

## Embracing the Impossible

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*Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death; because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.  
– Acts 2:24 –*

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Our modern world has wholly embraced the notion that man is the sum of all things and that human reason is the arbiter of all truth. “Science” is purportedly the prism through which we must evaluate existential reality, while the realm of human expression is little more than its relativistic extension. If it cannot be empirically proven, it must not be so, or at the very least, it is to be considered “your” truth. Popular culture is the vehicle that thoroughly distills all of this into the psyche of the masses, so successfully so that even many believers are influenced by these worldly philosophical constructs. Naturalism and hedonism are the overt and covert driving forces in terms of practical daily living of multitudes, regardless of stated creed or lack thereof.

From Genesis to Revelation, however, the Word of God calls us to a vastly different perspective. Bible-believing people recognize the natural laws of this world and the universe at large, but we do not enthrone them. Christians understand that spiritual reality trumps material actuality. God is a Spirit and holds the prerogative to upend, circumvent, confound, or conflate the natural laws and processes He created, when and where He deems necessary. And while such incursions into His universe may not be normative, they are certainly neither infrequent nor rare. This soul-deep embrace of that which is “impossible” is, in fact, the very basis of faith.

Think about it a moment. As believers, everything we hold to be true in the depths of our being is ostensibly impossible to the natural mind. From the creation of all things from nothing, to the virgin birth of a Babe in Bethlehem, to Christ’s grave-defying resurrection, to His physical ascension to the right hand of God, to His soon coming glorious appearing, to our own astounding conversion from darkness to light, to our forthcoming resurrected bodies – the Christian faith is one gigantic testimony to our Lord’s exhortation that the things that are impossible with men are possible with God (Luke 18:27).

This juxtaposition between perspectives has very real every-day consequences. When we believe in the God of the impossible, this world and its challenges become quite small. Faith is the lens through which we peer beyond the material universe, and prayer the vehicle we use to traverse the gap between. If we have faith as a grain of mustard seed, walk closely with our God, and purge ourselves from our own will, we can then say to every natural mountain in our way, “Be thou removed and cast into the sea”, and it comes to pass.

What seems impossible to you today? We have a Christ whom death could not hold, so it is certain that this current distress is no match for Him. Resolve to face it head-on in His power.

– D. Murcek

# *Pastors Thoughts of the Week*

## **Altogether Lovely**

*Song of Solomon 5:16: He is altogether lovely*

Let us agree with the prophet Isaiah's pathetic portrait of our suffering savior as a "man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" and, to the outward sense, there was "no beauty that we should desire Him". But this most certainly speaks of the agonies of the cross and the distortion of his visage that was so ingloriously marred by the unrelenting scourge, the plucking of the beard, the shame of the spittle, the brutal buffeting of which He endured to secure our redemption. The horrific spectacle of the cross and its accompanying indignities would be enough to make the most stoic of men recoil from the scene and hide their faces in disgust.

But there is an enduring beauty that is not dependent on the physical, outward expression. It is the pulchritude of the soul, the heart, the mind. This beauty cannot be captured with the artist's brush, the sculptor's chisel, nor the photographer's lens. It is intrinsic and finds its highest form of expression in the person of the Son of the Living God. What else can account for the centuries of devotion to this sacred person for whom, without ever seeing Him, countless believers have suffered torture and martyrdom without hesitation? What curious force of attraction is this that men have sacrificed fame, fortune, and families to become missionaries to strange lands in hopes of delivering the heathen from the bondage of superstition and debauchery? The only answer-He is altogether lovely.

John saw His radiant countenance and described it as a jasper stone. What fascination intrigues those who behold a brilliant gemstone? And so much the more did John in awe-inspired wonder behold the king in His beauty. Not only lovely but altogether lovely is our glorious Lord! Consider the many facets of the incomparable Christ: lovely in His incarnation, lovely in His immaculate life, lovely in His compassion for the afflicted, lovely in His grace to sinners, even lovely in His ignominious death, and lovely in His mediatorial position at the right hand of the majesty on high.

It is promised that we shall share in this loveliness for just as certainly do the children bear the image of their parents, so do the children of God bear the image of our Heavenly Father. We, though for now, are clothed in the defiled habiliments of Adam's flesh and blood, shall soon be transfigured for "we shall be like him"-altogether lovely!

*Pastor*

## Something to Consider

***Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore thus saith the LORD of host; Consider your ways.***

***Haggai 1:4,5***

Haggai prophesied when a remnant returned to the Promised Land after seventy years of captivity in Babylon. One would think that after their time of harsh existence in exile, God's people would repair the waywardness of their lives and faith. When they returned, they continued to manifest the same problem that caused their exile. Israel's obedience and their relationship with God became secondary to their personal interests. The prophet rebukes them while bringing to light the misguided carnality of their efforts. Because of not making God and worshiping Him in His temple a priority, the prophet highlights the futility of their labors. ***Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes (Haggai 1;6).*** Maximizing all their time and energy into providing food, clothes, and money could never produce a feeling of satisfaction.

The prophet's warning concerning the building of the temple applies to our spiritual lives today. As believers, our body becomes the temple of the Spirit of the living God. The Lord wants to take the earthen vessel of our body and make it a *vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work*. By His grace, He that began a good work in us will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. We are to prioritize our lives with the things that will honor and glorify the Lord first. Jesus told His followers to seek first the Kingdom of God and all the other necessary things in life will be added to us. Was not the young lad's fish and bread multiplied after he first offered it to the Lord for His use? We will feel a greater sense of purpose, and life becomes more fulfilling when we willingly put effort into the things that have eternal value. Certainly, we should put care and concern into the activities of this life, but not at the expense of sacrificing our spiritual well-being. Earning an income to provide housing, and to put clothes on our backs and food on our tables is not our primary purpose in life. They are secondary to worshipping and glorifying God with our temple.

Haggai told the people to ***“Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house, and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD”***. Let us consider our ways, and may God's Spirit energize us today to build our temple so that we glorify Him.

~ J. Ekis

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## Teaching power

*And he said unto them, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent. And he preached in the synagogues of Galilee.*

*Luke 4:43-44*

Three times in this chapter Luke emphasizes Jesus' teaching and preaching in the synagogues of Galilee. First, after returning in the power of the Spirit from the wilderness testing, He taught in the region and his fame spread (vv. 14-15). Next, His reading and proclamation of His fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy of Messiah (v. 21) led those of His hometown to marvel, yet reject and attempt to kill Him. Finally, His teaching accompanied by healing from diseases and devils in Capernaum caused the people there to beg Him not to leave. Yet His response to them in our text demonstrates His great desire to preach and teach the kingdom of God.

Although the Gospels provide plenty of evidence of Jesus' miracles that fulfilled the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament, the necessity of His teaching and preaching is manifested here, as well as in the extended discourses and incidental teachings recorded throughout the Gospels. As important as the miracles were to establish His identity, it was His teaching that substantiated it. Even in Nazareth, where no miracle is mentioned, they wondered at His gracious words (v. 22) before their unbelief was fueled by familiarity. Yet in Capernaum, they were astonished at His doctrine and powerful words (v. 32) and continually sought more.

The sensational can only go so far. Many have looked so much for the outwardly miraculous that they have overlooked the foundation of faith. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Romans 10:17). So Jesus demonstrated this principle in pouring forth the doctrine necessary for people to understand and believe in Him. We ought also to follow this example and emphasis. The most important aspect of communicating the gospel is to provide the truth of God's word, which is used by His Holy Spirit to convict and convince people of what they need and who He is, and His authority and power to save. May God grant us the power to deliver the message by word and example.

## Now and Then

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*For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face; now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known.*

*– 1 Corinthians 13:12 –*

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Human existence has boundaries. We live within a space-matter-time continuum. Though our soul and spirit longs for eternity, we cannot fully conceive of life outside these intrinsic universal parameters. Our faith bridges the gap to some degree, but can really only do so to a point. We understand we shall live forever, and even breathe a bit of the ether of that everlasting realm on a day-to-day basis when we commune with God in prayer, devotion, and Bible study. But when we stop to really contemplate the nature of eternity, our mental and spiritual faculties strain toward exhaustion, falling far short of any type of satisfactory result. We are like a caged bird, longingly beholding the vast expanse just outside the bars. We flap excitedly, yearning for the moment the door will open but a fraction and we find ourselves free, taking flight into the boundless atmosphere that surrounded us but heretofore excluded our full participation from its tangible reality.

There is so much mystery about our God and His ways that we cannot comprehend here. Though we take hold of them by faith, our heavenly entrance and subsequent glorification will open a new phase of understanding, relegating these stunningly profound enigmas to merely elementary in stature. How can God be omnipresent? Now, we know it to be true by His Word; but then, we shall experience its overwhelming verity with every fiber of our eternal being. What is the nature of the Trinity? Now, we apprehend the triune God-head by faith; but then, we shall interact with Father, Son, and Holy Ghost in ways we currently cannot even begin to imagine. What happened at Calvary? Now, we fondly and tenaciously embrace our salvation secured upon that lonely hill outside Jerusalem; then, will we perhaps be permitted to plumb but some of the depths of the moment our Lord mysteriously cried, “My God! My God! Why hast thou forsaken me?” Now, while we may not understand the why’s and wherefores to the painful events of this life, we nevertheless trust our God’s superintending care; but then, shall we not only understand the heartaches, but actually rejoice in them, finally beholding the tapestry and totality of our lives from heaven’s gracious and guiding vantage point?

This life is fleeting. It is a vapor. Then is what we are awaiting. And when it finally arrives, time will be no longer. At long last, we shall know as we are known. Hold tight, anxious Christian. The cage is soon to open, and we shall fly away to worlds unknown. Until THEN, let us resolve to trust our wonderful God in every NOW. --- D. Murcek

# Pastors Thoughts of the Week

## Taking the Garbage Out

*II Chronicles 29:16: And the priests went into the inner part of the house of the LORD, to cleanse it, and brought out all the uncleanness that they found in the temple of the LORD*

The temple of the Lord had suffered disrepair after a series of apostate kings had moved the children of Judah to pay homage and sacrifice to Baal. The center of worship moved from the sacred temple to the valley of Hinnom, where the disobedient people even offered their own children to the inexorable flames of their false god of stone. Where once the temple of Solomon was maintained with utmost fastidiousness, now that sacred structure lay in partial ruin due to shameful neglect. The courts that were once filled with the mingled scent of the evening oblations and the mysterious unction of the table of incense were now filled with the acrid aroma of animal dung and every form of vile refuse.

It was time to take the garbage out! It was high time for a thorough cleansing! Rising to the challenge was the revivalist king Hezekiah. He would be but a type of the greater One who would come with a fan in His hand to cleanse the floor. It could be said of them both that "the zeal of thine house hath eaten them up". And so he issued forth the decree "sanctify now yourselves, and sanctify the house of the LORD God of your fathers, and carry forth the filthiness out of the holy place." After which, he restored the rightful purpose for which the temple had been constructed: to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. The Shekinah glory was restored and the people again basked in the favor of the one true God.

In this age of the New Testament, there is no need for a temple for as the scripture has stated, "that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you". This temple must also be kept clean from all defilements, and to that end, we believers are the custodians who are given the charge to do so. Let us follow the zealous example of Hezekiah in removing all filthiness and uncleanness out of our holy place. The mind, heart, and body of the believer must be assiduously maintained so that it can serve as a fitting resting place of the Spirit of God. Let us sharpen our discernment and refuse entry to the devilish defilements that bring their accompanying corruptions. And like the Lord Jesus, take the "scourge of small cords" and drive "them all out of the temple".

Can we imagine letting our physical homes become so run down that we leave garbage piling up for months without taking out the trash? Or leaving toilets unflushed, dirty dishes stacked in the sink, or permitting dogs and cats to leave their waste matter over the floors for weeks and months without taking mops and cleaning agents in hand and scrubbing down the place. How absurd a scene this would be! How much also, do our bodies and souls need a continual cleansing? It is time to take the garbage out!

*II Corinthians 7:1: Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*

*Pastor*

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

## El Olam

And Abraham planted a grove in Beer-sheba, and called there on the name of the LORD, the everlasting God.

### Genesis 21:33

Throughout the Bible, God is revealed through a variety of names, which reveal certain aspects and characteristics of His nature. In today's text, Abraham is introduced to El Olam, the everlasting God. As finite creatures, it is beyond our comprehension to grasp that God has no beginning or end. Our physical existence on earth has both a beginning and a termination point; but because God created us in His image, we possess an eternal soul and spirit. God's eternity is better perceived by faith than understood by the intellect.

The everlasting God and His eternal attributes should help and encourage believers in the varying phases of life. The following is just a small compilation of some of the everlasting treasures found in our great El Olam of the Scriptures.

*Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of His understanding. (Isaiah 40:28) Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD Jehovah is everlasting strength. (Isaiah 26:4) The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms... (Deuteronomy 33:27) For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations. (Psalm 100:5) Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thy law is the truth. (Psalm 119:142) He stood, and measured the earth: he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow: his ways are everlasting. (Habakkuk 3:6) Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations. (Psalm 145:13) And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads... (Isaiah 35:10) In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer. (Isaiah 54:8) The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee. (Jeremiah 31:3) Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our LORD Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant... (Hebrews 13:20) Now our LORD Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace. (2Thessalonians 2:16) And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day. (John 6:40)*

The scriptures are designed to reveal God and His eternal plan for our life. The verses that remind us of His everlasting ways are of great help to us in our temporary situation. Whatever confronts us in life, El Olam is able to meet our needs. Today, put your full confidence in the One who is from everlasting to everlasting.

J. Ekis

## Old and miserable

*No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better.*

*Luke 5:39*

Jesus concluded His parable illustrating the ineffectiveness of mixing new and old with this statement, evidently aimed at the murmuring Pharisees. They had complained of His eating and drinking with publicans and sinners, at the celebration of Levi (Matthew) repenting of his purloining past and deciding to follow Him. As a publican in Israel, Levi had no other kind of friends, besides the other outcasts of society, to invite to the celebration with Jesus and His disciples. Yet, instead of recognizing and appreciating the new and better life that Levi had chosen, the Pharisees continued to condemn. They then proceeded to criticize Jesus and His disciples for not fasting often and praying like they did, and even like the disciples of John the Baptist (whom they despised), implying that their pretentiously holy state was superior to His.

Jesus once again responded with wisdom and clarity, emphasizing His joy and purpose for sinners to repent, as opposed to the self-righteous who saw no need. In addition, the two-fold parable of the uselessness of trying to repair an old garment with new cloth, or to store new, fresh wine in old wineskins, was designed to emphasize the new and living way that He had come to bring to His disciples, which would free them to enjoy the pleasure of His righteous presence in their lives. This new freedom would not mix with the old legalistic traditions that the Pharisees had created to bring themselves and the people of Israel under bondage to ritual, in vain hopes of fulfilling the law. The empty adherence to prescribed fasting in an attempt to achieve holiness was no match for the present fellowship with the One who bestows holiness. They needed to repent of the old wineskins of legalistic tradition in exchange for the fresh new wine of His Spirit of holiness. But alas, He rightly declares the problem that the persistent drunk is deluded to think that his familiar old bottle of despair is better, rather than to trade it in for a fresh new fountain of life. Thus were the murmuring, miserable Pharisees described. May this warning cause all that read to cast off the old garment of self-righteousness and receive from Him the new garment of salvation, which provides both eternal and abundant life.



## The Offense of the Cross

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*And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? Then is the offence of the cross ceased.*

*– Galatians 5:11 –*

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The modern decline of our nation, and for that matter, the Western world, is due in large part to Christendom's voluntary surrender of influence. Somewhere along the line, the professing church relinquished its grasp upon the foundation of the gospel. This is true of both pulpit and pew. "Fire and brimstone" preaching that condemns sin while pointing to the only means of salvation through the finished work of Christ at Calvary has become appallingly Neolithic to the sophisticated modern mind. Thus, many pulpits have polluted the gospel with pop-psychology and "seeker-friendly" syntax in a desperate hope to build and keep membership rolls, sell books, or both. This has helped spawn a generation of half-converts; professing Christians who embrace a neo-gospel that is "relevant" to the culture and not overly-intrusive to one's daily life. A facsimile of "grace" (the true biblical doctrine is grossly mis-understood) is the operative theological concept upon the lips of multitudes to justify a heart that craves a worldly comportment, while self-denial and holy living are seen as a puritanical relics of their unenlightened spiritual ancestors. Additionally, many true believers, aware of their own shortcomings as well as the increasing spotlight on genuine Christian profession, shrink in their commitment to witness to the unvarnished gospel that powerfully converted them, delivering them from the power of darkness and translating them into the kingdom of His dear Son.

We must not fall prey to these modern compromising phenomena. The gospel, properly understood, is attractive, yet quite abrasive. There is a fundamental and intrinsic offense to the cross of Jesus Christ. That offense is due to our proud, sinful soul and our haughty human intellect. In order to be born-again, one must humble himself and become as a little child. At the cross, man stands as criminal, not judge. Here, all of our best efforts are futile, all of our excuses are void, all of our justifications are puerile, and all of our intentions are exposed. We stand fully and unequivocally condemned. Here, we must become unobtrusively honest about our inward condition and embrace the pathetic state of our soul. We must abandon our pretense and acknowledge our vileness, now disclosed under the looming shadow of a bludgeoned and battered Christ, pierced and gasping in agony, bearing our shame. Here, pride finds no tolerating tenement. The honest soul has no recourse but to heave in deepest contrition at the foot of this sacred, bloody cross. When this condition of heart is met, salvation is at the door. It changes the man, now and forever, from the inside out. This experience will never be forgotten, and in fact, will grow curiously more precious with time.

Brothers and sisters, do you remember your conversion – your vileness confessed, your condemnation conceded, your deserved sentence to Hell acknowledged? And that was but the beginning. In His wrath, He remembered mercy, and plucked us as brands from the fire. Oh, the wonderful cross! Let us, with Paul, not be ashamed of the cross of Jesus Christ, nor of its offense. This, and only this gospel, is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth. – D. Murcek

# Pastors Thoughts of the Week

## An Instructional Time at the Table

*John 12:2-3: There they made him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus*

It was that home in Bethany where Jesus oft time retreated and was a guest to this holy family, where Jesus, now for the last time, would take his seat at that familiar table and enjoy the celebration that ensued due to the astounding events of the preceding day. For by His side sat Lazarus, who was now freshly raised from the grave and who, no doubt, was now retelling the wonders of the unseen paradise that for four days he had experienced. One can only imagine what that conversation revealed, yet the gospel narratives leave that discussion under the cover of the "secret things that belong unto God".

We know that every detail in the gospel has significance. So let us probe this text and see what lesson lies beneath the surface. In every context, Jesus must be considered the primary character. After the raising of Lazarus the day earlier, we now find Him seated, representing the august position that He would soon assume at the right hand of the throne of God after He completed His salvific work on the cross. Seated next to him is Lazarus who represents a type of the believer raised from the powers of hell. In some sense, he represents our justification. Like every believer, he heard the saving words of Christ and answered the call to come forth. Ephesians 2:6: And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:

And now there is sister Martha, just as we expected-serving. Isn't this a type of the believer serving the Lord? Once saved, we want to find the place of service. Whatever the Master might want. Whatever errand he would dispatch us to perform no matter how menial it may seem. She is an evident type of our sanctification.

Finally, we consider Mary at the feet of Jesus, pouring out the costly unguent, sparing no expense. It is a portrait of the believer pouring out his prayers and worship to the only One worthy of such obeisance. Scripture reveals that our prayers are stored in golden vials and will perfume the halls of heaven upon our arrival. Mary represents our effusive worship of the Savior which begins on earth and continues throughout eternity. She provides a living example of our soon-coming glorification.

So from the table of Bethany, John has provided us with a spiritual feast as we delight in seeing the unintended lesson that feeds our hungry souls.

Have a blessed day,

*Pastor*

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

## God's Better Plan

*... and they were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not.*

*(Acts 16: 6b,7)*

Jesus' last words in what is known as the Great Commission are encapsulated in the Gospel of Mark- "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature". This commission has been given to every believer since the first century and is to be continued in our current days. No matter where we go, we must carry that gospel message. Whether God has called us to a foreign land or to remain at home, we all are to participate in this great endeavor. In this spiritually dark hour, we desperately need the impact of the gospel to influence our communities, our country, and our world for Christ. With people in need all around us, there is no shortage of opportunities. With that said, we serve His purpose much better when our steps are ordered from above. Proverbs states, "A man's heart deviseth his way, but the Lord directeth his steps". Today's text is an example of being in the right place at the right time because of the Lord's divine plan and the Holy Spirit's leading.

In Acts sixteen, the Apostles and the first-century disciples have advanced the gospel message. As persecution scattered them abroad, they went everywhere preaching the Word. Paul shows a desire to venture into Asia with this message but was forbidden by the Holy Ghost, and when they tried to go into Bithynia, the Spirit forbade them. No reason or explanation is given why they were not allowed by the Spirit, but as the text continues, we find that God had a better plan for them. When the Apostle Paul halts his journey toward Asia, he then receives what is known as the Macedonian Vision. Obedience to this calling produced the conversion of Lydia and her household, the Philippian jailor and all of his house, and the establishment of churches on the European continent. Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, and more, were challenged and changed because of the message of the resurrected Savior. The results of this calling also laid the groundwork for the production of the New Testament by which multitudes through the ages have been converted.

As God has called us to carry on the propagation of the gospel message, we need to be sensitive to the leading of the Spirit. He has a plan for not only what is best for us, but also for those with whom we come in contact. Sometimes we will see the direct impact of this message, and at other times it will be that "bread that is cast upon the waters, that thou shalt find it after many days". May God grant us the grace to develop a sensitive spirit to discern His leading so that we might follow His better plan. ~ J. Ekis

## Unfounded fear

*Let these sayings sink down into your ears: for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men. But they understood not this saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not: and they feared to ask him of that saying.*

*Luke 9:44-45*

This is the second time in Luke's account that Jesus warned the twelve disciples of His coming passion. The first was earlier in this chapter, after Peter's confession that Jesus was the Christ of God, in spite of all the surmising of the people. It seems that the recognition of His true identity needed to be established among them, before Jesus revealed to the twelve the ultimate course of His earthly journey. In the same context, Jesus also laid down the premise that to follow Him means to deny yourself, take up your cross daily, and be willing to lose your life for His sake.

This was probably an unexpected message to the twelve, who had recently been given authority over demons and the power to cure diseases while they preached the kingdom of God. They had even been given the right to symbolically shake the dust off their feet in condemnation of those who would not receive the gospel of the kingdom. On the heels of that campaign, they enjoyed the privilege to watch Jesus preach the kingdom to the multitude, heal them, then feed all five thousand of them miraculously. Then, even after the initial warning, three of them experienced His transfiguration. Yet, after that experience, Jesus alluded to His limited time with them, as He freed the man's son from the demon, then reiterated the warning in our text.

The sad commentary follows, as they don't understand the warning and fear to ask for an explanation. There seems to be a connection between their imperception and their fear. As the disciples were basking in the glories of Jesus' power and the message of the expected Messianic kingdom, their understanding was becoming impervious to the new message of self-denial and sacrifice. This seems to also be supported by the events that immediately follow in the chapter. Perhaps their fear to ask was not only from embarrassment of admitting that they didn't understand, but was also from not wanting to understand the implications of the message?

This is another scriptural example for us to not follow. The word of the Lord to His disciples must always be the thing we desire to know and understand. We need not sift it through our own wishes or self-made expectations. It is not beyond the Lord's power to equip and sustain us for what He reveals to us. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32)

## From Garden to Garden

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*Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? Whom sleekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou hast borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.  
– John 20:15 –*

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One of the most remarkable testimonies that the Bible is the Word of the living God is its amazing uniformity. There is no human intellect that could have assembled such a cogent and invariable story with such historical veracity, and transmitted it via a series of forty authors over a span of fifteen hundred years. The story of redemption found from Genesis to Revelation is one of paradise lost and re-gained, and it is embodied in many ways within the two Federal Heads of humanity – the first Man, Adam, and the last Adam, Jesus Christ. The comparisons and contrasts between these two are as stunning as they are remarkable, leaving us in awe of both the Word of God and the God of the Word. Let us here consider but a few...

Adam enjoyed direct and open communion with God in the Garden of Eden. Christ relentlessly and restlessly sought for His Father through prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Adam failed the Serpent's momentary subtle deception in the lushness of Eden. Christ rebuffed the devil's head-on forty-day assault in the barren wilderness, and later successfully withstood an extended agonizing attack in the solitude of Gethsemane.

In Eden, Adam was provided the perfect help meet in Eve, yet fell. In Gethsemane, Christ was forsaken by His closest friends, yet remained true to His Father.

Adam's fall in Eden secured the sweat of the brow as the defining characteristic of mankind's purposeful work. Christ's sweat became drops of blood in Gethsemane, which blood became the only work upon which mankind can depend for eternal purpose.

Adam was cast out of a garden and forbidden to re-enter by Cherubic prohibition. Christ arose in a garden, His tomb hosting inviting and evangelistic angelic visitants, and then subsequently ascended from that garden above all principality and power.

Is there not a sanctified irony that Mary Magdalene assumed the risen Christ to be the gardener? In Eden, Adam tended the garden of God and was tasked with giving names to all the animals, before he was given a bride. Our Lord stepped out of His tomb and into a garden to eternally secure His beloved Bride, and will give each of us a new name in the city of our God.

Let us heartily praise God for the second Man, the last Adam, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

– D. Murcek

# *Pastors Thoughts of the Week*

## **The Ephemera**

For what is your life? It is even a vapour,  
that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.  
James 4:14

The mayfly (of the genus Ephemera) is one of God's creative reminders of the brevity of life. This insect has the most transitory existence of all life forms. After spending a year or more living on the bottom of a stream in its aquatic nymph form, it emerges as a flying adult — and lives for less than five minutes. During its brief adult life, the mayfly must find a mate, copulate, and lay its eggs. Having spent all its reserve energy in its maiden flight, it parachutes downward in a graceful spiral of death and expires atop the waters from which it emerged minutes earlier.

Like the ephemera, our lives are evanescent. Time is a relative phenomenon. A long life to us would be to obtain the rarefied title of "nonagenarian"; but to an ephemera, longevity is measured by minutes. The mayfly innately understands that its existence is transient and he must be about his obligatory task with no interruptions. No time for leisurely sauntering about the pond. No time for frittering away in hours of profitless conversation. No time for wasteful visits with fellow ephemera. No, the task is at hand and the limited time and energy must be spent on reproducing its kind. Countless mayflies die before they achieve this noble purpose, punctuating the meaninglessness of an already fugacious existence.

If the beasts and the birds have lessons to teach us (Job 12:7), can't this fragile insect serve as a schoolmaster to instruct us? Our great Creator has graciously set the metes and bounds of our earthly existence. It is a generous allotment in comparison to the momentary mayfly. Believers are meant to be reproducing themselves before we meet with our material end. We are often waylaid in our efforts by lesser things that detract from our noble calling. The devil is, after all, the author of procrastination.

Rise up, O men of God!  
Have done with lesser things.  
Give heart and mind and soul and strength  
to serve the King of kings.

What little time may be left on our brief journey here below, let us be found fully engaged in the service of the King. As the ephemera floats lifelessly to the place from which it emerged, let us likewise finish our course with the full satisfaction that we spent our last erg of energy in bringing others to life in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Have a blessed day,

*Pastor*

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

## Why We Follow

*...How long halt ye between two opinions? If the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him.*

*1 Kings 18:21*

It was easy and even natural to follow in our early formative years. Before we developed the ability to verbally communicate, it was natural to simply put our hand in our parents' hands and let them lead us. Even with our sinful and rebellious nature, the dependent state of our early years demanded (required) following some leader. As we grew and matured, independence naturally increased; but sometimes independence exacts a great cost. We were never meant to be so liberated that we would cease to follow God. Oftentimes, the reason someone stops following God is that they either willingly or unknowingly begin to follow something else.

The eighteenth chapter of First Kings records the epic contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. The contest was much more than a conflict between opposing prophets; it was a test to prove who was the only true and living God. Baal was one of the primary gods of the Canaanites. The adherents of this false deity and his manmade image had made them central to their culture. Jehovah, the one and only God, who is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent was the Living Deity of the faithful Hebrews. Elijah's proposal was for each side to call upon their respective God to consume a sacrifice by sending fire from heaven proving once and for all who was the real and living God. The silence of Baal and the response of Jehovah were meant to not only verify the true God but also cause the false worshippers to consider the vanity of their religion. The impotent idol of Baal and the feeble prophets were defeated when Jehovah answered Elijah's plea by sending fire down from the heavens and consuming the sacrifice. When this miraculous event occurred, the surrounding witnesses immediately acknowledged...*the LORD, He is the God.*

Christians are to be followers of God, and though we never have seen literal fire descend from heaven to consume a sacrifice, we have an abundance of reasons to declare *the LORD, He is God.* We are to walk by faith, and it is faith that pleases our Lord; yet still, we have many infallible proofs that bolster our faith. The experience of conversion and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is enough incentive to follow our God. We see His protection and provision daily as our eyes are truly opened. There are times He answers our prayers both directly and indirectly proving over and over that our God is true. There are also times when the mysterious hand of God moves in a situation in such a way that is beyond explanation, verifying that our God, though unseen, manifests Himself in divine occurrences.

As we have another day to follow our Good Shepherd, may we have the confidence of Elijah, and show the world that the LORD, he is God!

J. Ekis

## Things

*And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*

*Luke 12:15*

We don't know the circumstance or the motive of the man who came and asked Jesus to speak to his brother so that he would divide the inheritance with him. We only know that Jesus was not interested in being an arbitrator in those family affairs, and instead took this occasion to issue this warning of misplaced values. This is added to a number of other warnings that Jesus had just issued, before the man seemingly interrupted His teaching. He then proceeded to reinforce this warning with the "parable of the rich fool," which illustrates the emptiness of riches when it comes time for a man to give an account for his soul.

Yet the very premise that Jesus lays down here is opposed by the values communicated in most of what we hear in today's culture. The desire for abundant possessions seems to be a key indicator for investors in a country's economy. Convincing people that they need more things is the central theme of a majority of the ads we hear and see. The accentuation of covetousness seems to be the norm in attempting to sell things that are really not needed. While there can be legitimacy in advertising products and services that are useful and beneficial for life, much of what surrounds us today attempts to convince us that we "deserve" more or better things. Yet, how many pillows do we really need, or how happy does a dog have to be, if it could even tell you, especially compared to opportunities to alleviate actual human suffering? Let us beware of those who would promote covetousness in our naturally selfish souls.

Jesus went on to teach contentment with God's provision of the things that He knows we need and understanding of the meaning of life beyond those essential needs. He focuses on the link between what we treasure and our heart's desire, and how both should be centered on the eternal matters of the kingdom of God. As we follow His admonition, He assures us that our heavenly Father will provide our needs. Just as He does for the birds and the flowers, He provides us legitimate means, such as strength for labor, to supply our needs and to provide for our own (I Timothy 5:8) and others (Ephesians 4:28). Let this, rather than more things, be our focus.



## Is It I?

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*And as they sat and did eat, Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, One of you which eateth with me shall betray me. And they began to be sorrowful, and to say unto him one by one, Is it I? and another said, Is it I?*

*– Mark 14:18-19 –*

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Self-examination is critical to spiritual life and growth. It is a difficult work, however. Much of the flesh resides with us throughout the days of our pilgrimage. Our sinful self would rather we quickly justify our actions and dismissively excuse our motives than to spend any time in penetrating introspection. This spiritual discipline of inward reflection requires humility, honesty, and a candid openness to undesirable findings, as well as an ardent desire to be more like Jesus.

The disciples were around the table that night of the Lord's supper. The Master had greatly desired to eat this Passover with them. There was something different about Him tonight, though. His actions were comparatively melancholic and solemnly intentional, and His words even more pregnant with instruction than usual. His washing of their feet in basest humility? His prophecy that He would not commune with them again until drinking of the new wine in Kingdom? And then, this alarming utterance, "One of you that eateth with me shall betray me."

What would it have been like to be there at that moment? How many of us would begin to look about the table, suspecting we knew him of whom Christ spoke? It has to be Matthew. Once a publican, always a publican. I never did trust his testimony – all a show. But, no, no, wait. It's more likely Thomas. That doubter never did really believe the Lord. Though, it could also be Peter, right? All that bravado, but the man is really a coward at heart, and we all know it. Oh, but then there's also James and John, with their thunderous tempers, never really understanding what spirit they are of. Simon Zealotes is another candidate. He's been looking for vengeance against Rome, and must be sorely disappointed with Jesus' taciturn position with regard to Israel's servitude. Yes, it must be him.

Unfortunately, I can see myself with such thoughts had I been present in the upper room that evening. Can you as well? How foolish we often are! Let us learn here a most necessary and fundamental lesson from the disciples' example. This was their shining moment of the pre-Resurrection gospel history. It doesn't appear that any of them suspected the other, but rather all understood each their own frailty. They finally apprehended what the Master had been teaching them the last three years, and in His presence, they laid bare their hearts, to Christ and to each other, lovingly believing the best about their brethren while openly acknowledging their own weakness and their personal propensity toward spiritual failure. THIS is self-examination, THIS is spirituality. And because of THIS inward attitude, the Spirit could begin to work just a few months later amongst and through these men to turn the world upside down. Let us strive to emulate such honesty of heart. -- D. Murcek

# Pastors Thoughts of the Week

## Jesus is Knocking

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. Revelation 3:20

In 1853, the pre-Raphaelite painter William Holman Hunt finished his most famous work *The Light of the World*. It portrays Christ holding a lantern while knocking at a door overgrown with ivy and whose hinges are rusted shut. Hunt explained that it was symbolic of "the obstinately shut mind". The door has no handle and so represents the salient truth that mankind must open the door from within. It is a testament to God's refusal to violate the free will of man. There will be no imposition of divine determination; no insistence that the creature bends to the dictates of his creator, though it would be for the best outcome. No, all of Adam's race must "hear my voice" and choose to open the door or reject the proffered invitation to sup with the savior of his soul. It is lamentable that multitudes have heard the voice but left the door sealed, resulting in their own damnation. And with each passing year of rejection, the door of the heart becomes overgrown with the weeds of neglect and the hinges with the rust of insouciance.

The scriptural image of Christ standing at the door is placed immediately after the rebuke of the worldly Laodicean church. The careful student of the Bible will note that the message to the seven churches begins with Christ in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, which John explains to be the seven churches Asia Minor, and then ends with Him shut outside the door and knocking to gain entrance. This comes as a clarion warning to the apostate church of our current age.

Our text places appropriate significance on hearing the voice of the Lord. In the messages to the seven churches the passage, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" is repeated to all seven churches and serves as a divine imperative as well as an apposite conclusion to the messages given. The dire state of the church of our current generation needs to heed that word and quickly open the door to the heart.

Solomon's Song of Songs puts forth the poetic metaphor of the slumbering bride that refused to quickly arise at the voice of the bridegroom who knocked at the door. "Open to Me" he cried but she had already "put off her coat" and was languishing in a soporific state and was thus delayed in answering his call. By the time she had collected herself and unlatched the door, alas, he was gone and though she sought him and called out to him, "he gave no answer".

Both sinner and saint can glean a lesson from this instructional verse. "Awake thou that sleepest!" Make haste to open that door when first you hear that Divine voice. Let in the "Light of the World" while He is near. Bring Him to the table and break with Him the bread of life.

Have a blessed day,

*Pastor*

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



BEHOLD I STAND AT THE DOOR AND KNOCK IF ANY MAN HEAR MY VOICE AND OPEN THE DOOR I WILL COME IN TO HIM AND WILL SUP WITH HIM AND HE WITH ME.  
PRESENTED BY B&B CLERK IN HONOR OF HIS WIFE BETTY AND ONE OF THE 1000 PRESENTS TO THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD MUSEUM (101101) FINAL COPY BY B. MILLER (11)