

## **Work with purpose**

*And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.*

*Genesis 2:15*

In this expanded account of the details of God's creation, after He formed man of the dust of the ground and made him a living soul, then planted the garden in Eden, we see here that He put him into the garden for a purpose. The purpose was to dress and keep the garden. God's purpose for man from the outset of creation was to work. And the work was not just to keep him busy, but, as stated in the next verse, to provide his food. Adam was permitted to eat the fruit of all the trees that he kept, except for one. It is important to observe that this occurred in chapter 2, before man's disobedience in chapter 3 brought the curse that would affect his work and make it difficult and tiresome. From this some erroneously conclude that work is a curse upon man. So we often see and hear mankind complaining about the curse of work. But the result of the curse was not work itself. God gave man purpose in work before the curse ever came to make it difficult. Even Solomon, among his sour and bitter complaints about his perceived vanities of this life, had to stop and recognize the gift of God in giving mankind the privilege of work and its resulting benefits: "it is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour...this is the gift of God." (Ecclesiastes 5:18-19) As believers and servants of God and of others, we ought to remember this principle and, instead of being infected by the complaining spirit that may pervade our workplace, be infectiously thankful and rejoice in the purpose that God has ordained for our daily work. "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ." (Colossians 3:23-24)

## Religion

*Then said Micah, Now know I that the LORD will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest.*

*Judges 17:13*

The confident statement uttered by Micah in this text exemplifies the overwhelming capacity of man to deceive himself in complete arrogance. In the context of this chapter, every statement made by someone concerning the Lord reveals their ignorance of His character and law. In the midst of the chapter, the editing writer of the book of Judges feels the need to pause and remind the reader that “in those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” We find Micah filling his house with idols, mixing with them an ephod, perhaps modeled after some vague notion about the true tabernacle in Shiloh, and setting apart his own son to be “his priest.” He apparently learned some of this from the example of his mother, who earlier had the notion that molten images could be dedicated to the Lord. Thus, we see the state of the nation in those days, as they had drifted with each generation a little further from the absolute truth revealed by the only true God at Sinai, by mingling that truth with more of the lying deceptions of those nations that surrounded or remained among them in the land of promise. Micah’s statement reveals not only his own ignorance of the truth, but also that of the Levite, who ought to have known better, yet obliged him in his perverted idolatrous practice.

And what parallels have we today, when the true faith of Jesus Christ, once delivered to the saints by His apostles, has been generationally mixed with all sorts of human concoctions of religion. Although the idols may have changed, they seem to be morphing back to the original idol offered to Eve in the garden – the god of self. A mixture of notions and symbols of Christendom along with pantheism and human psychology will no more commend man to God than will the idolatry of Micah. The admixture of man’s notions of religion with God’s revealed truth will inevitably melt down into an abominable stew that will poison its adherents. Let us heed the warning of the author of this book, along with those of the New Testament, and seek to be lovers and disciples of the truth revealed by the incorruptible word of God.

# *Pastors Thoughts of the Week*

## *Pertinacity*

*Genesis 32:26: And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh.*

*And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.*

Jacob was spending a sleepless night contemplating the inevitable outcomes of the next day when he would be confronted by his vengeful brother. Esau had been storing up wrath to avenge the stolen birthright and to wrestle from his conniving brother the inheritance that had been deceptively denied him. Sixty-five years only intensified his desire for revenge as his murderous designs festered in his heart.

Jacob could only elude his adversary for so long. And so on this eve of destruction the Lord meets him at Mahanaim and engages with him in a divine wrestling match affording to him the comfort of certain success on the morrow and to us a sublime lesson on importunity in prayer.

We children of the king are as weak as Jacob and as he "not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed". We are taught here to cling tenaciously to the author and finisher of our faith. When we have spent all our energies and ingenuities and find ourselves enervated to the point of exhaustion, there is nothing left in us but to cling to the power of our omnipotent God. The Lord delights in our resignation. For as surely as we will not let go of Him, so assuredly He will never let go of us.

O love that will not let me go, I rest my weary soul in thee.

I give thee back the life I owe, that in thine oceans depths its flow.

May richer fuller be.

Let us then take solace in the illustrated truth. No matter the direness of your immediate struggle as Jacob did, so must we take hold of the arm of the Almighty and never let go until the blessing is secured.

Have a blessed week,

*Pastor*

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

## Teach Us to Pray

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*And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.*

*– Luke 11:1 –*

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Prayer is perhaps the most dichotomous discipline of the Christian life. It is at once as natural as the cry of a newborn babe, yet as foreign as learning a new language while in a land far from home. In times of distress or exigency, it will effortlessly pour forth from our lips and hearts. But when no pressing need is at hand, we often find it an arduous, agonizing work to utter even a few heartfelt syllables. Prayer is the most natural and God-pleasing act of any child, and yet it is never mastered by the most seasoned of saints.

Prayer in its truest form takes the inmost part of our being. It is less about our words and more about our hearts. It requires familiarity with, and honesty within, the unique solitude of our souls, as well as reverent recognition and engagement of the character and mind of God.

Jesus' prayers had to have been unequivocally remarkable. He most certainly would have engaged in prayer as naturally as in any of His humanly discourse, completely and totally aware of the Father's thoughts toward whatever subject was the matter of the supplication. He must have passed in and out of verbally uttered prayer with amazing ease, without ever really breaking communication with heaven. All the biblical injunctions and descriptions of God-pleasing prayer were undoubtedly personified in our Lord. Let us recall that it was while He prayed that He was transfigured. In Him, prayer was truly without ceasing and marvelously unhindered. In Christ, prayer was completely unhypocritical and selflessly motivated. His prayers were wonderfully importunate, perfectly humble, and always fresh and spontaneous. In Jesus, prayer was wholly earnest, fully effectual, and intensely fervent.

How different are our prayers! How frequently do we find our communication with heaven to be forced, disjointed, earthly, stale, feeble, and emaciated? And yet, we are ever encouraged and commanded to continue to pray in His name, that we may receive. What a marvel – that the God who delighted in the impeccable prayers of His incarnate Son eagerly awaits and attends to the frail utterances of His lowly followers, even empowering and perfecting those groanings by His Spirit for the throne of grace, and graciously promising that whatever we ask according to His will, it will be done for us!

With the disciples we plead, Lord, teach us to pray!

-- D. Murcek

## **The Great Supplier**

*But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*

*Philippians 4:19*

Life in this world is filled with needs. To maintain our physical wellbeing there seems to be a never-ending list of things we need. Food, water, and shelter are the three most basic things necessary to sustain our earthly existence. It is also important for us to distinguish between wants and needs, especially when addressing the Lord in prayer. God always knows what is best for us and promises to supply our needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

In today's text the apostle Paul commends the Philippian church for fully supplying his needs while he was in prison. He reminds them that their abundant sacrifice will be reciprocated through the riches of the Lord Jesus. Paul compares their gifts to a sweet-smelling sacrifice that is well pleasing to God. Throughout the scriptures there are accounts that remind us of the benefits of sacrificial giving. The widow of Zarephath gave her last handful of grain to the prophet Elijah and afterwards was miraculously supplied with a barrel of meal that never emptied. An unnamed lad gave his five barley loaves and two fish to Jesus only to be resupplied with abundantly more than he gave. Here in Philippians 4 we are reminded that as we seek opportunities to supply the needs of others, so the Lord will supply abundantly for us.

There is great comfort when we reflect on the loving care of our Great Supplier. In the Garden of Eden, Adam was not created until after God had first put in place all that he would need. The Sermon on the Mount teaches us that God who provides for the fowls of the air will certainly supply our needs. The provision for our greatest need-the forgiveness of our sin debt- was set in place *before* the foundation of the world. And far beyond that God provides well for us - our daily bread, peace that passes all understanding, the purpose of His will in our lives, the presence of His Spirit, and a mansion in heaven, just to name a few. Whatever need may arise, we can rest assured that our Lord shall supply. – J. Ekis

J. Ekis

## Staggering Not

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*He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.*

*– Romans 4:20-21 –*

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God has designed mankind so as to operate almost every aspect of his life on the principle of faith. It is impossible to live and move and have our being without faith in something, and often in multiple things. Most learning, for example, at least that which is not experiential, is based on *trust* that the information we are receiving is correct (for no man has all facts present at any moment of his existence.) Similarly, all human activity is spawned from the *belief* that the activity will benefit us or others in some way. Entrepreneurs, for instance, *believe* their ideas will satisfy a market need, so they work tirelessly to bring that idea to life. Yes, faith and belief prove to be the key to unlocking human activity of any kind. Yet it is only when faith is directed toward God that we find the ultimate purpose of this inescapable principle of human existence. It is only in Him that faith is consistently neither disappointed nor undermined.

Next to our Lord Jesus, Abraham forever stands as the representative of the quality of faith in God that we must strive to possess. It is virtually impossible to understand the nature of God-pleasing faith without acquainting ourselves with the life of Abraham, immortalized in Genesis as a decades-long antiphonal volley of promise and belief. With each promise, no matter how obscure, Abraham risked his heart and mind and “believed God”. Every aspect of what God asked Abraham to believe was, at the moment of time in which it was required, nearly unbelievable.

Abraham was instructed by God to separate from his family because God was going to make of him a nation, but with no explanation as to how. He was called to tabernacle in a strange land among a mixed multitude of sometimes hostile inhabitants, with no intimation as to when it would become his possession. He was challenged to believe that God was going to bless the entire world through his yet unborn family, which family was promised to become as the sand of seashore in number, though he was already an old man. The list is as strikingly momentous as it is long. And yet, with each iteration of promise, Abraham exercised his trust to the point where he no longer staggered at the promises of God but gained full confidence that God not only *could*, but also *would* keep His word. And by that persuasion, Abraham would ultimately don the divinely bestowed title, the “Friend of God”.

Dear brethren, let us inspect our hearts. What quality of faith resides therein? Is our faith faint, or have we, like Abraham, found Him more than worthy of unfettered trust? Any shred of unbelief within is a leaven that must be purged. Let us stagger not, but rather seek to exercise earnest and heart-felt belief, daily and consistently, in the abundant promises of our Master. This is the kind of faith that delights God.

*-- D. Murcek*

## **Sing aloud**

*But I will sing of thy power; yea, I will sing aloud of thy mercy in the morning: for thou  
hast been my defence and refuge in the day of my trouble.*

*Psalm 59:16*

When was the last time you sang aloud of God's power and mercy? In these days of repression of public worship, the heart of the child of God may become as rusty as his vocal cords due to lack of proper and necessary exercise in godliness. However, while the power of corporate praise and worship is instrumental in tuning both heart and voice, and is encouraged throughout the word of God, we dare not think that singing unto the Lord is relegated only to the public framework. What the psalmist David is contrasting here is his reaction to God's expected deliverance compared his enemies' reaction to it, as he has committed his defense against them to the Lord. Many times we may find ourselves alone as we recognize the marvelous mercy and powerful protection of our Lord in some circumstance, and we should not hesitate to lift up our voice in praise to His name, His attributes, and His works. Oh, we may well sit by and have wonderful thoughts toward the God of our help, but there is an even greater expression of those thoughts when we allow them to influence our bodily members to active cooperation. And this includes the work of the vocal cords. As the songwriter expressed the desire for her hands to be moved at the impulse of His love and her feet to be swift in obedience, so also she desired her voice to sing for her King. We are made to praise our Maker, as well as we are saved to praise our Savior. So whether in a crowd or solitary, let us allow our thanksgiving and praise to well up from our hearts and overflow through our voice to sing aloud of His wonderful works. And don't worry about who may hear you, because all that matters is that He hears both heart and voice.

# Pastors Thoughts of the Week

## Anchored

*That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul,*

*Hebrews 6:18-19:*

What a comfort this passage provides especially as we find ourselves in the current moral turpitude. In a constantly changing world where every day brings with it a veritable vacillation in cultural mores, leaving in its wake a confused generation in search of some immutable truth upon which to build their lives, let us rejoice and be most grateful for the solidity of our God and His glorious doctrine. He is the Christian's Polaris in the midst of swirling constellations of corrupt ideologies, vain religions, and perverted ethos. Our Lord is likened to a rock, a foundation, a high tower, and, in the above quotation, an anchor.

Tempters seek to lure astray;  
Storms obscure the light of day:  
But in Christ I can be bold,  
I've an anchor that shall hold.

As surely as the law of entropy dictates the degradation of the material world, so there is a similar entropic effect in the spiritual. Evil has its pervasive, corrosive influence manifesting spiritual disintegration wherever it is permitted to invade. Satan is a promoter of change-albeit malevolent change. Just before the Babylonian captivity, Jeremiah pled with the recalcitrant people "Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein." The people of God foolishly fled from (rather than fleeing to) the "refuge" and "anchor" of their souls and so drifted aimlessly for seventy years of ignominy.

The God who cannot lie has vouchsafed to us an immutable promise to provide a place of refuge in the midst of this vexatious atmosphere. He who is the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever has tamed the mercurial spirit of the "old man" and left in its place the indelible, unchanging presence of the Spirit of God. Let us lay hold of such a hope!

Have a blessed week,

*Pastor*

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

## Simplicity

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*For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward.*

*– 2 Corinthians 1:12 –*

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There is a complexity that accompanies the curse and is therefore permanently resident to human existence. As fallen, we tend to live life in a constant state of trying to “game the system.” We attempt to move in ways and directions that will bring the most pleasure, benefit, and security. The problem is that the devil, the god of this world, is constantly shifting the rules, moving the markers, and changing the game in order to entice us toward decisions that are ill-timed, wrongly motivated, or mis-informed. He knows that those decisions are potent vessels to consume us with bewildering discontentment and agonizing frustration, thereby effectively disrupting our peace or even obstructing our progress altogether.

Conversely, there is a marvelous freedom from the molesting complexities of life under the sun when we choose to walk in close communion with and obedience to our Redeemer. By carefully and continuously heeding His Word, enabled by the Holy Ghost within, *life becomes a much simpler matter*. The previous objective of personal pleasure is replaced by the pursuit of unbroken fellowship with our Master and usefulness to our fellow man. Our chief desire is no longer to selfishly eat, drink, and be merry, but rather to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. When in close communion with Christ, even our quest for knowledge is eased. We are free to be wise concerning that which is good, and simple concerning evil. By following hard after God, not much “hard” remains. The difficulties brought by the complexity of human existence tend to dissolve and we find that He is more than willing and able to supply a security that is simpler yet eternally more sound than the one for which we previously pined.

The way of transgressors is hard. We know that to be true from our unredeemed past. If the complexities of life are robbing us of our peace and advancement, we need to take inventory and return to simple obedience to our Master. Then let us praise God for our redemption in Christ, resolving to live in the power of its simplicity with godly sincerity today.

-- D. Murcek

## See and Hear

*The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see the Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard.*

*Acts 22:14,15*

In Acts chapter 22, we find the Apostle Paul in Jerusalem declaring what God was doing among the Gentiles through his ministry. His message as well as his association with the Gentiles riled up the hypocritical Jewish leaders, and they bound Paul with chains. A multitude gathered as he was being led away. Realizing there was an opportunity for sharing the gospel, Paul recounted his divine encounter with the Lord Jesus and his resulting conversion.

Though the testimony of Paul's conversion is uniquely dramatic, it contains the basic tenets necessary for salvation. We need to see and hear Jesus. While the word of Paul's conversion spread, Ananias came as God's messenger to tell Paul that he was to be a witness unto all men of what he had seen and heard. This same pattern is true for us today. Spiritually speaking, our conversion is the result of seeing what Jesus said and did. We see The One who left heaven to be virgin-born and laid in a manger, we see the heavens opened at his baptism, we see Him on the mount teaching about the kingdom, we see Him touch the leper, heal the blind, feed the multitudes, and raise the dead. We place ourselves in the crowd that gathered around the cross to watch the Lamb of God as He pays for our sins. When His sacrifice is complete, we see Him bowing His head saying that it is finished. Like Peter and John, we run to see the empty tomb. We have not only the witness of what we have seen, but we have also the witness of what we have heard. We hear Him say that except we repent we shall all likewise perish. We come to Him when we hear His invitation to come to find rest and comfort for our souls. We hear Him say that He is the Light of the world, the Door, the Bread of Life, and The Way, The Truth and The Life. Though there are many other things that he said and did, those things that are recorded are enough to satisfy and save us.

Let us continue to be a witness of what we have seen and heard.

J. Ekis

## *Behold*

*...behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof.*

### *Revelation 5:5*

The rapid advancement of technology has provided many conveniences, but at a cost. Could it be that we are diminishing our ability to deeply concentrate on the subject at hand while we are multi-tasking our life away? How often is our attention diverted when we are focused on something or *someone* important and our cellphone rings, or when we are already talking on our phone and a text message comes through. Prayerfully, we can strive to use technology to our advantage while not allowing it to distract our focus and adversely affect our spiritual life.

God wants us to behold His word and absorb its full depth of meaning. If we just give the Bible a cursory glance, we will limit the impact of this divine book on our life. God places in the Bible words such as: *selah*, *amen*, *verily*, and *behold*, in order to draw our full concentration to His truth within a particular account. For example, in Revelation 5:5 one of the elders exclaims *Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah*. The apostle John had been weeping because none was found worthy to open the seven-sealed book. As he beheld this heavenly vision it was announced to John that the Lion of the Tribe of Judah *hath prevailed to open the book*. The elders then in unison sing that *the Lamb was worthy because He was slain*, thereby securing redemption. Long before the events found in Revelation, we hear John the Baptist also telling the people to *Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world*. It would be an extremely profitable exercise for us to behold in depth both the Lamb and the Lion from the His entrance into the world to the time in heaven when the numberless heavenly host explode with praise saying *Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing*.

As believers, let us do today what we will one day do for ever and ever; behold Him as we bow down in worship.

J. Ekis

## Encouragement

*We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;  
Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.*

*II Corinthians 4:8-9*

Many circumstances of this life can come after us to trouble, perplex, persecute, or knock us down. This is the typical nature of the human condition. And the typical responses to these things from the typical human are distress, despair, and feelings of being forsaken or even destroyed. Yet when we are the children of the King of heaven, we are not the typical human. Here the apostle reminds us that as God's adopted children we can thwart all these responses to such attacks. In the Roman epistle he reminds us that, in the face of all kinds of forces that would attempt to separate us from the love of Christ, "we are more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Romans 8:37). The steadfast love of our Father in heaven remains our encouragement. At the beginning of this epistle to Corinth He is described: "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God" (II Corinthians 1:3-4). The word translated 'comfort' here includes within its meaning to come or to call alongside, with the sense of encouragement. In the upper room Jesus used the noun form to refer to the Holy Spirit as our Comforter. In his first epistle, John uses the same appellation of Jesus Christ the righteous, there translated as our 'advocate'. While in our flesh we as believers are subject to similar troubles and perplexing situations that can come to unbelievers, the difference is that, in the midst of human circumstance, we have an anchor of our soul in the Lord Jesus Christ, that not only reminds us of our heavenly hope, but encourages us right where we are with the peace and strength of His presence. May you know and feel the tight hold of His everlasting arms in any of these circumstances, today and in the future.

# Pastors Thoughts of the Week

## Graciousness

*II Chronicles 30:9: For the LORD your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if ye return unto him.*

The Gnostic heretic, Marcion argued for a dualistic belief system which accused the God of the Old Testament as being a malevolent entity, devoid of mercy and grace and fashioned more along the lines of the Platonic concept of the Demiurge. As a result his followers rejected the "wrathful God of the Hebrew Bible" and jettisoned all the books of the Old Testament as well as many of the epistles, except for the writings of the apostle Paul. They must surely have missed the verse we have chosen to expound, not to mention so many other passages that bear incontrovertible witness of both testaments to the benevolent nature of our merciful Creator. Aside from the patent fact that "The LORD our God is one LORD" Deut. 6:4, it must be understood that He is "the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever".

Was the Lord not gracious when He found our primal parents hiding in the garden after their willful defiance? After the antediluvian civilization had corrupted God's way upon the earth, was it not Noah who "found grace in the eyes of the Lord"? When God revealed Himself in part to Moses, did he not proclaim "The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,"? Jonah lamented that God would spare Ninevah, "for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. These are but a few examples that we could cite in defense of the merciful nature of our Lord".

What is so often misunderstood about the wrath of God is that it is always conditional. He only executes it in response to man's disobedience ; and even then only after He has waited for a protracted season for man's repentance. Our text guarantees us God's grace and mercy "if ye turn unto him". God is not a sadistic masochist who delights in tormenting his children. On the contrary He tells us, "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."

Graciousness has pervaded the Old Testament drama of God's dealings with sinful men, but the fullest manifestation of this attribute was embodied in the ministry of the Lord Jesus. His every word and action sprang forth from a heart suffused with this quality. And the enduring substance of this graciousness has survived two millennia to find its way to us, the willing and glad beneficiaries of such undeserved mercy.

Have a blessed week,

*Pastor*

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

## Observing the Wind

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*He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.  
– Ecclesiastes 11:4 –*

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The God of Heaven requires faith to find Him, to please Him, and to know Him. As His children, faith is the hallmark of our lives. It needs to define us daily. Faith must be the chief driving principle of our post-conversion, earth-time existence. It will differentiate us from unregenerate men of all stripes and in all seasons. Fear and apprehension may always raise their heads, even in our adopted hearts, but faith must win the day. We are a people of tomorrow because we personally know tomorrow's Maker. Faith thus drives us to be men and women of action. It empowers us to triumphantly seize each moment as opposed to living by our own proud, error-filled plans or carnally reacting to every unforeseen circumstance.

The faith that defines us will therefore give birth to work – His work. James reminds us that faith without works is dead. Any work born of faith is born in heaven, gaining the attention of hell and thus, not surprisingly, fraught with dangerous obstacles. But Solomon wisely reminds us in our text that the farmer cannot allow the spring winds to cause him to neglect the sowing of his fields, nor can he permit the threat of autumn's storms to rob him of his harvest. In like manner, we must not suffer the challenges that face us to deter our intent or stifle our action in the things we must accomplish for our Christ. We are here for a purpose and we must faithfully execute, despite the challenges. We must sow, that we may reap. It is not us but God who yields the increase.

God's work for His children did not cease because of a pandemic. If we have put our faith-filled living and love-borne labor for our Savior on hold (or even semi-hold) because of COVID-19, we have made the horrible mistake of observing the wind and regarding the clouds, thereby stifling our effectiveness for the Kingdom of Heaven. Ecclesiastes 11:6 states, "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand; for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good." When we permit our faith to work, it is certain to produce an increase. The only way we will not prosper for our Master is by sitting by and observing the wind.

-- D. Murcek

## Free Indeed

***And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.***

***John 8:32,36***

Throughout our lifetime we are likely to experience varying degrees of liberation. We don't have to be released from incarceration to know that exhilarating feeling of being set free. Being delivered from homework and tests on the last day of school, setting aside crutches after a time of rehabilitation, or making a final payment on a mortgage all produce some level of a feeling of freedom.

Today's text speaks about the ultimate freedom of being free from the guilt and punishment for our sin. Before our conversion, we spend our lives under the deception and oppression of the spirit of this world. The addictive nature of sin eventually causes us to become its servant. Being in a spiritually blinded condition we become bound to the very thing that separates us from God. Though the chains of sin's bondage are strong, the powerful light of the Truth can shine in our hearts setting our captive heart free. As we yield ourselves to the Lord, the things that have such binding qualities to them no longer hold a strong sway over our life. True conversion delivers us from fear of death which robs us of peace, subjecting us to a lifetime of bondage. Even the imprisonment of the superstitious performance of religious duties is defeated when we know the real truth. The temptation to conform to the pressure of peers is traded for the desire to conform to the image of the Lord. In John 8:36, we are reminded that it is only the Lord who makes us free indeed. Feeble attempts to change our lives for the better are usually short-lived and devoid of the true liberating power that makes us spiritually free.

As believers our lives are not only meant to be free from the physical vices of sin, but also free from mental and emotional things that rob us of our fellowship with the Lord. Today and everyday let us live as children of God that are free indeed. - J. Ekis

## Assumption and Witness

*Therefore we said, Let us now prepare to build us an altar, not for burnt offering, nor for sacrifice: But that it may be a witness between us, and you, and our generations after us, that we might do the service of the LORD before him with our burnt offerings, and with our sacrifices, and with our peace offerings; that your children may not say to our children in time to come, Ye have no part in the LORD.*

*Joshua 22:26-27*

After the Lord had subdued the land of Canaan under the control of Joshua and the Israelites, the two and one-half tribes that had been given their land inheritance east of the Jordan river were given permission to return from the west side, after having assisted the other tribes in the war. As they crossed the Jordan, they built on the east side a large facsimile of the altar in the Shiloh tabernacle. This action was immediately misunderstood by the western tribes as a sign of rebellion against the worship of the Lord centered in the tabernacle on the west side. Our text is part of the explanation given by the eastern tribes to the representatives sent by the western tribes to upbraid them and prepare them for possible civil war. It was clearly a relief that their intent was just the opposite of that assumed by those on the west. Instead, they desired to secure the opportunity for their progeny to continue to serve the one true God of all.

Several lessons emerge from this account. First, how sadly are we inclined to view the actions of others with an immediate assumption of ill intent. At least in this instance the western tribes checked out their assumption before rushing to destructive action. What a different outcome may have ensued without this assessment. Let us as God's people pursue the higher road of giving others the benefit of the doubt, instead of assuming the worst, and promote hopeful inquiry and dialogue to adjust unfounded perceptions. Even in the face of ill intent, should we not hope and work for repentance and reconciliation? Finally, let us appreciate the function of a witness. In whatever form they come, whether a large memorial as this one, or the smallest of tokens, or even the written word, they remind and convince us of promises made, mighty works of God or even man, and relationships secured and cemented in truth.

## Faithful Obedience

*But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year. And he left off talking with him, and God went up from Abraham.*

*And Abraham took Ishmael his son, and all that were born in his house, and all that were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house; and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin in the selfsame day, as God had said unto him.*

*Genesis 17:21-23*

In this chapter God gives the final details of the promised son to be born of Sarah to Abraham, along with the sign of circumcision to symbolize the associated covenant. Abraham's reaction to these details seems to indicate that, up to this point, he was assuming that Ishmael would inherit the former promises made, according to Sarah's plan in the previous chapter. But the details presented were so incredulous in Abraham's mind that he laughed at the thought of such a humanly impossible event, just as Sarah laughed in the following chapter at the same news. But in His mercy God allows for Abraham's human reaction, yet firmly confirms the promise of both the son and the everlasting covenant, before abruptly ending the conversation as He "went up from Abraham." We might tend to assume from Abraham's initial reaction that he did not believe. Yet we see the evidence of his faith when he does with his whole household, *on the selfsame day*, all that God prescribed for the symbol of the promised covenant. As the apostle James would write centuries later, Abraham shows us his faith by his works. In this case his actions speak much louder than the words of his initial reaction. We can be thankful for the mercy of God evidenced by this example. He knows that in our flesh we may sometimes waver, and yet the faith that prevails in our spirit by His Spirit will ultimately result in obedience to His word. The apostle John puts it: "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him." Once Abraham recovered from his brief lapse, he demonstrated once again in his repentance that the ultimate sign of faith is obedience. Let us follow his example and be blessed with faithful Abraham.

# Pastors Thoughts of the Week

## How to Really Succeed

*Joshua 1:8: This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.*

For decades the markets have been flooded with self-help books which purport to provide to its reader the keys to successful living.



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infinitum

Of the writing of these “many books there is no end”. In most cases the only success that has come from these panacean formulas is the financial gain enjoyed by the authors. At the core of these magical tutorials is the belief in one’s self. The theory is that with enough motivation and self confidence anyone can aspire to his loftiest goals. Public schools, the media, entertainers, and athletes keep putting forth the party line that “you can be whatever you want to be”.

Joshua was about to embark on an enterprise that would present formidable challenges. Forty years earlier his countrymen adamantly refused to embrace the campaign citing the seeming invincibility of the adversaries that stood in the way of victory. He had before him only one “How to Succeed” book—God’s Book! To its truths, Joshua assiduously applied his heart, soul, and mind and the guaranteed success was granted.

It is to be understood that spiritual success is not measured by military triumphs or, in the modern context, dollars and cents, social standing, or popularity. There is a far more transcendent prosperity that the Lord has in mind for the students of His word. In this temporal world we all will encounter successes and failures in varying degrees. We live in an imperfect world and must not demand or expect a smooth journey. The Word of God acquaints us with multiple illustrations of those who have fought to win the prize by enduring failure, upset, disappointment, and even untimely death.

Must I be carried to the skies on flow’ry beds of ease,  
while others fought to win the prize,  
and sailed thro’ bloody seas?

Success in this world is a transitory, penultimate experience. Believers are not dazzled by its ephemeral glitter. Even those who have achieved “great success” in this world are often found lamenting that it did not bring the satisfaction that they thought that it would. “Is That All There Is?” is their melancholic paean. Believers who meditate on the promises of God will never fall for that devilish delusion. Proverbs 4:18: But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. The triumph is secure and the victory permanent. We shall enjoy His good success despite whatever earthly disappointments assail us.

Have a blessed week,

Pastor

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

## Praying Like Daniel

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*O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name.*

*– Daniel 9:19 –*

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We learn it in the earliest days of Sunday School – “Dare to be a Daniel”. This prophet’s most recounted legacy amongst the people of God is his courageous defiance of the conspiracy-borne order denying the right to petition anyone but King Darius, the punishment of the Lion’s Den that ensued, and God’s miraculous deliverance of His faithful servant. But it is chapter nine of Daniel that lifts the veil for us as to why this man was greatly beloved and entrusted with God’s power, presence, and purposes.

Bold Daniel was a man of prayer, indeed. A life of faithfulness in this high calling had taught him how to gain heaven’s attention. He understood how to engage Jehovah. A careful reading and meditation upon Daniel’s prayer in chapter nine (which is highly recommended as part of this devotional) reveals a heart that loves his nation, despises its sin, and fears and reveres its God. He adores the Almighty, rehearsing both His character and His covenant, yet he dares not counsel Him. In humility and contrition, he identifies with the nation – “we have sinned”, “unto us belong confusion of faces”, “neither have we obeyed”. And by so doing, he helplessly casts himself and his people before the Lord, earnestly beseeching His mercies, yet standing upon the sure and steadfast ground of God’s promises, jealous for His glory – “for thy city and thy people are called by Thy name.”

Much of our praying never reaches beyond the ceiling because it is more instruction that supplication. We often tell God what we want, when we want it, and how we want it accomplished. Even when the petition is for someone else or for something right and good, we have a tendency to “advise” God why it would be good for Him to listen to us about this matter. This is not prayer. Engaging heaven requires honest humility and contrition. We must own our smallness. We must confess our sins. We must revere our Lord. When we do so, our hearts can then resign to His will. And when in that posture of spirit, as children looking toward their Father, we can secure heaven-blessed earnestness to our petitions, Spirit-borne direction in our requests, and large and wonderful answers from our God who stands ready to do exceedingly above all that we could ask or think when we ask in Christ’s name.

*-- D. Murcek*

## VAIN WORSHIP

*This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me.*

*Matthew 15:8,9a*

The Pharisees and other religious leaders play a large role in the gospel accounts. A Pharisee has been defined as *a member of an ancient Jewish sect, distinguished by strict observance of the traditional and written law, and commonly held to have pretensions to superior sanctity*. They emerged as a distinct group in response to the Maccabean revolt. Wanting to keep their religion pure after cleansing and rededicating the temple they eventually evolved into a system of external religion that was devoid of true and meaningful worship from the heart. Though there were a few exceptions most viewed themselves superior to others and lost sight of the value of the common man and also their own intimate relationship with God. They serve as a warning to us today lest we fall into the same trap.

Our faith and worship were always meant to be with a sincerity that emanates from a thankful heart that has been set free from the imprisonment of self and sin. That is why it is so important for us to often reflect on the extreme sacrifice of our Lord Jesus lest we grow used to this new life and the wonder of it becomes just common. If our outward performance of religious duties causes us to compare ourselves with others who are not measuring up, then we also can fall into the same trap that enslaved the Pharisees. The warning in this text is be certain that our heart does not distance itself from God by falsely comforting ourselves with an external performance of religion. We should always be on guard of allowing our good works to become something to satisfy our prideful flesh. When our hearts are truly close to God, every act of service can be done as an act of worship.

There is certainly an abundance of vain worship that occurs in the name of the Lord. May it not be so with us, but let us dedicate each work as a sincere act of worship of the only One who is worthy.

J. Ekis

## Many Crowns

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*His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written that no man knew, but he himself.*

*– Revelation 19:12 –*

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Our Lord will soon return in unparalleled triumph and glory. John tells us that upon His descent and among the many visible indicators of His august right to rule mankind, Jesus will be wearing “many crowns”. This refers not only to a multiplied number of diadems, but also a diversity of them.

Imperial Roman culture awarded and adorned all levels of citizenry with various types of crowns. Competitors in Roman sport and poetry could achieve the competitor’s crown. In the Roman Legion, crowns were bestowed for various acts of valor including rescuing a besieged garrison, being the first over an enemy wall, or leading a triumphant battle against an enemy. The Caesars famously donned the *Corona Radiata*, or the crown that served to indicate they were not merely a ruler, but a god. In almost all of the Roman cults, the priests’ attire vitally included the sacerdotal crown. Even ordinary Roman citizens could achieve a crown for the courageous act of saving the life of another Roman citizen. Crowns also regularly adorned the bride and groom upon the happy occasion of their nuptials.

John’s climactic reference to Christ’s many crowns thus compounds in its significance. The crowns adorning the pate of our victorious Lord emphasize multiplied and wonderful facets of His person. He has fought all of our battles, competing perfectly by the rules, tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin. At Calvary, He forged over the rampart of hell’s dominion, rescuing us from Satan’s isolating siege, heroically saving our souls from the power of sin. On resurrection morning, Jesus soundly and eternally conquered death and hell so that we need never fear its pangs. He is the loving Bridegroom, gone a long journey, finally returned to consummate His marriage to His glorious and chaste Church. Yes – He is at once our atoning Sacrifice and the Great High Priest of our profession, our wonderful Savior and faithful Friend, the Lover and Redeemer of our souls, the King of Kings, our Lord and our God!

Let us look forward with holy anticipation to that day when we may cast our crowns (which are ours by grace and not by right) before His pierced feet, in sweetest liberty from sin and the curse, singing with unfettered heart and perfected voice in His glorious presence...

*Crown Him with many crowns, the Lamb upon His throne  
Hark how the heavenly anthem drowns all music but its own  
Awake my soul and sing of Him who died for Thee  
And hail Him as thy matchless King through all eternity!*

-- D. Murcek

## Value

*And Abraham bowed down himself before the people of the land. And he spake unto Ephron in the audience of the people of the land, saying, But if thou wilt give it, I pray thee, hear me: I will give thee money for the field; take it of me, and I will bury my dead there.*

*Genesis 23:12-13*

Although he had become materially wealthy in his culture, at this point Abraham owned no real estate in this land promised to him by God. Now that his wife Sarah had died, as a sojourner among the inhabitants of the land, he was faced with the dilemma of needing a burying place. A notable aspect of the character of faithful Abraham is his understanding of the value of property. Even though Ephron the Hittite states that he is willing to give the property to him, Abraham is intent on purchasing the property for its fair value. And although Ephron indicates that the value of the property, 400 shekels of silver, was miniscule between them, indicating the good relationship that Abraham had with his neighbors, Abraham nevertheless followed through with the transaction to purchase the property with the cave of Macpelah for a burying place. He was not willing to simply receive it as a gift, although that could have been a legal transaction there at the gate of the city. He wanted to acknowledge the value of the property, no matter the owner.

Abraham's example teaches us the importance of understanding value. In our present time, there is an overemphasis on the concept of "free". Any product or service provided by others to us has a cost. From a moral sense, we ought to recognize that value. Most of us are willing and even anxious to receive things for free, or for less than their value. But there is something right about a willingness to acknowledge the value of property or services provided to us by others, such that we provide appropriate compensation. Doing so also helps us to better appreciate what is provided, as well as the provider. As representatives of the Lord, we should be, as Abraham, willing to demonstrate our appreciation for the value of others' property or service with proper compensation, treating others as we would have them treat us.