to travel the mountains and valleys of his emotional experience throughout the psalm, he turns the corner as he remembers the Lord's lovingkindness and His planting of his heart's song in answer to prayer. So he is able to conclude the debate: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God" (Psalm 42:11).

Like the psalmist, we may have times of struggle with our soul, which would prefer to respond to circumstances of disappointment with grief and hopelessness. It is in those times that our text reminds us that our help comes from the light of His countenance, that is, the face of Jesus Christ. To live our lives in the presence of His countenance, knowing that He is observing and attending every detail, provides the help we need to respond in hope against our soulish tendency to allow testing, be it from personal slight or more egregious circumstances, to cloud our view of Him. Have we been disappointed by our own failures or other fallible humans and, as a result, tempted to despair? Let us lift our spiritual eyes and allow that light of the knowledge of His glory, which He shined in our hearts when we trusted in His saving grace, to reveal His abiding presence. Then let that presence bring health to our own countenance as we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Freedom

Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

John 8:31-32

Freedom can be defined from a number of perspectives and in diverse contexts. An interesting exercise easily performed in our time is to look up the definition of freedom in a modern dictionary and compare it to the definition in Noah Webster's 1828 dictionary. A more thorough education is achieved in the older volume. Among its definitions of freedom is: "a state of exemption from the power or control of another." There are many who would pursue an extrapolation of this definition to their own destruction.

Even better, consider the definition implied by the Author of freedom in our text. Jesus declared that the truth shall make you free. However, the important preceding context provides the condition for this freedom: continuing in His word as His genuine disciple, which enables you to know the truth. This may seem like a contradiction, if we assume that a disciple is simply controlled by the leader. But what we should consider with respect to Webster's definition is that it does not say "from the power or control of *all others*." The question then to ask is, from what are we freed?

A genuine disciple of Jesus, a disciple indeed, is marked by continuing in His word of truth. A disciple follows willingly based on recognition of truth, not based on coercion or subjugation. As His truth takes root in our hearts by faith, it provides the foundation of what our loving Creator has deemed good for us, as well as the power to choose according to those good precepts and principles. As a result, we are free from the curse that sin brings upon our temporal lives, as well as upon our eternal souls. So He explains further, that "whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin," but then "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." The apostle Paul explains it this way: "But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life" (Romans 6:22). Dear reader, which freedom do you desire?

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Peaceful Thoughts

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Jeremiah 29:11

One of the most popular literary motifs of the Middle Kingdom of Egypt was "Order vs. Chaos" which can be seen in a number of their most famous literary myths. The demented genius that drove the chaos was the malevolent god, Apophis, who was depicted as a serpent, the embodiment of chaos. No matter how many times Apophis was defeated and killed, he always rose again to life leaving in his wake confusion, calamity and chaos. These cunningly devised myths have a strange resemblance to the Genesis account of the serpent in the garden as well as the chaos his serpentine temptation effected.

In the Biblical study of Cosmology we are assured that in the initial creation, God spoke His universe into existence, subject to an irenic, ordered structure. He pronounced it as "very good". It wasn't until Lucifer fell that chaos ensued; and then Adam's failure brought even further disruption to the cosmos with a dynamic tension juxtaposing peace and evil or, as in the greek expressions, Cosmos versus Chaos.

We live in unsettling times where evil pervades the culture bringing its accompanying miseries and with those miseries, accompanying uncertainties. Stress and anxiety have driven people to mental institutions, drug therapies, yoga sessions, and alcohol consumption in a desperate, albeit illusive, desire for inner peace.

It is of no small comfort to the believer to recognize that our munificent Creator thinks thoughts of peace toward His children. We can be assured that all things work together for good and that the Father has given us hope for an expected and prosperous end. What a stark contrast to the unbelievers who find themselves "at their wit's end". Psalm 107:27 What a pitiable condition when one has to rely on temporary modalities in lieu of trusting in the insured promises of a merciful God.

Let us be sure to laud the "the God of hope" who will "fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost." Romans 15:13

Pastor

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

Allegiance

Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the LORD's side? Let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him.

– Exodus 32:26 –

Our text records a pivotal and austere moment in the early history of God's chosen nation. Moses' time of communion with Jehovah on Sinai had to be interrupted because the very people God was revealing Himself to on that mountain had already gone whoring after a god of their own making in the valley below.

The idolatrous show sparked a holy outrage from this meekest of men upon his arrival and inspection of it. Moses' heart of intercession, displayed just moments before upon the mount in the Lord's presence, is filled with a righteous indignation and holy jealousy as he observes the outrageous display. For the people before him, it is time to choose. Where does their heart lie – back in Egypt, with all its idolatrous culture, or with the God who brought them out and had promised to fulfill His covenant with them. They must publicly identify – Who is on the Lord's side?

Christendom unfortunately displays many of the same propensities of God's Old Testament nation. It is not possible to be a blood-bought follower of Jesus Christ and live a life filled with the habits of the world or a persistent longing for any part of the unregenerate life. As redeemed, our life and conduct must reflect Him, or else we prove that we are none of His. And our discipleship cannot be a private matter. Allegiance and fidelity to Christ and His cause is and must be publicly known and confessed, or it is no allegiance at all.

This world daily presents us with a titanic struggle – one between good and evil, right and wrong, heaven and hell, God and the devil. The sides are exclusive. The battle lines are drawn. There is no middle ground. We must identify. Let us recall the words of our Savior, "He that is not with me, is against me..." (Luke 11:23) And again, "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 10:32). And yet again, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." (Matthew 10:37)

Dear friends, what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? What communion hath light with darkness? What concord hath Christ with Belial? What agreement hath the temple of God with idols? Let us inspect our hearts – are we with Christ? Are we unashamed of Him and His gospel? Our allegiance will undoubtedly be tested today. Who is on the Lord's side?

A Bold Request

And it came to pass, when they were gone over, then Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.

2 Kings 2:9

Of all the great men and women of the Old Testament, Elijah and Moses appear to stand apart from the rest. Their exploits and status influenced people in a far-reaching way. Their lives summarize the content of the Old Testament, that being the Law and the Prophets. We even see them making an appearance with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, and quite possibly they are the Two Witnesses that appear during the Tribulation in Revelation chapter 11. Elijah's ministry came during a time of great declension in the nation Israel. The wicked Ahab and Jezebel led the nation into gross idolatry and as a result spiritual darkness prevailed. During this bleak time the prophet Elijah stands against the King and the false prophets, and with the Spirit of God upon him, he travels about performing many miraculous deeds. But as with all of God's servants, his time was limited on this earth, and near the conclusion of Elijah's ministry, God sends Elisha to take his place. When Elijah asked what he could do for him, Elisha petitions for a double portion of Elijah's spirit. This bold request was granted as Elijah ascended to heaven and Elisha continued to carry on God's work.

It has been said that great challenges present great opportunities. As in the days of Elijah, great darkness and evil has overspread our land. Corruption and varied forms of idolatry have infiltrated every level of our culture, in government, education, and religion, as well as the foundation of the family unit. As much as we may dislike what is occurring, it is to this era that we are called to shine as lights in the darkness. Elisha's request should be ours also. Though God uses men who live in a tabernacle of flesh, His work is always best done with the fulness of His spirit. To be effective in God's work our greatest need is for us to be filled with His Spirit.

When we have finished with our prayers for others and we are requesting our daily bread, let us remember to unhesitatingly and boldly ask for a double portion of His Spirit. Our dark hour requires it. ~ J. Ekis

The Kingdom

After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

– Matthew 6:9-10 –

Much confusion has been wrought over the centuries as to the nature of the Kingdom of God. Some believe it to be a literal dominion, while others see it as a spiritual one, and still others interpret it as an allegory. Sadly, the confusion on the matter is utterly needless. If we simply rely solely upon the Scriptures and the Holy Ghost instead of fallible constructs of men, we find that God has revealed the matter in the plainest of language and quite comprehensively.

The young Christ asked Mary and Joseph in the Temple, “Wist ye not, that I must be about my Father’s business?” It becomes strikingly apparent throughout the ensuing Gospel history that His Father’s business was, in fact, the Kingdom. By using either a concordance or a good online Bible study tool, we will find that the Kingdom literally pervades the Gospel accounts. Both the Baptist and our Lord preached that the Kingdom of God was at hand. Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount begins with the Kingdom as the possession of the poor in spirit, teaches us to pray for the Kingdom to come, and exhorts us to seek first the Kingdom of God. The Lord spoke a plethora of parables, the vast majority of which had the Kingdom as their subject. He told us the Kingdom was made up of the child-like and warned the rich that they were in peril of not entering into it. And these are but a few instances, illustrating the prominence of the Kingdom in the Gospel narrative.

The key to understanding the nature of the Kingdom is found in our Lord’s instruction to us on prayer. “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done...”. *The Kingdom is anywhere the will of God is being carried out by right.* Currently, the Kingdom is within the heart of the believer. It is here that, by offer of the King and upon invitation from the subject, God has transacted eternal business, redeemed His property, and now possesses full right of reign. This makes the believer an ambassador of the King in this present world. This world, however, at least for the moment, belongs to the devil (by aegis of the King). But this is true only until the King in His wisdom and timing steps forth to redeem the creation, reversing the curse and assuming the kingdoms of this world to become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. At that time, He shall reign – visibly, bodily, and universally – forever and ever.

So, for now, the Kingdom is within us. But there is soon approaching the day when it shall be fully come, and we shall be in it. Our Father, thy Kingdom come, thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven!

-- D. Murcek

I am not worthy

I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands.
Genesis 32:10

This realization and confession by Jacob on the eve of his fearful encounter with his brother Esau was long overdue. He had spent many years scheming and conniving to obtain what he wanted, both from Esau and from his father-in-law. While Esau had been generally devastated by Jacob's schemes, uncle Laban had been a more challenging match for Jacob's strategies. Now Jacob was returning back to his land, at God's direction, with all he had acquired in Padan-aram, but prepared to face the expected wrath of his brother, whom he had defrauded twenty years before. At this juncture Jacob finds himself, perhaps for the first time, in a quandary about how to handle the situation. This journey was now not his scheme but God's plan. So he rightly realized that his only hope of survival depended on the mercy of the Lord.

In such a circumstance, perhaps Jacob had to reflect on his own self-serving motives and involvement in all he had obtained, including a birthright, a blessing, a large household, and a great wealth of livestock. Yet now as he desperately needs help from God, he has to realize that God had blessed him, not because of his contrivances, but in spite of him. Thus, he must realize his own unworthiness of not only God's mercies, but also His truth in carrying out His promise to Abraham. Here is the right place of repentance toward God.

We may speak the words that we are unworthy, for in a general sense it is obvious that it is true of all. Yet how deeply do we believe it? Are we offended when wrongfully treated? Do we have expectations for others to recognize what we presumably deserve? Or do we even expect special graces from God? These are the surmising of the selfish human heart. Let us truly reflect on our own lives and motives and seek the place where Jacob finally arrived, that we might somewhat apprehend the unfathomable mercies of God towards us, and confess with the hymn writer "the wonders of His glorious love and my unworthiness."

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Unmerited Favor

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

Ruth had cast her lot in with Naomi and had decided to walk by faith and not by sight. It was an unreasonable calculation for this young woman. Bereft of husband and future prospects, what hope had she for any benefactions amidst a people known for their xenophobic separation from the pagan Moabites, from whence she had hailed. At first glance it would appear that the young maid had cast her fate to the winds, but to the trained eye of faith, time would prove her tenacious cleaving to the God of her mother-in-law would reap a bountiful reward. First must come the willingness to lose all to follow Christ and only then the corresponding blessing is vouchsafed. Ruth, willing to sacrifice all prospects of future felicities resigns herself to arduous labor in the harvest fields in support of herself and her mother-in-law. And so "Her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz" where a Cinderellaesque drama unfolds.

The unpretentious scene before us strikes a resonating chord in the heart of every child of God. For who is this stranger that finds such unmerited favor in the sight of the Lord of the Harvest? Who amongst the redeemed of God has not with profound wonderment fallen before our Master. Have we not, like Ruth, pondered how such strangers to the covenant of God should find mercy in the eyes of One who has every right to shun and ignore us.

We are but impotent Mephibosheths who bring no credentials to secure an inheritance from the table of the king. But as surely as his great grandfather showed mercy to the undeserving, so did David to the lame outcast. And so many centuries thereafter, in this same royal lineage, there came a greater than Boaz and David. Jesus broke down the middle wall of partition and welcomed the outcast to sit at His table and partake of His inheritance. "That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ." Ephesians 2:12

With a similar astonishment we fall on our face with Ruth and ask "Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?" Let us never lose the wonder of that mystery.

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

The Sacrifice of Thanksgiving

I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving and will call upon the name of the LORD.

– Psalm 116:17 –

Among the answers teeming from the psalmist's heart to his introspective inquiry, "What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me?", the sacrifice of thanksgiving comes to the fore to codify and summarize the awakening of his heart.

Truly, God is good, and He is uniquely and especially good to His children. While He makes His sun to rise upon the evil and the good and sends His rain upon the just as well as the unjust, He has showered each of His adopted ones with a host of privileged blessings and benefits. For any of us to think otherwise would not only be fallacious but also offensive to our indwelling Friend. So then, why are we so apt to complain? We know we should not murmur about any circumstance, that we are to give thanks "in everything" (1 Thess. 5:18) and that we are even instructed to abound therein (Col. 2:7). Yet our spirit is often more readily marked by discontentment than it is by heartfelt gratitude to Him who is worthy of so much more than we are even able to offer. Why is this so?

God Himself had instituted the thank offerings as part of Levitical sacerdotal worship. The psalmist understood the spirit as well as the letter of that statute. By characterizing general giving of thanks as a "sacrifice", the inspired writer underscores the obstacle to thankfulness – our self-absorbed, self-promoting, sinful hearts.

A sacrifice can be thought of as the relinquishing of something of perceived or immediate value for something known to be of greater worth. In order to truly offer thanks to God, we must relinquish our hold upon our perceptions, our fleshly desires, and our self-ordained and self-adulating senses in order to observe our circumstances from Heaven's window. Only when we do this are we free to recognize any perceived lack in our lives for what it actually is – our sinful heart's longing to rule. This permits us to kick that carnal "old man" back into his grave, and frees us to then pour out our adoration, giving thanks unto the Lord, for He is good.

Dear friends and fellow adopted children of the Most High, let us repent of our selfishness, re-tuning our hearts and resolutely declaring, "I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving and will call upon the name of the LORD; I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all His people. In the courts of the LORD's house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem. Praise ye the LORD."

-- D. Murcek

Approved in Christ

Salute Apelles approved in Christ.

Romans 16:10

There are many passages in the Bible which give nonspecific information and leave us to speculate about the details. One account refers to a person as *a certain man*, while another gives a title without adding a name. We also read of the four *unnamed* men who carried the *unnamed* palsied man to place him at the feet of Jesus, as well as the *other blind man* who was with Bartimaeus. John's gospel also informs us in chapter 20 of the *many other deeds* of Jesus that are left unrecorded, and that certainly leaves us with a level of curiosity. Such is the case found in Paul's tribute to the important people that God placed in his life whose names are recorded in the last chapter of Romans.

We may not know much about Apelles based on today's text; but the morsel of information given about his reputation should inspire us. In Proverbs, we are reminded that a good name is rather to be chosen than great riches. The intent of that verse is not to say that the person's name itself has importance, but that with which the name is associated; or its reputation. All that we know about Apelles from the scriptures is that he was approved in Christ. Was he a convert of Paul, or did he assist the apostle in ministry, or did he face some level of persecution because of being affiliated with the cause of Christ? Whatever Apelles did, it earned him the reputation of being approved in Christ, and he is forever remembered in the eternal record of the Bible. Faith in Christ is meant to be worked out in every area of our lives; so, the working out of Apelles' faith earned him a good name.

Let this brief account remind us of what is most important in our own life. Many people of this world strive to achieve accomplishments for which they will be remembered; but like Solomon, it will all be in vain if they are not approved in Christ. Today let us demonstrate a life that has been approved in Christ.

J. Ekis

A Good Thing to Give Thanks

It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High:

Psalms 92:1

The giving of thanks should be a trademark of God's people. For, of all people on earth, it is the Christian who should understand the unimaginable benefits of being a ransomed child of God. It humbles us when we stop to contemplate the innumerable ways the Lord has blessed our lives. Here is just a short list of the Lord's blessings to consider on this day of Thanksgiving.

➤ As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. *Psalms 103:12*

➤ He hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear son. *Colossians 1:13*

➤ Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God. *1 John 3:1*

➤ Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. *Psalms 119:105*

➤ For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. *2 Timothy 1:7*

➤ Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not. *Jeremiah 33:3*

➤ According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: *2 Peter 1:3*

➤ I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. *John 10:10*

➤ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am there ye may be also. *John 14:3*

➤ For he hath said, I will never leave nor forsake thee. *Hebrews 13:5*

May we take time today and everyday to give thanks to our great God.

~ J. Ekis

In every thing

Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

We have much for which to be thankful. While some of the American world about us has still taken one day out of the year to be reminded to be thankful, most of that celebration often focuses on material provision or, in some cases, takes a step deeper to human relationships. It is good for us to be thankful for these things. But as redeemed children of the God of heaven and earth, we have reason for a depth of thanksgiving beyond what a temporal culture can consider. The relationship that the apostle describes as being able to cry “Abba, Father” to the Almighty God provides an anchor of our soul for which we can always be thankful. The translators here have provided two distinct words for the one Greek word for “everything,” perhaps to give emphasis that there are many “things” that can come our way in this life that would urge us to give thanks.

These things can be events or circumstances that bring a crushing blow to the normal life that our natural flesh desires to have. Should we be the writers of the plan for our life, we would surely not include a chapter for any of these things. However, living in a world that still reels from the curse and continues to rebel against God and His Christ, we should not expect to escape these negative things. Thus our text reminds, yea commands, us to rejoice with an eternal perspective, to not give up praying, and to give thanks in every one of these things, because doing this is God’s will for those of us whose life is hid in Christ Jesus. When events of this life come to make our “bottom fall out,” the feet of our souls can land on the Rock of our salvation. Knowing Him, the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His suffering provides the peace that passes all understanding and keeps our hearts and minds in a frame of thanksgiving to Him – in every thing.

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

The Ugly Duckling Syndrome

The LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart. I Samuel 16:7

When Hans Christian Anderson penned his famous tale of a duckling who was ridiculed and rejected by his peers but later grew into a beautiful swan, he confessed that he was writing his own autobiography. Like Anderson many people have suffered the ostracizing insults of their rejecting coevals. Perhaps they were cast out of the "in crowd" because they weren't as pretty as the cheerleaders, or as coordinated as the star athletes, or as cerebral as the honor students. They were forced to struggle with the bitter sting of being rejected by elitists that decided who was or wasn't to be admitted into their insular society. It was a lonely, depressing existence for many that led to copious tears and even morbid considerations. But with time, self-worth would be found apart from group acceptance. In many cases such rejection led to seeking the acceptance of the only One that really mattered.

Our culture has wrongly set the crown of success on the heads of the least worthy of such adulating attention, while at the same time depreciating those who possess requisites that are hidden from human observation. To these, the persona non grata of the world, God has reserved an eternal consolation: "The Lord GOD which gathereth the outcasts". It will be, after all, "that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called". What an ironic reversal is about to upend the perverted social order.

The text reminds us that it is not the acclaim of a mercurial world that we should curry, but the acceptance of a holy God. The world will bestow its honors on those whose beauty, wealth and power are manifested by tangible evidences, while the Lord bestows His on those who "serve God acceptably with reverence" from "the hidden man of the heart".

David was the runt of the Jesse's family yet God saw in Him the potential that would ultimately equip him to be the leader of the mighty nation. And a millennium later the Son of David would be born in humble surroundings with "no beauty that we should desire him". His disfigured, crucified form was so revolting that at first sight one would be compelled to turn away and hide "our faces from him". But from the hideous scene a transcendent beauty emerged. In transfigured ecstasy the victorious Savior arose with "healing in his wings". And from His heavenly throne He graciously invites the outcast, the poor, the ugly, the learning disabled, and the unpopular to "Come Unto Me!". What a beautiful transformation is awaiting !

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

One Thing I Know

...One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.

– John 9:25 –

The healing of the man born blind in the ninth chapter of John's gospel affords a multitude of spiritual lessons. One of the most impactful of those is the resolution of the healed man to witness to the truth of Christ's miracle despite the crescendo of opposition against him.

The Lord makes it abundantly clear that this man had done nothing personally amiss to be born blind. His individual lot as a member of Adam's fallen race was uniquely his (as is all of ours). The circumstance of his blindness had a purpose in God's grander design, namely, that the works of God should be manifest in him.

The Pharisees could speak nothing against this man's healing. The witness was simply far too powerful, that a man born blind could now see. And so, they initiated and carried out a campaign of interrogation and intimidation in order to discredit Jesus. The man born blind was no theologian, possessed no political savvy, and understood very little at this point about the Man who had healed him. But when pressed and pressured by the intelligentsia, he could not disown one undeniable fact, that, whereas he was blind, he could now see. No one could dissuade him from that reality, and none could honestly deny its authenticity.

Our modern world is filled with Pharisaical types – some religious, most secular, and many who possess the power of status, position, and in particular, media influence – who cannot abide by our Lord and His work. They continually seek to deny our God and denigrate our Christ. They isolate and marginalize us for one reason – they sadly hate the Jesus who changed us. But as they mount their pressure and lodge their grievances, let us reflect on the one thing we know – we were blind, but now we see. A marvelous transformation has taken place in us that simply can be neither gainsaid nor undone. We are not what we once were. God's works have been manifested in us, and we stand invariably today as a living epistle, known and read of all men.

Let us resolve that no matter the pressure, no matter the swirling and chaos surrounding us, and no matter the cost, we will never cease to testify to the undeniable truth indelibly and eternally wrought by the Lord in our hearts – that whereas we were blind, now we see.

-- D. Murcek