

Double Trouble

Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel. They remembered not his hand, nor the day when he delivered them from the enemy.

Psalm 78:41,42

The journey of the Hebrew nation from the bondage of Egypt through the wilderness of Sinai provides both warnings and encouragements for believers. Their experiences as well as their responses to them often illustrate the ups and downs of our Christian life. There were times of obedience and faith as well as times of disobedience and faithlessness. These accounts that happened aforesaid are for our learning that we might avoid the same pitfalls in order to move progressively forward to our Promised Land.

Being disciples of Jesus Christ has many joys attached to it, but as our Lord said “in the world ye shall have tribulation.” We can be encouraged because the One we follow has overcome the world, yet there are a couple of recurring problems that plague believers. Unbelief and disobedience are at the root of many of the things hindering our progress in our Christian life. The Hebrews failed to recognize that some of the difficulties they faced, though very real, were opportunities for them to exercise their faith in Jehovah, and would cultivate a *stronger* faith. Often though, they would complain of their situation and forget or refuse to trust God. Their unbelief and disobedience even had them wishing they were back in the bondage of Egypt, where at least they had a supply of food. When Joshua, Caleb, and the other representatives of each of the tribes of Israel brought back their report after exploring the Promised Land, the children of Israel chose to dwell on the negative details. They allowed this to produce a fear that would undermine their trust in God for His protection and victory. Instead of immediately conquering the Promised Land, they would continue wandering in the wilderness for forty years. Once they entered Canaan there were times of faith and obedience and the ensuing blessing, but the double-trouble would resurface. This pattern would continue through the ruling of judges and the reigning of kings.

As children of God, like the Israelites, we are also traveling through the wilderness of this world as we march toward the eternal promised land. The experiences that come our way are designed by God for our edification. We are to believe and trust the Lord through both the highs and lows of life which God has designed for our spiritual growth.

For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. (2Cor. 4:15)

J. Ekis

Seeing God

Then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel: And they saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness. And upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand: also they saw God, and did eat and drink.

Exodus 24:9-11

Of the few Biblical instances describing men's visions of God, this one involves substantially more men than any other. Most if not all of the others are by a singular person, depending on how they might be categorized. For this one, there is no debate, as it clearly states that all 74 of them saw the God of Israel, as they were invited by God at the beginning of the chapter. They also in His presence apparently partook of the offerings that Moses had commissioned a few verses before this, from which he had used the blood to sanctify the people, after they had heard the commandments issued from Mount Sinai. We would expect that such an awesome experience would be sufficient for these men to be established in their fear of the Lord to henceforth lead obedient lives.

Yet, not long after this, while Moses remained in the mount receiving instructions from the Lord for the tabernacle worship, chapter 32 records the rebellion of the people demanding that Aaron make them an idol, violating the commandments they had recently heard. In that context with Aaron and the people, it could be assumed that the 70 elders of the people were also there. After that, when the tabernacle was completed, the scripture records the deaths of Nadab and Abihu, because they in some way had not followed the prescribed approach in offering incense before the Lord (Leviticus 10).

Though their experience was not the same as the elders', the people of Israel witnessed the original signs God gave to Moses, the plagues upon Egypt, their firstborn saved by the Passover, a dry pathway through the Red Sea, and miraculous provisions of water and food in the wilderness. Yet they would eventually wonder in the wilderness for forty years because of disobedient unbelief (Hebrews 3:19).

These observations imply that the basis of faith in God must be established upon more than experience. There have been those through the generations that demand to see God so that they might believe. Yet such experience might simply put them in the same category of experience forgotten. We are reminded in the great "hall of faith": *But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)*. That diligent seeking seems to be key in "seeing God," beyond even a one-time awesome experience. As the Savior promised, the Father seeks such as worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23). Let us therefore desire to see Him with the eye of faith daily as we seek His truth through His word and the presence of His Spirit.

A Tale Told

For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told. – Psalm 90:9

As you learn to read God's Word by the leading of His Spirit, you will find that God has much to say in the sacred scriptures about your unique, human life. It is a gift from Him, to be sure. While God has a perfect will for it, other factors are permitted to affect it. Time, events, human free will, devilish temptation, and God's sovereignty work in concert to orchestrate its symphony. But make no mistake, the Lord has a specific reason for and purpose in the breath you draw. In our text, the psalmist says our lives are like a tale that is told – i.e., a story being played out. Meditation upon this inspired insight will strengthen our hearts, our faith, and our resilience in spiritual matters.

We spend our years. Spending denotes value. We spend things of value. Your life has value – significant value in the sight of God. He entrusts it to you to use wisely. You can, like the man in Jesus' parable, squander it by selfishly hiding it away in vain pursuits, or you can invest the talents to gain the more. How are you spending your years?

Our years. This very same psalm seems to indicate that the natural course of God's plan is seventy years for human breath. More than that, while troublesome, is nonetheless blessing. Lives cut off prior to that are the result of either the curse, human interference, or a nexus of both. Someone once said, "Eat right, exercise daily, and die anyway." While perhaps pessimistically sardonic, it is nonetheless true. An over-emphasis on the physical life will be very disappointing. Our days are numbered, and we are wise to focus the vast majority of our attention on things of eternal value.

A tale that is told. God is its author, and you are its co-author. It had a beginning and its earlier chapters have set the stage for where you are right now. That is neither an excuse nor a license – it just explains in some fashion what is happening today. You are here because this is where the epic has brought you. You have no power to re-write anything that is written, but you do possess the ability to influence the next pages. By purposing to live each moment by faith and for God's glory, you are building a solid theme and important lessons that will make your life a story worth re-telling your posterity when it finally comes to an end. And because of Christ, your life is not just a marvelous poem expressing His beautiful redemptive power here and now (Eph. 2:10), but it is an ongoing saga whose epilogue will continue to be written for eternity in His kingdom.

Your life is a story. Identify the chapter divisions, decide upon the lessons you want to teach, and offer your recommendations to God. But then, let Him write. Be His pen and watch what a wonderful tale He tells.

– D. Murcek

He Leadeth Me

Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel,
and afterward receive me to glory."

Psalm 73:24

Now here is a golden promise; that the omniscient Lord of creation, who sees the end in the beginning and can infallibly predict every future event, has vouchsafed to his children His inerrant guidance through the convolutions of life. Though our frail bark be mercilessly tossed about with assailing torrents, the Captain of our salvation will bring us to our "expected end".

Abraham, "not knowing whither he went", was led out of idolatrous Ur through the temptations of Haran, down through the inhospitable lands of the Hittites, across the mountainous wilderness, and finally to the promised Canaan land.

The Divine guidance being his sole roadmap. The steps of this "good man were ordered of the Lord" as promised. Now not to Abraham alone is given such benefits, for this is the heritage of all those who have abandoned the right of self determination and surrendered their future to their beneficent conductor who will "shew us the path of life".

There will be distractions and detours along our circuitous journey, but the saints can be assured :

Sometimes on the mount where the sun shines so bright

God leads His dear children along

Sometimes in the valley, in darkest of night

God leads His dear children along

Though sorrows befall us and Satan oppose

God leads His dear children along

Have a blessed day,
Pastor

The Long Surrender

For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

1Corinthians 6:20

From the earliest age humans display possessive behavior. Little ones will grab a forbidden item and parents will need to pry the baby's fingers off in order for them to let go. Similarly, adults have belongings they once used or enjoyed but for years those items have gone unused, yet they cannot be surrendered to the garbage dump. There are also the matters of man's sinful nature such as pride which often restrains a person from letting go of ungodly behaviors.

Our coming to the Lord Jesus Christ for forgiveness and salvation began with a surrender, but that surrender is only the beginning of a lifetime of submission. The infancy of our new spiritual life in Christ is a wonderful time. Understanding deliverance from eternal punishment and experiencing a fresh and vibrant relationship with God brings much joy to the soul. But it is not long before we realize that being born again does not totally eradicate our old nature. Anger, jealousy, self-centeredness, stubbornness, all of which are rooted in pride, can resurface at any time. Thankfully, believers possess the Holy Spirit who produces a conviction that is meant to motivate us to weed these things out of our life. Similarly to weeding a garden, spiritual weeding is something that needs to be done on a regular basis. Situations will arise that summon up the depraved part of our nature and bring to the surface behaviors and responses that are a poor reflection of our Savior. Understanding we have been *bought with a price*, and *we are not our own* anymore, we must daily determine to surrender our will and submit to God's will. A large part of our sanctification process, which continues for all of our time on earth, is surrendering to our Lord. His plan is that we glorify Him in all areas of our life. Being a new creature in Christ, worldly ways and habits things are to pass away and be replaced by the new things that are pleasing to God. A corn of wheat will not produce fruit unless it falls to the ground and dies, but when it does it brings forth more fruit. When we are able to surrender and put to death our unbecoming ways, it enables us to experience the growth of spiritual fruit in our life.

Jesus taught that when we lose our life, we actually find real life; likewise, when we surrender things to Him we find a greater level of freedom. May the Holy Spirit remind us every day to surrender to the One who purchased our redemption.

J. Ekis

As the LORD commanded

*And Moses did look upon all the work, and, behold, they had done it as the LORD had commanded, even so had they done it: and Moses blessed them.
Exodus 39:43*

Multiple chapters in Exodus describe the instructions for making the tabernacle and all its accoutrements, the offering of the people providing the necessary materials, and then the workmanship to create, assemble, and prepare it all according to the instructions. Moses had spent forty days in the mount receiving and recording the instructions. The LORD's instructions included His appointment of Bezaleel as the chief craftsman, along with Aholiab to assist, in leadership of the craftwork needed to accomplish the task (Exodus 31:1-6). The LORD also spoke of these, as well as an unnamed group of men who would accomplish the work, as receiving their wisdom, understanding, and cunning abilities in workmanship from the spirit of God. In particular, Bezaleel's and Aholiab's leadership included teaching the wise and willing hearts of the others. With these instructions and the materials that the people of Israel had offered "with a willing heart" (Exodus 35:5, 29), the work commenced. *Then wrought Bezaleel and Aholiab, and every wise hearted man, in whom the LORD put wisdom and understanding to know how to work all manner of work for the service of the sanctuary, according to all that the LORD had commanded (Exodus 36:1).*

The result of the work is described in our text. It is obvious from this description that Moses was quite impressed with all the work, insomuch that he promptly blessed them. And the characteristic of the work that seems to have impressed him the most is that they had done it as the LORD had commanded. These workmen had obviously used the gifts that the LORD had equipped them with to obey Him, and thus honor Him, in their work. If we review the instructions recorded by Moses in the preceding chapters, it is evident that, beyond the basic requirements, there was also room for application of their individual skills. Yet, in application of those skills, they did not depart from the commanded instructions, and the results of their work made that obvious, provoking blessing.

May this example remind us that there is no beneficial work that we perform that is not a result of His gracious equipping, whether in workmanship, or in mentorship. Although we may perform our work within the sphere of our own individual learning and acquired several abilities, we must remember that we are stewards of His gifts, and thus complete the work as the LORD commanded. This should impact not only the final product, but also the manner and attitude with which the work and required mentoring is accomplished. As we are admonished regarding our service: *And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ (Colossians 3:23-24).*

The Open Secret

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

– Psalm 91:1

The Bible repeatedly reiterates a secret that is open to any and all who want to hear it and act upon it, and that is that any individual human being (me and you included) can be as close to God as we want to be. Why so few avail themselves of nearest proximity to the Master is likely due to the ownership clause that He holds in the relationship – i.e., that it's His house, not ours; His rules and His ways will govern the tenor and tone of our inward abode and outward conduct should we desire to constantly abide in Him. Yet it is the best life there is – life abundant and free – that He invites us to when we dwell in His secret place and abide under His shadow.

He can and will be our dwelling place, indeed, should we choose to take Him up on His offer. He seeks to be our home to which we incessantly return when the dangers of this world threaten us, when the enemy seeks our demise, or when the effects of the curse overwhelm us. And not just our home, but our refuge and our fortress – both our hiding place from the storm as well as the rampart from which we can securely mount a counter assault.

But if He is to be such to us, we must learn to be comfortable in His presence, never forgetting that we are sinners – redeemed, yes, but sinners still – and He is the High and Holy One who inhabits eternity. To be sure, He has cleared the way to the throne of grace by the blood of His dear Son. Yet the onus is upon us bring ourselves thereto time and again in honesty and openness before Him. As we do, we will begin to sense and ultimately know with full confidence that we are safely and continuously welcome in the secret chamber of the King of the universe.

Dwelling in the secret place of the Most High brings a plethora of benefits. We become aware of the snares of the enemy, and God provides us with special grace to avoid them. The noisome pestilences of a cursed creation, while still wielding their power over the flesh, have no effect upon the inner man when we make the Lord our abode. Cancers, syndromes, neurological disorders, etc. flail and retreat from the inner sanctum of the believer who boasts God as his home and Friend. Even the arrows that fly by day – e.g., the increasingly present dangers in a society unhinged and deranged due to its untethering from God and His Word – are powerless against those to whom God has commanded His mighty and holy angels to protect and deliver until the appointed day of their homegoing.

When we set our love upon Him, He will deliver us. There is great reciprocity in an intensely intimate relationship with Jehovah. We call, and He answers. When trouble comes, He is there. His deliverance is sure. He will exalt and honor those who exalt and honor Him in all their ways.

The first disciples asked Jesus, "Where dwellest thou?" He replied simply, "Come and see." (John 1:38-39). The invitation still stands today. Come and see and dwell in the secret place of the Most High – our Lord Jesus Himself. Practice His presence and be assured that He will continuously show you His salvation. – *D. Murcek*

Well Pleased

For the LORD taketh pleasure in his people:

Psalms 149:4

What father does not take joy in the obedient spirit of his sons and daughters. The same is most certainly the case with our Heavenly Father who takes great delight in His born ones that assiduously apply themselves to a life of service and obedience to their Creator. It is a humbling notion to consider that the self-sufficient God, the “I am that I am”, somehow takes pleasure in finite, imperfect creatures such as we.

God, being identified and defined as self-sufficient, means He possesses within Himself every quality, ability, and supernatural command with never-ending measure. Every attribute or mighty and wonderful power is His endlessly. Theologians call this attribute of God his aseity. The true and living God lacks no good thing. He isn't advanced or improved by our existence or efforts. God wants for nothing and lacks nothing; He is complete and yet, that said, our text affirms that He derives pleasure in beholding His people. Let us then, as the object of His Divine favor, press forth with ardent zeal advancing the causes that please His magnanimous heart. May we always and ever win His affirming smile and may we one day hear Him say of us, as He did of Jesus, this is my beloved child in whom “I am well pleased”.

Have a blessed day,
Pastor

Beyond Emotion

And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment;

Philippians 1:9

God has created mankind with an abundance of emotions. In just one day's time we can experience joy, sorrow, grief, anger, jealousy and love to name a few. Some emotions are welcomed and warm our soul, while others can make life very unpleasant. The emotion *love* has been the theme of countless songs, and literature, and it takes a prominent place in the Word of God. Probably the most widely known Bible verse John 3:16, deals with God's love for the world. The basis for each of us becoming Christians was the understanding of God's love for us seen through the sacrifice of His only begotten Son for the sins of the world. Receiving God's love greatly impacted our love for Him. The more we delve into God's love, plus having the fruit of His Spirit in our life, deepens our capacity for experiencing and expressing love.

In today's verse, the Apostle Paul speaks about love abounding in knowledge and in judgment. The love that we have for God and others needs to go beyond being just an emotional expression; it needs to grow in knowledge and be governed by judgment (discernment). As believers, our love for God and other people is to abound and our love for brothers and sisters in Christ is to be a witness to all those who observe our Christian interaction. Knowing the love of Christ which passes knowledge allows us to be filled with God's fullness (Ephesians 3:19). As we search the scriptures and allow the truths to sink into our soul, we begin to see more and more the unfathomable depths of God's love. Knowing that Christ willingly left the glories of heaven to come to this cursed and corrupted world, and then carried our sins to the cross. He who knew no sin, became sin for us, so that we could be made the righteous of God. Understanding God's love for us becomes a catalyst to a deeper desire to know Him more. The Apostle Paul understood the depths of his depravity and strove to know the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus. Often times there are situations where our love needs proper judgment in order to make right decisions. Loving someone does not mean we must always agree with them. Sometimes speaking the truth to others is difficult, but it is necessary, and should always be spoken in Christlike love.

The day we were converted, God began a good work in us that He intends to finish. Each day we are to grow in faith and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as we follow Him. May our love abound in knowledge and judgement today.

~J. Ekis

Engagement

Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee.

Psalm 143:8

This psalm of David is a model prayer for anyone afflicted or persecuted by an enemy. His desperate cries from an overwhelmed spirit and desolate heart reveal the honest recognition of his trouble, as well as his unworthiness and inabilities. Yet it also shows his confidence in the Lord's power to deliver, not for his own righteousness, but because of the Lord's faithful righteousness. In this state, he appeals to the Lord's past works and deliverance, as well as His mercy. And in the midst of his petitions, here in our text, he admits his need to be engaged in the deliverance that he craves.

First, he desires to hear the lovingkindness of the Lord in the morning, in the beginning of his day, before the clamor and necessities of the day crowd his mind and distract his attention from that need of his soul. Before making his first major decision, he needs guidance based on the word of the Lord, providing confidence that the Lord's direction embraces His love for His own. David's basis for such desire is his trust in the Lord, which is reinforced by his previously described meditations on the works of His hands. Second, he asks to know the way wherein he should walk, i.e., how to live according to what he has learned from the Lord throughout the day. It is one thing to understand with the mind the principles and precepts of God's word, but the next step must be to apprehend with the will how to apply them in our daily behavior. In the context of this psalm, this includes walking in a path that is safe from the enemy's influence. He later requests, "teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God" (v. 10). Finally, he explains his attitude in these requests, as he "lifts up his soul" unto God. As the Levitical priests would wave their appointed portions of the offerings before the Lord, previous to their consumption, so David metaphorically lifts up his own soul as an offering unto the Lord, before embarking on that day's endeavors.

Whether we may deal with a physical enemy or with the spiritual enemy of our soul, we have a model in this psalm to follow. Let us seek the Lord daily with these desires and attitudes, that we might lift up our redeemed souls unto Him, engaging with His direction in our daily living, as we seek His good spirit of deliverance.

Known for Faith

*For by it [faith] the elders obtained a good report. – Hebrews 11:2
(A reading of the whole chapter of Hebrews 11 is recommended)*

There are so many Halls of Fame in our current world. We are most familiar with the ones associated the major sports or music genres. But a quick Google search or scan of Wikipedia reveals a list of nearly countless Halls of Fame, each unique to some specific professional or academic discipline, celebrating the achievements of a select few who attained to a high degree of expertise in their field and set the example as well as raised the bar for all who follow in terms of what can be secured by focused attention to, application of, or practice in their specialized craft.

In the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit gives us His inspired Hall of Fame, immortalizing for time and eternity those Old Testament men and women who chose to live and move and have their being focusing on the spiritual realm instead of the visible, on the eternal as opposed to the temporal. From Abel to David and beyond, we are treated to a line of succinct epithets over a multitude of lives of ordinary people who made an extraordinary mark on this earth by their trust in the God of the universe. By faith, these elders [exemplars] obtained a good report. In other words, their faith is not only something for those of us in the midst of our pilgrimage to pattern our lives after but was also so resolute and active that it gained the audience of heaven to the point of moving God's hand in the affairs of men.

The overarching lesson of the chapter is clear. Let us pause and reflect. We must strive to live each moment of each day in the reality behind our trust in God. In doing so, faith becomes substance and evidence – we see and know and perceive God's ways and movements more keenly than any material circumstance. The reality of the spiritual world trumps the restrictions of merely physical existence. Living by faith affects not only us and our path, but others as well because God becomes the primary author in the purpose of our breath. Ordinary men and women consistently trusting God delights heaven, glorifies Christ, and somehow mysteriously changes the trajectory of both individual lives and aggregate human history.

We will not be remembered for our wealth, for our accomplishments at work, or likely even for our common kindnesses and relationships. But when we live by faith, our legacy is written in hearts, and our inheritance is compounded in Heaven. Brothers and sisters, let us be known for nothing else but our unshakable, confident, resolute, and robust faith in our God and in our Christ. – *D. Murcek*

Under Foot

And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.

Romans 16:20

Here is a promise that brings an unqualified "Amen" to the lips of any believer. How often has that arch enemy of the soul, that accuser of the brethren, wrought havoc, hardship, and mischief to the lives of the redeemed. All too often we have found ourselves cowering like pusillanimous weaklings at the mere invocation of the name of Satan. He has bullied us, beaten us, and berated us in countless ways. What little success we have had in averting his relentless assaults can only be owed to our taking cover behind the invincible Name of Jesus.

In that curious text in 1 Corinthians 6:3 it is said that "we shall judge angels". It would have to refer to the fallen angels and thus would include their perverse general, Satan. So the tables shall be turned and we who have suffered so long under the attacks of that malevolent adversary, will, in the day of victory, be given the same authority as our Lord Jesus, who sublimates all "enemies under His feet" 1 Corinthians 15:25. And so, in that moment, the one whose evil machinations plotted for our damnation shall find himself squirming under the omniscient scrutiny of our defender, advocate, and friend. We will sit together with Christ in the high places of judgement and pronounce the sentence of eternal doom: "And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever." Revelation 20:10.

For now, we must continually walk circumspectly. The devil has carefully laid his traps to make us stumble in the journey. He is well aware of our vulnerabilities and so he furtively "walketh about, seeking whom he may devour". He is equally aware of his soon coming defeat and that he "hath but a short time" to wreak his mischief on the saints of God. "The Lord shall laugh at him: for he seeth that his day is coming." Psalms 37:13. The Lord Jesus will fulfill that most ancient of prophecies and shall bruise his head and we shall share in the triumph.

Have a blessed day,

Pastor

He Sees Us All

Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.

John 1:48

While reading through the Bible it becomes very apparent that God is extremely observant of all his creation; animate or inanimate. Everything, whether large or small, from the observant exterior to hidden intricacies, is seen by him. The capstone of His creation, man, especially receives His attention as demonstrated by Jesus willingly giving himself for the sins of the whole world.

In today's text our Lord reveals His deity in calling Nathanael by name and telling him specific details about his life before they had ever met. As it is true about all of us, Jesus always had His eyes on Nathanael and had a calling and a plan for Nathanael's life. In the gospel narratives Jesus repeatedly shows His love and His personal interest in all mankind as well as His desire for each of us to come to understand who He is and trust Him as Savior and Lord. When Jesus saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because He could see they were like wandering sheep without a shepherd. Later, there was the certain infirmed man who apparently had no friends to help him into the healing waters of Bethesda, yet he clearly already had the attention of Jesus. The Lord not only heals him physically, but also lovingly touches his soul. At the well of Samaria, Jesus sees the woman whose futile pursuits in life left her still thirsting in her soul. When He offers her Living Water, she runs to tell others about her encounter. Then, there was the time He intervened on behalf of a women who was about to be stoned to death because of her adultery. He shows mercy in His pardon and reminds her to go and sin no more. Jesus wept with Mary and Martha as they mourned the loss of their brother and then brought immense joy to them by raising Lazarus from the dead. Jesus saw the rich young ruler who was confident in his own self-righteousness, but lacked assurance concerning eternal life. The gospel account tells us that Jesus beholds him and loves him and then tells him the way of truth. While society made the leprous man an outcast, Jesus sees him in this pitiful condition and has compassion on him. With healing in His hand, our Lord touches the leper, giving him a new lease on life.

When we read these accounts, we can be confident that the same caring and watchful eyes of Jesus that were on them are also on us. In moments when we are so very alone and feel that no one understands the trial we are experiencing, we must remember to look to and lean on the One who *always* watches over us. ~J. Ekis

Neighborly love

Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him. Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.

Leviticus 19:17-18

We are familiar with the response of Jesus to the question concerning which was the great commandment in the law (Mark 12:29-31). As He reached back to the august response from Deuteronomy 6:5, the crowd of Jews about Him would identify that answer well. Yet He finished the response with this more obscure passage in Leviticus 19:18, stating the second most important law. We can understand, with the scribe who asked the question, how these two encompass all the commandments of the Torah. The second is also repeated by Paul and James in their epistles, as summarizing all laws of human interaction. Jesus also expanded the second to the lawyer in Luke 10 to define who his neighbor was, probably to his dismay.

However, the context from which the second springs sheds light on yet another aspect. In verse 17, neighborly behavior extends also to the internal attitude. It excludes hating your brother, or neighbor, in your heart. (Jesus expanded on this in the Sermon on the Mount.) The counter to such hatred is to rebuke the neighbor. This may seem at first contradictory, until the statements that follow are considered. To “suffer sin upon him” can imply that we allow him to continue in a path of sin, either toward ourselves or toward others. In either case, we leave our neighbor in a bad case, either awaiting, perhaps even unknowingly, our vengeance, or the vengeance of others upon him. Our vengeance is also forbidden here, because the remedy should be for us to rebuke our neighbor privately, encouraging him to repent, either for mutual reconciliation or for reconciliation to others (Matthew 18:15ff; Romans 12:19). But to instead allow inward hatred and grudging to continue, perhaps behind hypocritically polite interactions, is not neighborly love, since it may ferment our own wrath or bring the wrath of others upon him.

While love for our neighbor includes both proper and respectful treatment, as we would want to be treated, as well as proper rebuke when necessary for his good, the latter must always be done in a spirit of meekness and humility (Galatians 6:1-3). With this in mind, let us also recognize our responsibility when we are the neighbor in need of rebuke. In such a case, instead of the natural tendency to take offense, let us appreciate the love of one who would care enough to bring our own sin to our attention, that we also might benefit.

Battling Hell

*And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.
– Colossians 2:16*

As I pen these words, our nation has been engaged for several weeks in military action against Iran. While the United States has overwhelmingly decimated the terror-state's military capabilities and essentially won the conflict already, the terror-state's regime is still clinging to the last vestiges of its power and trying as much as possible to project strength and cause turmoil and disruption for their own people as well as for the world. I relay this specific circumstance as it depicts for me in my mind's eye essentially what the devil and his minions have been doing for over two thousand years since Calvary. He is a defeated foe who refuses to recognize his own humiliating situation, and he wields sufficient influence with the masses to portray enough obstinance, permitting him to continue his nefarious industry for a little while longer.

When our Lord gave up the ghost on Calvary, it was a lights-out moment for Satan. The Son of God destroyed the power of sin in the flesh, bore all of heaven's wrath upon the cross, and secured forever the eternal redemption and ultimate glorification of any and all of Adam's race who would respond to Him by faith. Yet God's timing in this conflict is such that mankind must be granted full opportunity to avail itself of this most generous substitutionary victory, thereby creating an interim gospel age in which our arch foe is yet not confined to his final infernal abode. From his decimated position, he flails against mankind, stirring up sinful flesh in order to try to mount some counterassault against Heaven's clearly wrought conquest.

You and I are caught in the crosshairs of this eternal struggle. As such, it is important to remember that it is just that – war. There is a growing phenomenon within Christianity to completely miss or ignore this important framework, thinking that this so great salvation does not come at so great a price and does not involve so great an effort on a daily basis to remain aligned with Heaven. It is puerile thinking to believe that we have no dog in this fight. To the contrary, biblically speaking, when we received Christ's salvation, we volunteered to serve on His side of this struggle. We counted the cost and went to combat (Luke 14:28-33). Donning our newly received armor and weaponry, we stand against the wiles of the devil, and having done all, we continue to stand (Ephesians 6:10-18). We strive to not be entangled with the affairs of this life, so that we may please Him who has chosen us to be soldiers (2 Timothy 2:4). We grow weary in the battle, yet we faint not (Galatians 6:9). This – and this alone – is Bible salvation. Anyone who thinks that living for Christ is a simple matter of reclined ease may very well be self-deceived.

Let us ask ourselves: Are we in the battle? Do we feel its rage? Are we actively fighting our mortally wounded enemy, or are we permitting him and his forces to somehow ridiculously gain ground in our lives and the lives of those with whom we have influence?

Yes – the war has been won, and victory is sure. But there are still many skirmishes and battles with high stakes in which we must engage until our King arrives. Let us be resolute. The gates of Hell shall not prevail (Matthew 16:18). Let us battle Lucifer and his hordes until we see him confess that Jesus is Lord, and watch the angels cast him into the lake of fire and brimstone where he shall be tormented day and night forever and ever. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. – *D. Murcek*

Blessings

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The LORD bless thee, and keep thee:

The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee:

The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.

And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them.

Numbers 6:22-27

This prescription from the LORD for pronouncing His blessing on the Israelites has provided effectual guidance for the Aaronic priesthood, as well as a continued pattern used in the Christian church, through the ages. The LORD's desire to bless His people is manifest in this benediction in a number of ways. The first element is the very act of the LORD to bless. The root of the Hebrew word translated "bless", *barak*, is described initially as "to kneel," implying adoration of God. David used it often in the Psalms in such a context, "I will bless the LORD at all times," etc., in Psalm 34. In the reverse direction, then, it would entail the love and care of the LORD for His people. In human terms, just think of the way we adore our little ones, then magnify that immensely. The next element of such blessing is that He would *keep*, or literally, *guard*, His people. Again, David in Psalm 34 recognized this aspect of the LORD's blessing when he said, *The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.*

The next two lines of this blessing involve the face, or countenance, of the LORD. This of course is beyond our ability to comprehend, since in the human realm none has yet seen his face in its fullness and lived. Our closest descriptions may be those of John the beloved in his attempts to describe his visions in the book of Revelation. Yet in a practical way, this aspect is fulfilled in Him being gracious toward His people. This grace includes stooping in kindness and pity. How many of our songs of worship and praise are directed toward His amazing grace toward unworthy sinners such as we. When we consider what the effulgence of His eternal light could do to us in our imperfect state, His grace instead brings its benefits as a healing balm both to cleanse from sin and to strengthen our souls. In Psalm 42, David implores both the help and the health of His countenance for his needy soul, to turn his despair into hope.

The second effect that His countenance brings in this blessing is to give peace to His people. There is no greater peace than what the LORD gives, and true peace only comes to us as recipients of His grace, by which He reconciles us to Himself. When Isaiah described the coming Messianic kingdom, he declared, *And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever. And my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places (Isaiah 32:17-18).* So the apostle concludes, *Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1).*