

Empty But Powerful

Then cometh Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie,

John 20:6

When some things are empty, they lose their power to perform the function for which they were designed. A car with an empty gas tank is powerless to move. Guns without bullets are rendered harmless. Water pitchers devoid of water lack the power to quench someone's thirst, and when a person's stomach is empty, they will lack the nourishment and energy to perform simple tasks. In contrast, the empty tomb of the Lord Jesus Christ stands as the powerful force that changed the world.

When Jesus warned His disciples that He must go unto Jerusalem, suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, be killed, and be raised again the third day; Peter rebukes Him saying that this *will not* happen. Later, Jesus also tells Peter that he will deny knowing Him three times, to which Peter replies this *will never* happen. As the plan of Jesus' sacrifice unfolded, Peter denied knowing Jesus, but when the cock crowed, Peter wept bitterly as he remembered the Lord's words. Then as the final judgment of crucifixion occurred, Peter and most of the disciples seemed to go into hiding, fearing for their lives. Three days after Jesus died, Mary Magdalene tells Peter that the stone of the tomb was rolled away and Jesus' body was not there. Hearing her words stirred Peter's interest, but his life was forever changed by investigating it for himself. The empty tomb was the catalyst that caused Peter to remember what the Lord had said. With the powerful message of a risen Savior and the filling of the Holy Ghost, Peter earned the reputation of turning the world upside down. No longer fearing for his life, Peter boldly declared this message. Even after enduring persecution, the apostle rejoiced that he was worthy to suffer for the cause of Christ. Having witnessed the empty tomb, Peter boldly preached the significance of the resurrected Messiah.

The transformational impact of the empty tomb traveled throughout history and continues to this very day. The great commission of going into all the world and preaching the gospel to every creature is the cure for all the ills of this world. The root of this world's chaotic problem is man's internal malady of sin, and all the external attempts to correct the internal problem of sin will fail. The powerful message of the empty tomb and the resurrected Savior always has been and still is God's remedy.

J. Ekis

Heart attack

*For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father.
I Kings 11:4*

This commentary on the latter end of Solomon is reminiscent of a few chapters before, when the young king Solomon had finished his public prayer in dedicating the newly constructed temple to the LORD his God, and then exhorted the people of Israel who were present: “The LORD our God be with us, as he was with our fathers: let him not leave us, nor forsake us: That he may incline our hearts unto him, to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and his statutes, and his judgments, which he commanded our fathers... Let your heart therefore be perfect with the LORD our God, to walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments, as at this day” (I Kings 8:57-61). Although the LORD had personally appeared to Solomon twice in those beginning days, each time with a promise of blessing, both were also tied to a conditional warning (see I Kings 9:6-7). Yet the multitude of wives who turned his old heart away were amassed during his younger days of riches and wisdom. Along his way of apparent success, the younger Solomon had evidently thought himself impervious to the impact that his heathen wives’ idols could have on him. After all, look at all that he had done in the name of the LORD. Surely a man like that could not be swayed to worship any other god but Jehovah. However, the sad commentary in chapter eleven describing the downfall of Solomon illustrates how the heart of man can become more susceptible to attack with age. Just as it is with the physical heart of man, the spiritual heart (i.e., the will and desire) may lose the strength and resolve of its youth after many years of repeated fatigue. For Solomon, he even forgot his own exhortation to the people those many years before, and did not let his own heart therefore be perfect with the LORD his God. Let us apply our hearts to this wisdom and learn the lesson from the experience of Solomon. If we be young, let us avoid or remove those obstacles that may attack our hearts either now or later. Whether young or old, we must continually guard our hearts – our will, desire, and resolve – to test them in the sight of the LORD our God, that they may be upright before Him, especially now in this day of grace, when He will supply through the power of His indwelling Spirit both the cleansing and enabling power to perfect them before Him.

Contrasting Worldviews (Conclusion)

*But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.
– 1 Corinthians 2:15 –*

There is probably no more obvious disparity between secular and biblical worldviews than in the moral sphere. The Law of God and the Gospel of Christ are wholly at odds with the foundational philosophies of the secularists when it comes to the individual.

Secular worldviews teach that man is flawed in practice but good in essence. Here is something that even Democrats and Republicans agree upon! I have heard many a speech by politicians and cultural architects alike extolling man's intrinsic goodness and virtue. But this is not Bible, this is not Gospel. Christ told us that in our natural state, we are of the devil (John 8:44). The gospel declares repeatedly that we are inherently evil, not good (Rom. 3:10-23). The Law of God stands as witness against each of us that all our righteousness is as filthy rags before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

As for meaning in life, secularists find whatever "purpose" they can wholly in their "happiness" and "fulfillment". But the gospel makes clear that our purpose is very real and fathomlessly deep, yet categorically elusive apart from spiritual salvation and redemption. (Luke 19:10; Acts 2:21)

The worldview of secularism teaches that we are all victims of something. Increasingly, there are more and more pills and "therapies" to treat our scarred psyches. We can explain and excuse our behavior by the past, yet never be released from it. But the gospel declares plainly that we will each give an account of ourselves to God (Rom. 14:12; Rev. 20:12), and instead of leaving us here to do nothing but fret over that awful fact, it provides us with a new nature and freedom to live unto God a life that actually pleases Him through our redemption in Christ (John 8:36; Rom. 6-8; Gal. 5:1).

Secularist worldviews are ego-centric. We must love ourselves, believe in ourselves, promote ourselves. This is supposedly the pathway to peace. Unfortunately, it leads to nothing more than a nihilistic perspective, hedonistic behavior, and an overwhelming lack of purpose for those who embrace it. Evidence for this is everywhere, from social media to the penitentiary to the corporate boardroom. The gospel, on the other hand, teaches us to deny ourselves and take up the cross (Mt. 16:24), and to love one another sacrificially, as we have been loved (1 Cor. 12:25-27). This is called the Christian life, and it leads to abundant fulfillment, undaunted hope, joy unspeakable, and a peace that passes understanding (John 10:10; Rom. 15:13).

Many professing Christians these days are embracing non-biblical ideas. Even Bible believers are being massaged via the media and culture into receiving at least some of these secularist viewpoints. Let us be circumspect! There is no fellowship between a biblical perspective and a secular one. We have the mind of Christ, we need not entertain the devil's concoctions. Let us be confident in our Bibles. -- D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Wokeness

Ephesians 5:14: Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.

The devil's people believe that they are the final arbiters of truth. They have it all figured out and if one dares to voice a contrarian opinion, they are to be canceled and sent to Orwellian "re-education" sessions in "room 101" where his face is torn off by rats until he is forced into submission. "Wokeness" is the watchword of the uber elites who have advanced their agenda on the American psyche by having seized control of public education, Twittersphere, social media, Hollywood, TV, and entertainment. This hydra-headed beast spews out a volatile and lethal venom, leaving the afflicted victims neutered of any moral compunction. Satan's Prophets of Wokeness are the educators who begin their insidious indoctrination from daycare up to advanced degree studies on college campuses. President Biden succinctly stated his twisted logic to a gaggle of teachers at the White House last week; "They're not somebody else's children; they're like yours when they're in the classroom." The shocking reality is that teachers spend an average of 30 hours per week influencing their students. After school, children are absorbed in some form of media via the internet, or tv programming accounting for another 40 hours a week. Once developed, the adult mind becomes resistant to change its worldview. And the influence is palpable, if not universal. Blessed are those who, by the grace of God," *have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*".

So then those who claim to be "woke" are really quite asleep to the saving truth of the gospel. To these the apostle pleads, "Awake thou that sleepest!" The devil has injected the minds of the masses with a spiritual pentothal whose soporific effects lead inevitably to spiritual death. But as certainly as after four days, Christ raised the putrefied corpse of Lazarus, so has He that same power to infuse life in those who sleep the "sleep of death". Psalms 13:3: Consider and hear me, O LORD my God: lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death;

Believers are often lulled into torpidity as well and must assiduously avoid the stupefying influences of the lost generation that besets us at so many levels. *Romans 13:11-14: And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.*

Walk in the truth,

Pastor

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

But...

The wicked are overthrown, and are not: but the house of the righteous shall stand. ~ Proverbs 12:7

The book of Proverbs is classified as one of the poetical books of the Bible. Inspired by God, its nine hundred plus verses impart wisdom to us that apply to our daily life. For the most part, one or two verses address a certain topic before moving on to another truth. More than one-quarter of the verses are in antithetical form. It will state one condition and then interject with the conjunction “but” before highlighting an opposite condition. These numerous “buts” are to remind and encourage us that God’s truth will always prevail.

Today, we will look at just one verse that contrasts the wicked and the righteous. Ever since the fall of Adam, sin has infiltrated all of creation. A cursory look at history reveals how mankind has manifested wickedness. Evil people often dominate the headlines, and all have one thing in common; from dictators to outlaws, their careers eventually come to an end. Several verses of Psalm 37 remind us of this. The first two verses state Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. Then later, verses 35-36 confirm that truth - I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found.

In contrast to this consistent outcome for the wicked, today’s verse reminds us that the house of the righteous shall stand. The righteous can stand because their righteousness is not self-manufactured but grounded in faith in Christ Jesus. The Lord is the unshakeable foundation of their life. During times of trials, believers may feel themselves wavering, but when their feet stand firmly on God’s promises, they come through the trial strengthened. When believers delight and meditate in God’s word, their spiritual feet are firmly planted in truth. Refreshed by divine rivers of water, God’s children bring forth fruit in their season, and eternal life is promised. This is not the case for the ungodly.

We live in a day when, as the Bible says, evil men shall wax worse and worse. Wrong seems to have become right, and many are caught in this evil current. The farther our culture strays from preserving Biblical influences, the more wickedness will become the norm. If temptation is threatening to pull us away from the Lord, we must reset our course with another verse from Proverbs: Treasures of wickedness profit nothing: BUT righteousness delivereth from death.

J. Ekis

Cause of Estrangement

That I may take the house of Israel in their own heart, because they are all estranged from me through their idols.

Ezekiel 14:5

Though Christianity has liberated many cultures and people from the bondage of paganism, idol worship is still prevalent in our modern world. The days of human sacrifices to false deities have ended, but you can still find places where other forms of sacrifices are made to manmade images. Not only does idol worship subject its adherents to some harmful practices, but it also alienates people from a relationship with the one and only true God.

In the Old Testament, the chief sin of God's chosen people was idolatry. Having no other gods, and not making any graven image was at the forefront of the Commandments. Though Israel experienced times of revival, idol worship would eventually resurface causing estrangement from Jehovah. Israel's decline became so great that they adopted the practices of the surrounding pagan cultures. Failing to heed God's warnings sent by His prophets, the nation Israel consequently fell into captivity by invading nations. Eventually returning to their Promised Land, their spiritual blindness continued to alienate them from a right relationship with God. Rejecting their Messiah, their estrangement will continue until the future time when they will repent and turn to Him.

The lifesaving message of Christ crucified has brought multitudes out from the darkness of false beliefs to the liberating light of the truth. Seeing through the fallacy of man-made images and false deities, believers should be wary of other types of idolatry that can subtly creep into their lives. The first epistle of John, which was written to believers, concludes with this warning "little children, keep yourselves from idols". This first-century warning is not only speaking to the infant church, but also God's children today.

When a time of estrangement comes upon us, could it be that we have allowed some undetected form of idolatry into our life? It need not be some graven image; it can be a person, an activity, our agenda, or our self-will. When we give priority to the wrong things in our life, we can crowd out the fullness of God's presence. As believers, may we quickly detect any decline in our relationship with our Heavenly Father through the Holy Spirit. If some form of idolatry is revealed, may we be ready and willing to allow the grace of God to give us the power to cast away the idol and return to having sweet fellowship with our loving Lord.

J. Ekis

Meditative worship

I will love thee, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.
Psalm 18:1-2

Here is an example of proper meditation. As one of the psalms that has a rather extensive explanatory heading, we are told that David wrote this upon the occasion of deliverance from all his enemies, and, in particular, from Saul. His first response is to remember his love for the LORD as he contemplates that He is his strength, especially in the face of his enemies. Then David is drawn by that simple yet profound thought to enumerate the facets of that strength that the LORD supplies.

He moves first to one of his favorite expressions with respect to the strength and protection of the LORD – his rock. This does not mean a stone that is thrown, but rather a lofty, craggy rock that provides a place of protection. He expands on this meaning by adding that He is his fortress, like a castle or strong place of defense. Then, as he contemplates this place of protection provided by the LORD, he recognizes the LORD his deliverer, as His protective hand delivered him from Saul and other enemies. He then must stop to recognize that the LORD God - Jehovah, the almighty God and creator of all, is his own God. As such, as he reiterates the delivering strength from God, he reminds himself that he must trust in his God. He can trust Him for protection just as assuredly the soldier would hold up his trusty buckler – the shield worn on the forearm in hand-to-hand combat – against the strikes of an enemy. Then, as the powerful horn of a beast so endued provides its deliverance, so David remarks that the LORD is his own horn of salvation from his enemies. He finishes this list of facets of God's personal deliverance with the metaphor of a high tower, which provides a place of refuge, as well as defense from the most strategic vantage point.

Let us learn from David the proper attitude and art of meditation and worship. In consideration of a single aspect of His nature for which we ought to be grateful, we can allow the preponderance of the LORD's related attributes to reverberate in our minds, hearts, and souls, to amplify our worship, praise, and adoration of His excellence.

Things We Know

But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ...
– 2 Peter 3:18 –

The older I get, the more I realize I don't know. It can be overwhelming at times. But the old saying, "It's not what you know, but who you know" is a pithy reminder for believers that while much in this world may escape our grasp, there is a priceless experiential knowledgebase to our existence that became our property when we fled for refuge to the hope that is in Christ.

"We know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now" (Romans 8:22). There is a reasonable explanation for the deteriorating condition of the universe. The scientific law of entropy makes sense and is explained by the curse. This helps us to honestly rationalize the most painful events in this life.

"I know that in my flesh dwelleth no good thing" (Rom. 7:18). Paul's inspired words encapsulate the perspective of every honest heart. When our measure is only ourselves or others, we are not being wise (2 Cor. 10:12). An open weighing of our hearts before God leaves us with the stark realization that there is nothing good or commendable about us. This is a vital thing to know.

Yet because of the redemption that we received in Christ, "...we know that we are of God, and that the whole world lieth in wickedness" (1 John 5:19). Despite our inward unworthiness, the Spirit took up residence in response to our faith. Someone moved in and reminds us that we are not our own. Because that abiding Guest within is Holy, we realize that this world with all its wickedness is not our home, so we need not get comfortable and settle down in this City of Destruction. Life will be a battle.

But even though life is a battle, it is one in which we have the upper hand. This is because we "know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings" (Philippians 3:10). Our spiritual knowledge is not just informational, but personal – and the Lord Jesus is that Person. We know Whom we have believed, and that fully persuades us that He is keeping us against the coming day (2 Tim. 1:12).

Speaking of that future day, we know quite a bit. For "we know that we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). That risen Man in glory is the sum of God's thoughts concerning us, and He has predestinated us to be conformed to His image. We can boldly assert with Job, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh will I see God" (Job 19:25-26).

Are these not wonderful things to know? Let us live today in the power of this knowledge and grow therein. -- D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

The Good Way

Jeremiah 6:16: Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein.

Choosing between the good and the evil way is an oft-repeated theme throughout the Bible. From that fateful Adamic decision to forsake innocence and to know evil, man has been offered the two ways of good or evil. When Moses set before the people blessing or cursing, he urged the people to "choose life". Similarly, Joshua laid the proposition before the people: "choose you this day whom ye will serve". Elijah questioned the idolatrous people "How long halt ye between two opinions?" Jesus spoke of the two ways, one broad way that leads to eternal ruin and that straight and narrow way that leads to eternal life.

The prophet portrays the image of a man standing at the crossroads and having to choose between that broad path where so many of his companions were traveling or an old worn path that presented obstacles and unseen perils but nonetheless was known to be "the good way". In Robert Frost's poem Two Roads, the poet paints a similar image. Here stands a man at a crossroads having to choose which way to proceed. After some deliberation he wisely

"took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference".

It can be quite intimidating when one finds himself on that road less traveled. How few are those who can withstand the societal pressures to be "up-to-date" and to "fit in". But God's children have always been called to be peculiar people whose delight is in being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. And the text above assures us "ye shall find rest for your souls".

Walk in His Good Way,

Pastor

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

Little Instructional Things

Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, Provideth her meat in summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest.
(Proverbs 6: 6-8)

God has given us His word for instruction and has also provided pastors and teachers to edify believers. The Lord's creative hand has designed lessons in the physical world to strengthen His children. Dynamic things like lightning, tornadoes, and earthquakes easily capture our attention, but there are great lessons to glean from the small and simple things which are often overlooked.

Today's text instructs us to consider the ant. For the most part, ants are viewed as pests and uninvited as they invade picnics and our kitchens. Being anxious to rid ourselves of this pest, we can fail to observe the lessons which God designed for them to teach us. If we stop and study the diminutive ant, there are several things to notice. First, the ant is industrious. Rarely do they appear to be static, but rather they always seem to be moving with purpose, gathering any available food. Their food supply is stashed away in some unseen location, providing an immediate source of nourishment and a surplus for the coming winter. The ants' coordinated teamwork requires no leader; because each seems to know their responsibilities and readily share the workload. They have intuitive knowledge to take advantage of present opportunities to provide for the future. Their example of persistence illustrates the law of sowing and reaping. As they sow the efforts to gather for the future, they reap the rewards at the end of the harvest season.

Considering the ways of the ant can help us in this present life, while also providing vision in preparing for our eternal future. Throughout the scriptures, there are verses that admonish us to be industrious. We are told that what we do with our hand, we should do with our might and for the Lord's glory. Our labor should provide a surplus from which to share with those in need, and we should enjoy the good in our labor. The Lord instructs us to occupy with the talents He has given us.

As believers, we should be aware of the time we are given here in this temporal life to make eternal investments by first having our name entered in the Lamb's Book of Life, and then offering our life in sacrificial service to the Lord. Performing acts of kindness, and scattering soul-saving seeds of the gospel now, will pay rich rewards when we enter heaven's gates while hearing the Lord say "well done, good and faithful servant".

J. Ekis

Know the glory

*For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.
Habakkuk 2:14*

As Habakkuk unloads his burden that was given to him from the LORD, he describes tumultuous times. The nation is living in rebellion against the living God. It is full of violence, lawlessness, wickedness, oppression of righteousness, and wrong judgment. As a result, the LORD promised to raise up their enemies against them, to execute His righteous judgment against iniquity. Habakkuk's vision continues to describe the iniquity of the people as well as of their enemy, including pride, drunkenness, and covetous practices. In addition, those practicing these sins also foist them on others and expose the sinfulness of both. He continues to expose their shame, nakedness, and illogical and senseless idolatry. Yet, every so often, as in our text, he "comes up for air" and proclaims a contrasting hope for the few remaining who are faithful to the LORD. No matter what insanity of sinful devices the surrounding world is driven to, or is running to, the truth is that a day of judgment and restoration shall come, where the earth shall be completely filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD.

This is evidenced even in our times, when the promoters of evil and professed unbelief, who claim to reject God and His word, continue to demand that their sin be accepted as normal and right. Why is this so? Perhaps because the knowledge of the glory of the LORD still witnesses in the conscience, which mankind is trying to sear, that His holy law continues to be the truth, no matter how loudly they scream and fight against it or try to subdue its voice. Let us pray that those consciences will still be able to see some glimmers of the light that "lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John 1:9), and that those that continue to hope in the truth of this text will reflect that light.

Spiritual Alzheimer's

*Now when John had heard in prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him,
Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?*

– Matthew 11:2-3 –

My father and my uncles were afflicted in their later years with Alzheimer's disease. A frequent mark of the disease is the loss of short-term memory. My dad often reverted to the distant past, recounting stories from long ago, and then repeating them over and over, because the recollection of recent events just wasn't there anymore. It is a hard thing to helplessly watch your hero lose his greatest gift.

In Herod's prison, a hero of the faith seems to have suffered a case of spiritual Alzheimer's. It had not been very long ago that John the Baptist had humbly submitted to Jesus at the river Jordan and baptized the Lord. John's mission was acutely to prepare the way for the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. John was also the recipient of a special revelatory confirmation from Heaven when he saw the Spirit descending like a dove upon Jesus and the voice of the Father Himself witnessing, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." John knew so much. His spiritual insight into God's plan was second to none. Jesus attested that of them that are born of women, none was greater than John the Baptist. So how could it be that this spiritual giant experienced such a degree of doubtful amnesia that he commissioned an embassy to actually accost the Lord with the direct question of His Messianic identity, "Art thou he...or look we for another?"

How often do we find ourselves in John's position, bound in the prison of sorrow or dissolution? Things have not worked out the way we would have written the story. There is a seeming inequity as we have assiduously followed His leading, yet we sit here in the Slough of Despond as the Herods of the world feast sumptuously in the palace above. We search for light from our past dealings with the Lord, but find no answers to our present affliction of soul. All the while, we have missed the meaning of His working in the most immediate events of our lives, deaf to His still, small voice within, and forgetful of His promise that He is with us still, even here.

Let us be careful to ward off spiritual forgetfulness. We have a more powerful position than John with an abiding Holy Ghost within the breast. We need not succumb to the temptation of doubt and despair because of any present distress. The same God that saved us is with us now, no matter how dark the moment. The same Christ we met at Calvary will never leave us nor forsake us. He that began the good work in us will carry it to completion, and is working all things together for good for us who love God and who have been called according to His purpose. Let us resolutely remember His promise and purposefully live in the light of His presence. -- D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Our Safety Net

*Deuteronomy 33:27: The eternal God is thy refuge,
and underneath are the everlasting arms.*

Karl Wallenda had been performing stunts since he was six years old. He was trained to walk on a high wire, cycle across a tightrope, and balance as one of a seven-man pyramid. Never was a safety net used. For him, it seemed, nothing was impossible. But on March 22, 1978, the world watched in horror as Karl Wallenda fell to his death. As he attempted to walk across a high wire strung between the two towers of the Condado Plaza Hotel in San Juan, Puerto Rico, the 73-year-old Wallenda lost his balance when a sudden gust of wind caused him to teeter on the wire for 30 heart-stopping seconds before plummeting headlong from 10 stories up.

Life on earth can be likened to crossing a chasm on a tightrope, while the unpredictable dangers of a sudden, swirling wind can threaten to plunge us to an inevitable death at any moment. So many are like Karl Wallenda who prefer to traverse the high wire of life without a safety net. What folly it is to forsake the promised, protective hand of the Almighty while depending on one's own wit and will to retain equilibrium against the fortunes of the unpredictable circumstances of life.

For the believer, it is an unmeasurable comfort to know that the "everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth" is monitoring our every move. And when we are in the most precarious circumstances "having done all to stand" we are assured that "underneath are the everlasting arms". Just a chapter before our text we find in 32:11: *As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings.* And such is God's protective superintendence of His children. It is an oft-repeated Biblical motif and with those multiplied promises the believer has been furnished with the perfect safety net. *Jude 1:24: Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, Jude 1:25: To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.*

Be blessed in His keeping power,

Pastor

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

Confession of faith

And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.

Matthew 15:27

The Canaanite woman in this account came to Jesus when He and His disciples came into the region of Phoenicia near the northwestern border of Galilee. We are not told anything about how or what she knew of Jesus. It could be that news of His miracles had traveled across the border into this Gentile territory. It is also possible that He had taught or demonstrated His works in this place after arriving there, since there is no timeframe given between their arrival and her approach to Jesus. Whatever the case, it is clear that she had sufficient knowledge of the faith of the Israelite nation across the border and of Jesus, to call Him her Lord and the Son of David. Such terminology would have to come from knowledge of the Messianic prophecies of the Hebrew scriptures and of the works and words of Jesus demonstrating that He was, in fact, the anointed Son of David who was promised to come.

So, with deep concern for her demon-possessed daughter, she first comes confessing her faith in Him as Messiah, and as her Lord, or master. Yet Jesus' initial response was to ignore her. His disciples' response indicates that she nevertheless continued to cry out for mercy on her daughter. At that point, Jesus speaks, either to her or about her, that His mission is to the lost sheep of Israel, implying that her Gentile state disqualified her from mercy. At these two seemingly harsh responses, many would have departed, and perhaps even disdained the apparently bigoted prophet from Galilee. Yet her response was to come to Him and worship, which implies that she fell or bowed before Him, begging for help.

His third response might be considered most severe, where He uses the common term of the Israelites for the Gentiles, saying "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." It is to this that her reply in our text reveals much about this woman. First, "Truth," demonstrates her recognition that her spiritual need was much greater than her need for esteem. Next, "Lord," reveals that she knew that there was no one else with the remedy that she needed. Finally, as she confesses that His estimation of her unworthiness is correct, she continues in faith to believe that He has the overabounding sufficiency to meet her need in addition to all that He came to do for Israel. His final response, "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt," pronounces to her the passing grade on her test of faith. We have much to learn and follow from this example.

Taking Advantage of Greater Resources

The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks;

Proverbs 30:26

There are plenty of situations in life where the strong, or the most advantaged, do not always come out on top. Throughout history, there have been battles that were won because of the inferior taking advantage of resources beyond their natural strength. The American Revolution illustrates this. From a skill and material standpoint, the American colonists should never have won the Revolution; yet outside resources enabled them to prevail. The epic conflict of David and Goliath still stands as an inspiration to the weak and vulnerable.

Today's text mentions the conies, which were passive rabbit-like creatures that lived in the middle east. Their lack of great strength and mild nature made them very vulnerable to aggressive predators. To compensate for their weakness, they found protection by nesting in the rocks. The strength and narrow crevasses of the stone outcrops gave them protection from dangerous carnivores. Being aware of their frailty, the conies utilized the strong protection of the rocks. Knowing how to utilize outside resources can provide even the most vulnerable with what is needed to thrive in a hostile world.

As believers, we can glean spiritual applications from the lowly cony. There is a vast difference between physical strength and spiritual strength. Recognizing that our spiritual strength cannot be conjured up from our will, but rather it is developed by assimilating the truth of God's word into our daily life. Desiring the sincere milk of the word nourishes our spiritual muscles and enables us to grow. Thinking that we can stand on our own in times of temptation only sets the trap for a fall. As the Apostle Paul learned, there is strength available for our weakness; and when we learn to trust the Lord, we too become strong. The metaphor of the Lord as our rock is used throughout the scriptures. When we are overwhelmed, He is the rock that is higher than us. Not just hearing the Lord speak, but also applying what He says, is like building our spiritual house upon a rock. With a strong foundation, when the storms of life assail us, we can endure the assault, standing firmly on the rock of our salvation. He is the smitten Rock of Horeb, that can refresh us with life-sustaining water. He is the rock, wherein is a cleft for us to enter for a better view of our loving Lord who was wounded for our transgressions.

Every day we can retreat as the conies to the safety of the rocks. From this position of strength, we need not fear the enemy while singing praise to God, for He is our rock, our fortress, our deliverer, our strength in whom we trust! ~J. Ekis

The Days of Noah

*But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.
– Matthew 24:37 –*

As I pen this devotional, the sky is foreboding. There is a massive storm on the horizon, and the pellets of rain can be heard pattering against the windows of my house. It is no surprise. The weather forecast predicted that this front was moving through, and that today is going to be a very rainy day. How common this is for us – to know that a storm is coming before it arrives.

It should have been so in the days of Noah as well. That preacher of righteousness faithfully warned his generation of God's coming watery judgment. The fact that he was building a boat in the middle of dry land was a witness to everyone that what the man said, he believed. Yet no one fled for refuge. They were content to face the storm, if, as they viewed things, it ever came.

Jesus warned us that the days immediately preceding His return and reclamation of the earth would be like the days of Noah. In our generation, we are witnessing mankind's near total incredulity toward God's warning of judgement to come. Most of the world has categorically dismissed the Bible altogether, and the professing church has overemphasized God's grace and mercy to the exclusion of His righteousness and wrath against sin to a point that the salt is soon to be cast out and trodden under foot of men. Yet the pitter patter of a coming fiery flood is already starting to fall, and it appears that only the watchful can hear it.

The days of Noah were violent. Genesis 6:11 tells us that violence filled the earth. What started between brothers east of Eden had exponentially increased. Beatings, rape, and murder were common occurrences in those days. Today, violent crime is climbing, bolstered by lunatic political ideologies like defunding the police. Islam, that satanic worldwide religion, boasts of honor killings and beheadings on a daily basis. And nationally, wars and rumors of wars, even to nuclear conflagration, swirl. The earth today is certainly filled with violence.

The days of Noah were corrupt. All flesh had corrupted God's way (Genesis 6:12). Given the context of Genesis 6, this is a reference to the sexual deviance of Noah's day. Mankind had so polluted the waters of human sexuality and procreation that God was left with no choice but to decimate the world. This sexual perversion recycled itself locally post-flood, from the Canaanites down to our present day. But never since Noah's day has this corruption reached such a militant pitch, global reach, and threatening crescendo. Our generation is beginning to experience the decadent societal death-spiral that Noah and his family endured so long ago.

The days of Noah were evil. The imagination of man's heart was only evil continually. Today, it seems that evil advances daily. Mankind now openly glories in its shame. God's patience is waning. Christian – look up, your redemption draws nigh! Live loudly, engage the lost, and resolutely occupy. The Judge stands at the door. -- D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Worth the Wait

Habakkuk 2:3: For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.

At least four millennia elapsed before the promised people witnessed the coming of their messiah. Hope deferred maketh the heart sick causing many to abandon the expectation of their prophesied deliverance. After the "fulness of time" had come there were very few who, like Joseph of Arimathea, "waited for the kingdom". And so Jesus "came to his own and his own received him not". It wasn't for a lack of evidential signs and wonders that the people rejected Him, for a myriad of daily miracles were on display in every town that Jesus had visited, providing incontrovertible certification as to His divine authority. The people had simply stopped waiting and were found trapped in a blinded stupor.

In these latter times, we are likewise apt to fall prey to this same spiritual lethargy. The unbelievers hurl at us that sneering taunt "where is the promise of his coming?"; and at the same time the self-assured theologians seek to undermine the hope of His coming by their preterist rantings. (The devil is equally comfortable in the cloak of the scoffing professor or in the ecclesiastical robes of a clergyman.) Despite these formidable assaults the believer must not abandon that "blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" "For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry".

Employing the medium of the *Theater of the Absurd*, Samuel Beckett wrote the tragicomedy *Waiting for Godot* in which two characters engage in a variety of discussions and encounters while awaiting the titular Godot, who never arrives. When queried on the meaning of his play, Beckett adamantly refused to discuss who Godot was, leaving the door open for multiple interpretations. Since the unspoken creed of all existentialists is that there is no final meaning to life, it would account for Beckett's unwillingness to ascribe any absolute meaning to his writing. It seems evident that, owed to the similarity of the name Godot, Beckett meant to imply God and that the waiting for Him would prove to be a lesson in futility. Sadly many of our lost generation have bought into that fabrication and as a result have pined away in a hopeless nihilism, believing that there is nothing beyond this temporal existence.

The Lord of Glory will have the last word. Be assured that "yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry". Faith and hope require patience and waiting for God to accomplish His hidden operation. It is well worth the wait.

Pastor

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

Be Content

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.

Hebrews 13:5

We are bombarded daily in this culture with advertisements aimed at convincing us that we need more. We are amazed at a population saturated with abundance of things when they react to news media threats from would-be forecasters by clearing the store shelves to hoard even more. And none of us is immune to the temptation to wonder if perhaps some of these claims may be correct. But in the midst of a world in disarray, we have the comfort of our Lord reminding us that He is our sufficiency. No matter what unforeseen events may come upon us in this life, we can rest in the everlasting promise that our God is with us. Whether we lack wealth or health or more convenient conditions, the promise of never being forsaken by our heavenly Father can be our source of contentment. The apostle Paul reminded Timothy that godliness with contentment is great gain. And from a cold, dark Roman jail cell he was able to tell the Philippians that he was content whether abased or abounding, yet was thankful for the loving gift that they had sent his way. None of this is normal human reaction. It is learned from hiding in the Rock of our salvation and believing the promises of His presence with His own. Let this reminder establish, strengthen, and settle our hearts and souls. *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)