

Concerning Zeal

*For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me.
– Psalm 69:9 –*

The Apostle John cites our text in its Messianic application to our Lord's cleansing of the Temple (John 2:17). This coincides with other Messianic prophecies found in Isaiah and Ezekiel that most certainly describe the zealousness of the Master and His work (Isa. 9:17; 37:32; 63:15; Ezk. 5:13). Zeal for God was surely the invisible cloak that our Savior donned during his meteoric ministry. The Father's honor was what drove the Lord Jesus. As the Son of Man, the last Adam, Christ was consumed with advancing the Kingdom of Heaven. In truth, if the holy zeal that characterized our Lord had been missing from His Life, there would be cause to question His identity as the Savior of the world – it was that integral to His Person and work. And if Christ was so zealous for God in the days of His flesh, ought not we, His disciples, have a holy zeal as a defining trait of our spiritual lives?

What is zeal? It is an animating energy, an enveloping enthusiasm, a consuming passion. It is a person being anything but passive. It can be and often is the misdirected possession of lost souls. As such, it can stir a pot and create significant temporal disruption, even for wrong purposes and to wrong ends. (Prior to conversion, Saul of Tarsus himself was zealous for God, but not according to knowledge (Rom 10:2)). But when zeal becomes the possession of Spirit-filled men and women, it carries a dynamic and hell-shattering power. It wells up within and erupts with volcanic fury from a soul consumed with God and His Word. It serves as its own fortress because it places the believer on a pummeling offense. It does not pull or push, but drives. It scatters the powers of darkness and puts them in a scrambling retreat. It cannot co-exist with mediocrity or dishonesty. It is a powerful force for the spiritual infant, and even more so for the seasoned saint. It repels the hypocrite, attracts the seeking, and encourages the faint-hearted. In short, zeal is a critical ingredient to meeting out God's purpose for our lives.

How zealous are you for our Master, dear reader? Beware, for there are many things that can quench our passion for the Savior. If our walk is devoid of zeal, something is wrong. Let us rush to Calvary to recapture our gratitude, reset our hearts, and re-ignite our zeal for the One Who loved us so that He shed His blood to save our undeserving souls. This will ensure that we are always zealously affected in a good thing (Gal. 4:18). – D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

The Day of Decision

I Kings 18:21: And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.

It was time to decide. Fence straddling was verboten to the people of God and the choice couldn't have been more obvious. As often is the case, the devil worshippers were in the majority. Elijah lamented, "I only, am left". Four hundred fifty prophets of Baal versus one man of God, but the true saints of God are not intimidated by disproportionate odds for "If God be for us who can be against us". But alas, the opportunity to shrug off the temporary miasma of idolatry and stand up for the true and living God was met with a deafening silence. Their deficient faith demanded evidence before they would make a commitment. Elijah stood alone in his unshakeable faith-a faith that was soon validated by the God who answered by fire. After the fire fell the sottish children of Israel gave glory to God but this would be proven to be temporary as will always be the matter with faith that depends on signs and wonders.

In our present distress, we, like Elijah, find ourselves defending the one and true Lord in the face of the formidable forces of unbelief on one side and the withering, witness of the lukewarm church on the other. Jesus allowed for no middle ground in the matter of commitment: "He that is not with me is against me". The lukewarm and undecided will find their soul in great jeopardy at the final hour.

So saints of God, stand up, stand up for Jesus! Believe Him when it seems that the whole world has pledged allegiance to Baal. Soon the fire of judgment will fall and only those whose faith was genuine will endure.

Maranatha,

Pastor

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

The Place of Restoration

... and came to Jesus, and found the man, out of whom the devils were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind ...

Luke 8:35

Currently, there is a promotion of information about mental health. There seems to be an increase in the instability of people in our world. Fear-mongering in social media, drugs, fractured family structures, civil unrest, and divisive politics could be a few of the contributing factors. In these stressful and uncertain times, it is important to find a quiet place of solitude to experience peace and refocus the mind on eternal things that are unaffected by things of this world.

Like many people today, the maniacal Gadarene was a tormented and troubled soul. The text does not give us any details of how he became so possessed by many devils, but this individual was most likely given over to the idolatrous practices of the times. Whatever the case, the maniac's condition had dominated his life. Controlled by a tormented mind that was set on self-inflicted harm and an obsession with the dead, the maniac resisted and overcame all attempts to tame him. Only One could penetrate the dark cloud that enveloped him- Jesus, the Light of the World. After our Lord cast out the maniac's demons, we find this troubled soul restored, at peace, and sitting at the feet of his Deliverer. Spiritually made new, the maniac then goes about proclaiming what great things Jesus had done unto him. On the heels of this account, we find Jairus, the ruler of a synagogue, falling at the feet of Jesus pleading for the life of his dying daughter. Troubled with an overwhelming burden, like the maniac, Jairus also finds relief for his daughter and himself at the feet of the Giver of Life and Great Burden Bearer, Jesus.

Through the course of this life, every one of us will encounter trouble of varying degrees. These trials can spawn a plethora of emotions that can consume our thoughts and lives. As believers, we know and trust that God is working out His plan; yet when we are in the midst of trials, it seems difficult to dismiss fearful thoughts. The devil, the great tormenter and enemy of our soul, delights to oppress us in times of testing. We must remember and be resolved to place ourselves at the feet of Jesus. It is at His feet that we can be liberated to worship! It is there that we pray, and it is there that we praise. His feet are those that trod this troubled world to be the Savior and Good Shepherd for all. It is there that as sinners we can find eternal life, and as believers, we can refocus and find our faith and peace restored. Take time to go there often; take time to go there today! J. Ekis

Golden moments

Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.

Matthew 7:12

How many of us were taught some version of this “golden rule” during our childhood training? Perhaps we didn’t all learn it in the context of the law and the prophets, but it would have been an admonition as we began to deal with the intricacies of interpersonal relationships, starting maybe around the age of two or three. Its principle appeals to our common sense when we are faced with its simple logic, yet it has no appeal to our human nature. This rule is much more easily acknowledged with the mind than followed through the practice of the will. Even in the acknowledgment, we would in many cases turn it around and interpret it as not harming others because we would not want them to harm us. But this is not the emphasis. Jesus states it in the positive sense, in the context of treating others as the Heavenly Father does. This could easily lead us to conclude with the apostle Paul, “O wretched man that I am!” (Romans 7:24)

The truth is that no person can ultimately follow the golden rule without the work and aid of the Spirit of God. While we may make some successful attempts now and then, these are usually in the “easier” category; for example, to support a charity, help the destitute, make a loan to a friend, visit the sick, etc. The bigger challenges come when our internal spirit is provoked. In the context where Luke records the golden rule (Luke 6:31), Jesus goes on to say that to help our friend is trivial, but what He’s really talking about is loving our enemies. However, some cases may not even be that challenging. The test may come when our friend’s word “strikes a nerve” or a worn area in our spirit, and we react in retaliatory words, instead of considering their context and responding with edifying words. So Jesus rightly said that our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, because we desperately need the mind of the Spirit to overcome such selfish behavior. As the world about us becomes more antagonistic, let us plead for the Holy Spirit of God to fill our hearts and minds with golden motives and ways, that we may reflect Him in every moment.

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Burdens Are Lifted At Calvary

Matthew 23:4: For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.

Whether it be prince or priest, it is a common foible of those who ascend to power to enjoy their status by exempting themselves from the laws they legislate for those whom they perceive to be "beneath" them. The Pharisee hypocritically thanked God "that I am not as other men are" and so exempted himself from certain mundane labor that was not befitting to a man of his stature. What resentment is engendered amid the masses towards this kind of arrogance. When Nehemiah embraced the task of rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem he found "their nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord". Paul found a similar attitude amongst the Thessalonians which caused him to command "if any would not work, neither should he eat".

"Do as I say, not as I do" has become a familiar bromide artfully employed to describe the deplorable actions of the hypocrite. The Hollywood elite as well as the duplicitous politicians love to excoriate the "little people" for driving gas-guzzling cars while they consume one hundred times that amount to jet set on the Rivera or to fly off to a Climate Change conference in the Bahamas. Of course, they view their own lives to be more important than the insignificant commoners who support their opulent lifestyles with oppressive taxes and expensive media purchases. Psalms 37:13: The Lord shall laugh at him: for he seeth that his day is coming. Luke 1:52: He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away. The kingdom of God will be administered with perfect egalitarianism.

The omnipotent Lord from heaven humbled himself and became our yokefellow bearing the heavy burden in our behalf or as Isaiah eloquently phrased it "In all their affliction he was afflicted". Our heart is magnetically drawn to such a Lord who so loves His people that He inserted himself into the arena of humanity and became the Captain of our salvation by bearing our sin debt in toto.

Days are filled with sorrow
Days are filled with sorrow and care
Hearts are lonely and drear
Burdens are lifted at Calvary
Jesus is very near
Troubled soul, the Savior can see
Every heartache and tear
Burdens are lifted at Calvary
Jesus is very near

Rest in His Peace and Power,

Pastor

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

The Spirit of the Lord

And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD

– Isaiah 11:2 –

The same Spirit of God that rested upon our Lord Jesus resides in the heart of every New Testament believer. He is our continuous Companion, our earnest of the purchased possession of our redemption. He comforts and convicts us along life's daily path. He leads us into all truth. He perfects our feeble prayers and makes them fit for the throne of grace. The flesh lusts against Him, and He against the flesh. The Spirit strives to own our hearts so that we may fulfill His purpose in and through us. He does not leave us, but it is our prerogative as to how full we are of His power. While we live and move and have our being here, we possess the ability to either grieve and quench Him, or to yield to Him and walk in His might.

It is good to stop frequently and take personal inventory of the evidence of the Spirit's working in our lives. Our text in Isaiah 11:2 can serve as one of the guideposts for such an exercise. There are six characteristics of the Spirit of God that are outlined in this short verse. These can serve us well for a hearty self-examination.

The Holy Spirit is a spirit of wisdom. Am I growing in wisdom? Do I see things differently today than I did a year ago, not just because of the march of time and the acquisition of experience, but because of how God has shown me things I would never have learned on my own?

The Spirit of God is a spirit of understanding. He gives me the mind of Christ. Do I see the events unfolding in my life and the world at large more through the prism of God's purposes than I did heretofore?

The Spirit of the Lord is a spirit of counsel. Do I turn to the world for answers, or to Him and His Word alone? Do I have answers for perplexed people that He draws into my sphere of influence?

God's Spirit is one of might. While I may still have this old man, this fleshly nature that I tote around until heaven, am I gaining ground upon it? Do I find Him working in me mightily and transforming me into the image of God's Son?

The Holy Spirit is a spirit of knowledge. Do I know more about God and His ways today than I did a year ago? Do I hunger and thirst for His Word as my necessary food?

The Spirit of God is a spirit that teaches me the fear of the Lord. Is my relationship with God right? Do I fear Him with the awful respect He deserves? Do I humbly revere His holy nature and august position?

May the Spirit of the Lord fill us, move us, and use us to be what He has call us to be today! -- D. Murcek

A Probing Question

And when he was come into the house, the blind men came to him: and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this?

Matthew 9:28

In the Gospel of Matthew, after the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus embarks on a mission of miraculous works. A wide variety of physical healings, demons cast out, and power over the natural world, confirmed that the carpenter from Nazareth was the Messiah. Hearing of Jesus's divine works caused multitudes to seek Him for a remedy to their problems. In some cases, our Lord would test their faith in varying ways to filter their motives for coming to Him.

In today's account, two unnamed blind men follow Jesus, asking for Him to have mercy on them. It appears our Lord did not immediately respond to their request, but as they followed Him into a house, He turns to them and asks "Believe ye that I am able to do this"? When they respond yes, Jesus touches their eyes, saying, "*According to your faith be it unto you*". With the miracle completed, and their faith bolstered, the blind men go about proclaiming what Jesus had done.

Believe ye that I am able to this? Though we will not hear an audible voice, this question is often presented to us. Deep down, we know that God is able to do the impossible. From the creation of the world through the resurrection of our Savior, God proves himself through the miraculous. The encouragements to pray are abundant throughout the scriptures. Examples of the saints who prayed in impossible situations, and admonishments for saints to pray, inspire us to do the same. Knowing that we don't have perfect knowledge our prayers are submitted to God's will. At the same time, there is no use in praying if we don't believe that God can answer. Our faith is not in our faith but the Lord of heaven and earth.

Throughout our life, we will be confronted with situations that exceed our power to remedy. In those times of testing, fear and worry can dominate our thought, yet the believer's resource and spiritual instinct are to pray. None of us have perfect faith, but we are to believe that the Lord can meet the need. When we pray for the salvation of a loved one, or a strained relationship, or a financial need, or a health issue, or for a host of other things that arise; do we hear that voice saying "believe ye that I am able to this"? Continue in prayer today to the One who can answer.

J. Ekis

Do as I do

Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.

Philippians 4:9

As the apostle Paul wrote from his Roman jail cell to the Philippian church, he appealed in this statement to their memories of his times with them, where they had received his instruction, not only in formal teaching, but also by seeing his life among them. He was confident enough in his walk with the Lord that he could exhort them, not only to follow his teachings, either by spoken word or by epistle, but to follow his example, from which they also could learn and receive instruction. Earlier in this epistle, as he instructed them to strive to be likeminded (2:2; 3:15-16), he tells them to “be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so, as ye have us for an ensample” (3:17). So not only could he point them to his own example, but he could also point them to others who were living consistent with the apostolic teaching and example.

How about us? Can we exhort other believers as Paul did, to follow not only our words, but also our example? Actually, if we are to obey his instruction in this epistle, we should be able to do the same as he. Of course our initial reaction to such thought is to focus on our faults and failings, which we would never want someone else to follow. Yet if we understand the implications of what the apostle emphasizes here, as well as the admonition of our Lord throughout scripture, the aim of our heart, mind, soul, and life, which have been bought with the price of His precious blood, will be to press toward the mark for the prize of His high calling (3:14). Then, although we remain for this time in these earthly bodies, which still slip and fall at times, our faith in Christ will persevere through and out of those circumstances to demonstrate our general aim and goal to which He calls us. Unto this goal we can invite others to accompany us in our journey. Therefore, let us walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called, that we may not be ashamed to humbly invite others to follow.

Vigilant

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.

– 1 Peter 5:8 –

The devil is our enemy, and a very formidable foe at that. He hates us because we are the special object of God's affections. Though he was defeated once and for ever at Calvary (praise God!), Satan is still permitted to tempt men, even believers, enticing us toward self-destruction. Though his bark is worse than his bite, he is masterful at creating elusive traps via the world and the flesh that draw men to perdition. It therefore becomes critical to recognize his influence, to identify his snares, and to steer clear of his entrapments.

Scripture tells us that the whole world lieth in wickedness (1 John 5:19). This is no surprise, because the devil is the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4). He owns a certain right of reign that he ceased from Adam in Eden. As the prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2), he wields powerful influence in the sphere where Adam's progeny uniquely participates – the arena of ideas. As mankind collectively and increasingly resists the ministry of the Holy Spirit, Lucifer's sway tends towards more control in the thoughts, words, and deeds of men and nations. While limited to advance only as far as God permits, the Serpent's leash appears to be getting longer of late. The growing acceptance of sin and the militant normalization of perversion is advancing at a breathtaking pace and on a global scale. We no longer see a localized Sodom and Gomorrah serving as epicenters of devilish thought and practice, but are rather witnessing a widespread and hydra-headed cultural push for mankind to cross every boundary and unfetter every restraint to fulfill the devil's primal promise, "Ye shall be as God." The stage is being set for the Man of Sin to embody this lawless mystery of iniquity in human flesh, thereby giving the devil what he has desired for so long – the willful and collective worship of mankind.

All of this has very practical implications for us as believers in these latter days. We are exhorted to be sober and vigilant. Sobriety is desperately needed in the modern church of Jesus Christ. We must recognize that we are engaged in a mortal battle, commissioned by God Himself in a spiritual warfare against the devil's principalities and powers that are incessantly assaulting us through every conduit of information and entertainment. We must be vigilant. There is no relaxation in this war. While our soul finds rest in Christ, our spirit must be in a constant state of watchfulness. The Enemy's subtlety is as polished as it was in Eden, if not more so. Perhaps now more than ever, believers need their senses exercised to discern good and evil. Faintness of heart will lead to decimation of witness and significant loss of reward.

Greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world. Believe it, Christian! Be circumspect. Be vigilant. The day of our Lord's appearing and our Enemy's destruction is soon at hand. Until then, watch. -- D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

When It's Okay to Disrespect Your Mama!

II Chronicles 15:16: ¶And also concerning Maachah the mother of Asa the king, he removed her from being queen, because she had made an idol in a grove: and Asa cut down her idol, and stamped it, and burnt it at the brook Kidron.

Filial affections must never interfere with obedience to God. In all matters, it must be that loyalty to God and His word supersedes all earthly affinities. Jesus said: "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me" Matthew 10:37. King Asa was not about to lose the power of the Almighty just to curry maternal favor. The Lord had proven Himself faithful to Asa by a mighty deliverance from the million-man army of the Ethiopians. Asa was one of those rare kings that "was perfect all his days" and as a result "all Judah rejoiced at the oath: for they had sworn with all their heart, and sought him with their whole desire; and he was found of them:". So for Asa, no one was exempted, not even his mother, when "he took away the altars of the strange gods, and the high places, and brake down the images, and cut down the groves".

When Bathsheba made her petition on behalf of Adonijah (I Kings 2:21), Solomon knew better than to respect his mother's ill-advised request. It may have hurt her feelings, but his God-given wisdom discerned the evil motive cloaked behind the seemingly modest supplication. (How sad to note that later in life, Solomon possessed not the same resolve when "his wives turned away his heart after other gods".)

How much better it would have been for Salome had she refused her vengeful mother's request to ask for the head of John. No doubt she suffers the pangs of eternal regret for such an iniquitous request. Add to the list of infamy the wicked king Ahaziah whose "mother (Athaliah) was his counsellor to do wickedly". Believers are under no obligation to follow the example of evil parents. The rule of precedence must be assiduously applied. Obedience to God must be our primary allegiance.

Jesus First,

Pastor

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

Something or Nothing?

Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.

Galatians 6:2,3

One trend that has negatively impacted our culture today is the rise of self-centeredness. Books on positive thinking, visualization, and self-esteem have made great inroads into our daily life. Corporations, professional athletic teams, and countless individuals have jumped on the bandwagon of promoting themselves. As this mindset precipitated Lucifer's fall, it can also place believers at the edge of spiritual decline.

What are we and what is our value? Because we have been created in the image of God, we have great value and a divinely appointed purpose. As believers, we strive to strike a delicate balance between dependence on the Lord while also exercising our free will to serve Him.

The Scriptures remind us of the balance we should maintain in our attitude in following Christ as both the Lord's children and servants. We can do nothing without Him, yet we can do all things through Him. We are weak in and of ourselves, while at the same time we are strong in Him. We are residents in a sinful world, but our citizenship is in heaven. We are born in the flesh to earthly parents yet have become reborn heirs of the eternal God. We are to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. If we lose our life, we will find it; and if we humble ourselves, we will be lifted up. While we advance as saints to our heavenly kingdom, we must never forget that the Lord lifted us out of the pit.

Today's context in Galatians 6 speaks about bearing the burden of one who has been overtaken by a fault. Both believers and unbelievers can be trapped in a pit of sin. While the unbelievers have yet to know the power of deliverance, the believer has experienced freedom through the blood of Jesus, yet can still fall back into that pit in a time of great temptation. In either situation, we should exhibit compassion and concern. Remembering that we also have been rescued from our pit of sin can help us to have the right attitude toward those who are trapped. The Great Reconciler, the Lord Jesus, has also given us the ministry of reconciliation. A hand that is motivated by prayer and compassion has an opportunity to reach down and help someone escape their trap.

Today's scripture warns us not to be deceived by thinking we are something when we are nothing. Remembering that we are nothing without the Lord can help us to better serve the One who is everything. J. Ekis

Legacy

Now, my son, the LORD be with thee; and prosper thou, and build the house of the LORD thy God, as he hath said of thee. Only the LORD give thee wisdom and understanding, and give thee charge concerning Israel, that thou mayest keep the law of the LORD thy God.

I Chronicles 22:11-12

When we read at the beginning of II Chronicles of Solomon's response to the LORD's offer to give him whatever he asked, we may think that his request for wisdom and knowledge to lead and judge the LORD's people (II Chronicles 1:7-10) was of his own accord. But as we compare it with this expressed desire of his father David for him in our text, we understand that Solomon had been prepared for that moment a while ago. He had evidently taken in and contemplated his father's blessing and desire for him over that time. He had also witnessed David's diligent preparation of materials and worship leaders as an earnest upon which Solomon could invest and complete the magnificent place of worship. So his decision of what to ask of the LORD was highly influenced by king David. Yet, Solomon made the ultimate observation and allowed that influence to guide his choice. He had to align his desires with the correct and holy desires of his father and king. That alignment resulted in his becoming the wisest and richest king that should reign over united Israel (except of course for the King of kings to come in the final fulfillment of the Davidic covenant).

Solomon could have considered that influence and decided that he wanted something different. He could have viewed his father's desires for him as old-fashioned, or "too heavenly minded to be of earthly good." He may have contemplated a more progressive approach to reigning and worship. In fact, we know he had that proclivity, since it manifested itself later in his life, and became his downfall. Yet, for this time, he allowed his father's legacy of godly influence and experience to guide his decision, and he prospered as a result. This leads us to ask ourselves the question, what are we doing with the legacy of spiritual influence left to us? Are we honestly contemplating the value of true and tried doctrine and practice that have marked the people of God in the generations of effective believers before us? Will we continue to desire those things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, good, virtuous, and praiseworthy, as defined by the Word of God and proven by the experience of godly examples? Let us, like young Solomon, follow the right and godly influence of our spiritual forefathers, and know the favor of God.

Two Roads

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

– Matthew 7:13-14 –

Jesus closed His Sermon on the Mount by drawing us into a realization of the dichotomous nature of human existence. There is a decision between two gates of entry to make, a distinct choice between two roads to travel, two trees yielding two types of fruits among which we must discern, two types of professors that will stand at the great judgement, and two foundations upon which we can choose to build our lives. Each of these dichotomies is highly instructive to the meditative hearer. Let us consider the differences between the broad and the narrow ways that the Master laid out for our sober consideration.

The road to Hell is a broad one. It has so much room to hold all walks of life simultaneously. Its travelers include the Pharisee with his punctiliousness as well as the Sadducee with his ostentation. The Herodian with his sniveling allegiance to the powers that be is comfortable on this road, as is the Zealot so vehemently steeped in his revolutionary fervor. Atheists, pagans, naturalists, occultists, Muslims, Buddhists, self-proclaimed “Nons”, and even faithful “Christian” churchgoers all tread this road in droves. Divide mankind how you will, and every group owns a significant portion of this seemingly limitless avenue. Moralists and nihilists traverse in congruous numbers, as do the rich and the poor, kings and paupers, academics and fools, the famous, the infamous, and the unknown. Democrats, Republicans, Independents, et. al. claim equal representation as well. What binds all of these travelers – so vastly different from each other and in many cases even diametrically opposed to one another – to this way that leads to a singular and undifferentiating destruction of hellfire and brimstone? Pride and spiritual neglect are the common denominators amongst this infinitely diverse mass of humanity.

But over yonder is another road. It is one that is much less travelled. No one really traverses it in company. It is a lonesome path – one that is quite long, very steep, and particularly arduous. While there is significant diversity on this road, with travelers hailing from every tribe and nation and kindred and tongue, they share a common characteristic of soul. It is an insatiable spiritual desire – to know as they are known. These are the poor in spirit, that mourn for sin and long for mercy. These are the meek of the earth, that hunger and thirst after righteousness, pure in heart with an intense desire to see their God. They long to hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” And though the road is narrow, even while scaling its ever-increasing heights, they rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Which road are you on? And, who do we love that yet travels the broad road? There are no other questions we will face today that are more important to answer. -- D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

AMEN!

And all the congregation said, Amen, Nehemiah 5:13

It is a pleasant thing, though somewhat rare, to see the people of God in one accord. Consensus ought to be the prevailing attitude of the New Testament believers since we have the plenary revelation of God's Holy Bible and the gift of the Holy Spirit who was promised to "guide you into all truth". Unity of belief was an essential characteristic of the infant church. Acts 2:1: they were all with one accord in one place.

Acts 2:46: And they, continuing daily with one accord ...with gladness and singleness of heart

Acts 4:24: And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, :

Acts 5:12: and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.

Acts 8:6: And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake

It didn't take long for the devil to recognize that a unified body of Christ was an imminent threat to the advancement of his diabolical agenda. Nearly every epistle warns of division and schisms in the local assemblies. Satan loves whatever God hates and Proverbs 6:19 plainly declares "These six things doth the LORD hate... he that soweth discord among brethren".

The word "amen" is a confirmatory response to a truth commonly held by the congregation and is defined by "verily", "truly", "it is true", and "let it be so". When uttered in collective response to a truth proclaimed, it provides certitude to both the preacher and the listener. What joy in believing abounds in the house of God where multiplied "amens" ring out from the hearts and tongues of those so convinced of the verity of the expounded truth. The devil may try to suppress such unrestrained affirmations but ought we not to follow the example of those whose worship is now perfected in heaven? Revelation 19:4: And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia. If the halls of heaven enjoy those glad affirmations, ought not our churches be filled with similar shouts of glory?

Maranatha,

Pastor

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

Surrendering to God's Infinitude

O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches.

Psalm 194:24

God is infinite in all of His attributes. His love, grace, power, knowledge, and wisdom are immeasurable. As far as the east is from the west, so is His greatness in all that He is. The scriptures describe His ways as being higher than ours, and all of His ways are past finding out. We see His fingerprint in all creation, yet we cannot begin to fathom how it was spoken into existence. It is the grandest privilege to receive the grace of His forgiveness and be called His child, while we are unable to grasp the fulness of His glory. As believers, we acknowledge all the greatness of our God and His will, still, we often resist surrendering to it.

Today's text speaks of God's wisdom in all of His manifold works. Everything in creation is a product of His wisdom. His wisdom did not cease after creation; it actively continues in the events of our lives. When and where we were born was ordained by the Lord to fulfill His purpose for us. After being born again, God continues to design things that help us to be conformed to the image of Christ. But as followers of Christ, we are often walking contradictions. We acknowledge God's infinite attributes while we complain about the things that interrupt our wants and plans. God in His infinite wisdom sees down the road of life and plans things that will stimulate our faith so we might grow stronger. Some of the lessons that difficult experiences provide will enable us to help someone in the future who is going through a similar trial. When things occur that don't seem to make sense to us, it is probably because we are unable to peer ahead and trust that God is working out His plan. Recall how after Jesus told His disciples that He *must go unto Jerusalem and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day*, Peter rebukes Him and declares that this shall not happen. In the moment of distressing news, Peter forgets that the all-wise Savior is speaking. After the resurrection, Peter understands the wisdom of Jesus' words.

There will always be situations in life that we will not understand, but hopefully, we will continue to grow in faith as we watch God work out His will in our lives. In His wisdom, He has designed a path for us to travel today. When we surrender to His infinite wisdom, we will see that truly He doeth all things well!

J. Ekis

Business minded

Of the Izharites, Chenaniah and his sons were for the outward business over Israel, for officers and judges. And of the Hebronites, Hashabiah and his brethren, men of valour, a thousand and seven hundred, were officers among them of Israel on this side Jordan westward in all the business of the LORD, and in the service of the king.

I Chronicles 26:29

In these final chapters of I Chronicles, we find king David, in co-regency with the appointed king Solomon, ordering the affairs of the kingdom, before his own death when Solomon would reign alone. While the long enumerations can sometimes seem tedious to read, we can gather valuable lessons as we take in the big picture, as well as take note of principles tucked away among the details. After the appointment of Solomon, the leadership team was gathered together to organize Levites and priests for the anticipated temple worship (I Chronicles 23:1-2). For some this would constitute a career change, now that transporting the tabernacle would no longer be required. These chapters describe how the larger population of Levites at that point would be structured to perform the services for worship, including the upkeep of the elements of worship, assisting the priests with the sacrificial duties, the expansion of prophetic music ministry, guarding the entry doors to the worship place and the associated duties, maintaining the temple treasury, and administering the business of the temple and the kingdom.

Those in this last category are described in our text as 1700 men for the kingdom west of the Jordan river, as well as 2700 men for the kingdom east of the Jordan at the end of the chapter. What is noteworthy in their job descriptions, both in this text and in verse 32, is the order of responsibilities. The first is in all the business of the LORD, or for every matter pertaining to God. The second is in the service and affairs of the king. We can see from some of the incidental descriptions of these servants of the kingdom that they were no mean men. In the context these are described as men of valor. These ministers were to understand that to be a good servant of the king and their people, they must first be a faithful servant of the LORD. We do well if we follow the same principle, no matter how our “secular” duties may be regarded. As New Testament believers, made by the power of Christ to be “kings and priests unto our God,” we are admonished to maintain good works for necessary uses, so that the Lord is honored. Both Paul and Peter exhort believing servants and masters to serve and honor the Lord in our business. Thus, no matter where we serve, let us observe, “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men...for ye serve the Lord Christ” (Colossians 3:23-24).

Uncertain Sounds

*For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?
– 1 Corinthians 14:8 –*

Much of the cultural rot and spiritual decline that America and the West is currently experiencing is squarely the result of the abnegation of spiritual duty by the church of Jesus Christ. Pulpits far and wide have become polluted. In the worst cases, wholesale heresy is on ongoing display. In many others, while not as extreme, the gospel has nonetheless morphed from its biblical tenets into a lopsided declaration of God's grace and mercy to the exclusion of His hatred of sin and impending wrath. The electronic church cannot maintain viable revenue streams when denouncing sin, and faint-hearted "preachers" scramble to be relevant in a desperately vain attempt to draw crowds. The masses have quaffed at fountains of a contaminated message for so long that the unvarnished gospel of Christ is alien even to much of professing Christendom. God's complaint recorded in Jeremiah regarding apostate Israel is becoming dangerously to being applicable to the modern church, "For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (Jer. 2:13).

The remedy is simple in nature, though perhaps painful in practice. We must return to preaching, teaching, and witnessing against sin. Jesus named sin and denounced it. Paul, Peter, James, John, and Luke did likewise in their inspired epistles and treatises. The New Testament uses great plainness of speech and words easily understood when it comes to delineating between righteousness and unrighteousness, between good and evil, between light and darkness, between things God loves and things God hates. The good news can only be good if the bad news is grasped and understood. Men can only be saved if they understand how near destruction they tread. A sinner can only repent if he sees himself from God's perspective as deserving of His wrath.

Uncertain sounds issue forth from many assemblies today. Failure to identify and denounce sin from the pulpit has caused confusion in the pew. This spills over to the masses. In their daily interactions with lost friends and relatives, many Christians are losing power in their witness because they are embarrassed to decry sin, or they simply appear to be so foreign in their viewpoint because the culture is not uniformly challenged by a unified message from the professing church.

God does not wink at sin. He hates sin while loving the sinner enough to solicit their repentance. He expects us, His children, to be like minded. Let us not shun hard conversations. Equipped with the gospel, God's love, and human empathy, there is no need for any uncertain sounds. Let us engage lost souls in plain and frank language, that they may flee for refuge to the hope we can lay before them. The time is increasingly short. -- D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

The Operation of God Part I

Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Col. 2:12-13

The doctor walked back into the patient's room clutching several x-ray films along with the radiologist's report. The patient, reading the dour expression on the physician's face, concluded that the test results confirmed the grim diagnosis-radical and immediate surgery would be the only hope for preserving the patient's life. All the previous modalities failed to suppress the advancement of the insidious cancer. Radiation, chemotherapy, immunotherapy, hormone therapy, stem cell transplant, and even photodynamic therapy were all employed but proved to be ineffective treatments. Surgery was the last option because of the size and placement of the tumor and because of the amount of cutting that would be involved, but with all channels exhausted the patient was handed the permission forms to sign and the operation was performed. The incisions were made and the cutting was extensive. The ensuing pain from the operation was excruciating, but because of the skill of the surgeon, the operation was a complete success, the deadly tumor was removed, and the patient's life was preserved.

Let us consider the above scenario as an allegorical lesson regarding the "operation of God".

SYMPTOMS: Just as in the physical realm, pain is what alerts us to an existing problem. "For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." Romans 8:22

EXAMINATION: It is at this point that we submit to examination from a competent physician who can render his diagnosis: "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Psalm 139:23-24

DIAGNOSIS: The experienced physician can identify the source of the pain and predict the outcome. "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment." Isaiah 1:5-6

PROGNOSIS: The surgeon lays out the course of action and predicts the positive outcome "When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death." John 11:4

EXPLANATION: The doctor must explain the risks versus the benefits of the procedure including the cost, the associated pain, and the necessity of rehabilitation. "He shall die without instruction; and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray...For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life" Proverbs 5:23

TRYING ALTERNATIVES TO SURGERY: Patients often seek other opinions regarding treatment including unproven and expensive therapies which prove to be ineffective and even fatal. "Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man." Psalms 60:11 "And had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse," Mark 5:26:

CONSENT: The patient must trust the surgeon and sign a consent before the surgery takes place. "And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," Acts 16:31

REFUSING TREATMENT: After hearing the diagnosis and explanation of the procedure, some will choose to refuse the treatment: "Why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable, which refuseth to be healed?" Jeremiah 15:18:

(Continued to next Friday)

Have a blessed weekend,

Pastor

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