

Tuesdays With Tony

Volume 1
June 2021-May 2022

Tony Eldridge

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to three people:

First, to one of my elders, Terry Bennett, who encouraged me to post my articles on Facebook for others to read. Terry, thank you for your encouragement and your faith in me.

Second, to Randy and Rachel Potter. Randy is the one who dubbed my Tuesdays posts, “Tuesdays With Tony” and the name stuck. And his wife, Rachel, has been a reader and a sharer of my posts since I started. They both have been huge encouragements to me. Randy and Rachel, thank you both for your encouragement.

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Introduction

In June of 2021, I met with an elder in my church to share with him some articles I had written while studying the Bible. This may sound odd, but I didn't write the articles to publish, but to help me with my own personal Bible study. I love to write and I love to study the Bible. After looking at some of the articles, he encouraged me to post them on Facebook so others could read them too.

Well, I had gotten off of social media a few years prior because of all the stress and infighting on the platforms, even among those who claimed to be Christians, so I didn't eagerly jump at the chance to post my writings. That said, I take my submission to elders very seriously, especially since they watch over my soul and will give account of their oversight of me to the Chief Shepherd. So, I reluctantly started to post my articles to Facebook.

I decided to post one a week, on Tuesdays. When I announced this, a friend commented, "Tuesdays With Tony" and the name stuck. So, for over a year, I posted my articles every Tuesday and also posted short observations or lessons I gleaned from my daily Bible readings between these weekly posts.

This book is a compilation of all my Tuesdays With Tony posts from Facebook and those observations I posted between my Tuesdays posts. I have compiled them in this Volume 1 in book form. They cover my Facebook posts from June 2021 – May 2022. I have divided each post with this visual divider:

The actual Tuesdays With Tony (TWT) posts have titles and are listed in the Table of Contents page at the beginning of the book. Some non-TWT

posts are short and others are nearly as long as the featured posts, but there is no rhyme or reason to what topics I post on. I simply post about the things on my mind as I write. I use the ESV version throughout my book and paste exactly as copied from the Blue Letter Bible program I use.

It is my prayer that these writings help encourage you and strengthen your faith. You are free to share my work in any format and for any purpose without seeking permission. I only ask that you do not attribute anything to me that I didn't write. Aside from that, you need not give me any attribution when you use my work found in this book. If God gets the glory from anything that I produce, that is reward enough for me.

What is found in this book is pretty much the exact way I posted these things on Facebook, with edits made as I catch them. I have also attempted to present everything in the book in the same order that I posted on Facebook.

Thank you for your interest in spiritual things and thank you for your support through your purchase of this book. May we all help each other make the journey to our heavenly home together.

Tony Eldridge

Remember The Blessings Of COVID-19

June 29th, 2021

To my friends on Facebook. Lately, I have been combining my love for studying the Bible with my love for writing. With the encouragement of a dear friend, I have decided to share my thoughts with you each Tuesday. You have my permission to share without restriction. I don't need acknowledgment or links. My prayer is that the Tuesday posts will in some way bring comfort and encouragement to anyone who reads them. I will start off today's post with a reprint from an article I wrote for my congregation's View From The Pew section of the bulletin the first day we met unrestricted after our COVID-19 isolation.

Remember The Blessings Of COVID-19

As we transition to a “pre-COVID” way of life, there is a lot for us to be thankful for, especially as it relates to our spiritual lives. We will be hearing a lot of thankfulness to God that He brought an end to the pandemic and we will be hearing a lot of how important it is that we do not let habits borne of necessity take over our lives now that we can assemble together with the saints. We will all face temptations from Satan to replace God's plan with a substitute of convenience.

But all that being said, and very important to hear, I want us not to rush pass the wonderful blessings that came about because of the pandemic of COVID-19. We can see ways that God worked powerfully because of the pandemic. And as we transition back to a pre-COVID life, let's not be too quick to return there without taking the blessings with us to make our future even better than it was in the past.

1. Worship With Our Family- I hope that all of us had some form of

family worship to God, before COVID-19, where parents and children sat down together to center their time on worshipping God. But I suspect that the pandemic brought that holy practice to our family at a depth not seen before March of 2020. As we transition back to congregational worship, let's not replace our family worship together with our collective worship. Let's make both stronger post COVID and let us all draw nearer to God, 7 days a week and not just Sundays and Wednesdays. Can we praise God for how He used this illness to bring our families closer together in our worship to Him?

2. The Proliferation of God's Word- Pre-pandemic, we were blessed with the ability to search the internet for biblical resources and videos that were Bible based, but when the pandemic hit, God used it to throw that proliferation into overdrive. Preachers who had never published an article online or recorded a YouTube sermon began doing so in droves. And just as Paul's threats against the 1st century church spread the preaching of the Gospel everywhere, this terrible disease became the catalyst for godly men to spread the Gospel in a way it hasn't seen in a long time. Brothers and sisters, shouldn't we praise God that because of the pandemic, there has never been an easier time to fill our hearts with good, wholesome godly thoughts; never a better time to dig into the rich truths of God's word with such a new abundance of resources that were not available before March of 2020? Let us pray to our God in thanks for the feet of these preachers who preach the word in our hearing. While we still need to vet all we hear through prayerful study, let's not overlook this bountiful feast made possible by COVID-19.

3. Confirmation That God Is In Control- When things are going great, it's easy to pay lip service to this principle. But when our world is up-ended, Satan tempts us to lose faith that God is still in control. We wring our hands because it's often hard for us to see how we can continue. COVID-19 did, and continues to scare us, and rightly so. But even a deadly pandemic is no match for our God who told us that even the gates of hell itself is no match for His kingdom. What COVID-19 reminded us is that as bad as things may look, God will always provide a way for His people, His church. Who knows what new "pandemic" awaits us in our future? However, having gone through the last year, we will be even more ready to face it in the knowledge that it will not be too powerful for God to handle. And as bad as the next pandemic, persecution, or assault against the kingdom of God may be, He is able to thwart the evil it brings and turn it into good for us, His people. Can we praise God for the privilege of witnessing His mighty power and providence demonstrated as we lived through the COVID-19 pandemic?

Let's be joyful as we all move back to a pre-COVID existence, but let us all make that journey better by not forgetting the wonderful blessings that our God wrought because of this terrible world-wide disease. And let us pray that our future is even better than the past because of His providence we witnessed in 2020.

Jesus, As Our Mediator, Changes Everything

* Shout-out to Randy Potter for dubbing these posts, Tuesdays With Tony.

In Job 9, Job laments that he cannot approach God to question Him as to why bad things are happening. He goes on to tell how God is so much more powerful, so much wiser and so far above man that there is too much of a gulf that exists between the two. He ends with this:

“There is no arbiter between us, who might lay his hand on us both.”
(Job 9:33 ESV).

Job was right. Even when we are at our best, there is too much that will always separate man from God. God is holy and cannot have any fellowship with sin. We are sinful creatures. Isaiah says,

“but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.” (Isaiah 59:2 ESV).

God’s ways are higher than our ways, and His thoughts higher than ours. When sin enters our lives, it closes off access to our God. And there is nothing we can do on our own to approach the sovereign Creator of the universe.

Enter Jesus. There was only one way that man would be able to approach a holy God. The Creator would have to do what His creation could not do:

“who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.” (Philippians 2:6-7 ESV).

Jesus, who is God, would live as man. Why? First, so He could pay the price of sin for man with His blood. But second, so He could become that mediator who Job longed to have. Jesus was the answer to Job’s prayer.

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.” (Hebrews 4:15 ESV).

You see, Jesus is uniquely qualified to truly mediate between man and God. He is the only being who can lay His hand on man’s shoulders and say, “I understand you. I know what you are feeling because I have been there.” And He is also able to lay His other hand on the Father’s shoulder and say to Him, “I understand You. I know how You, as a holy God, can have no fellowship with sin. I know because I, too, am God.”

And then Jesus mediates. He pleads our case and presents His precious blood to the Father as payment for our sins. With one hand on each shoulder, Jesus eliminates the gulf that exists between man and God. Our Lord showed His love not only in the sacrifice of His blood, but in His willingness to humble Himself and become man so that He could truly understand us and mediate between us and the Father.

Tonight, when you pray, see Jesus’s hand on your shoulder as you enter the presence of the Father. And see His other hand on the Father’s shoulders as you utter your prayer to Him. Take comfort knowing that you are not alone before God.

A Preacher Formerly Named Legion

In Luke 8, we read how Jesus healed a demon possessed man. He often showed His power over demons, and even gave His followers power over demons. These stories teach important lessons about our God.

The man possessed by this demon(s) grew increasingly stronger and more menacing. By the time Jesus met him, he ran around naked and lived in the tombs. At one time, the people could restrain him, but by now, he had grown strong enough to break even the strongest chains and he roamed free.

“Jesus then asked him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Legion,” for many demons had entered him.” (Luke 8:30 ESV).

And if Hollywood had its way, an epic battle between good and evil would ensue.

But in truth, confrontations between the Son of God and the demons were fairly anticlimactic. There was never a battle, but simply the Creator commanding and the demons obeying. In fact, as strong as this demon was, he (they) knew the gig was up as soon as Jesus stepped onto the scene. They didn't struggle, they simply begged and obeyed the Almighty. Consider...

“When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him and said with a loud voice, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me.” (Luke 8:28 ESV).

“And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss. Now a large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him to let them enter these. So he gave them permission.” (Luke 8:31-32 ESV).

No power struggle. No epic battle. Jesus shows that He truly is master of all. And when the dust settled, a man created by Jesus, in His own image, sat at His feet, clothed and in his right mind (Luke 8:35). For the first time since being inhabited by Legion, the man was in control of his life. And what was the one thing he chose to do?

“The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him,” (Luke 8:38a ESV).

Legion had forced this man's obedience but having met the One whom even Legion feared, the man chose to follow the Son of God.

“but Jesus sent him away, saying, “Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.” And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him.” (Luke 8:38b-39 ESV).

The man obeyed Jesus' instructions. And the man formerly named Legion preached to all who would hear. Later we read about Jesus feeding 5000 men plus women and children, a massive crowd who grew and refused to stop following Him around. This crowd was from the same region that this new preacher told the story about the Man who commanded even the demons.

I wonder how many of the people who ate the loaves and fishes were there because they had heard the message from this new preacher formerly named Legion. Remember, no matter how broken, poor or sinful our past may be, never underestimate how God can use even someone like us.

What Makes Jesus Anxious

Anxiety is not something we usually associate with Jesus. He is the one who is calm and sleeping during a storm at sea. But we do see glimpses of anxiety in Him from time to time. Because of the robe of flesh He inhabited, we see Him pray for the cup of suffering to pass from Him.

But the anxiety I want to talk about is the anxiety He has as God. It is borne of His nature. He had it while on earth and He has it in heaven today. And His anxiety is brought about by us.

In Luke 15, Jesus responds to the Pharisee and Scribes' complaints of Him associating with sinners. He teaches a lesson in three parables. First, the shepherd who leaves the 99 safe sheep to find the one lost sheep. Then, the woman who searches everywhere to find one lost silver coin. Finally, he talks about the prodigal son.

Consider the common threads of each parable. When something of value is lost, the one who loses it is grieved. He doesn't just write it off and rejoice in what he has that isn't lost. And when the item of great value is found, he rejoices and shares his joy with everyone.

When we lose something we deeply value, we experience anxiety. It forces us to search and sacrifice in order to find it. I can only imagine the state parents find themselves in when a child goes missing.

You see, when we are lost, Jesus experiences anxiety over us. He is willing to go out and look for us. When others are ready to write us off as a lost cause, He comes searching. He's not above getting His hands dirty to rescue us.

Why? Because He is acutely aware of the perilous situation we are in if we are not found. Without His presence to keep us safe, we will experience an eternity void of Him and any goodness that flows from Him. Without Him, existence is full of pain, despair, evil and hopelessness. The consequences of us remaining lost brings great anxiety to Jesus.

That's why He will never stop searching for us; He will never stop knocking; He will always be willing to focus on the one who is lost. Until His Father sends Him back to claim His own, He will never stop looking for us.

And that's why He says,

“Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” (Luke 15:10 ESV).

The joy in heaven is an outflow of relief- anxiety that is eased when the item of great value is found.

No matter how lost you are, Jesus loves you. No matter how many people have written you off as a lost cause, Jesus has not. No matter how much you have done, nothing makes you so dirty that the Lord cannot cleanse you and make you whole. That's what He does. That's why He died. He did it all to find you, His precious possession that fills Him with anxiety.

Be found today and let joyful celebrations echo throughout the halls of heaven. Return to the safety of the 99 and join in prayer as your loving Savior continues His search for one more precious lost soul.

When you are tempted to leave God and join with Satan, remember who the two options truly are.

While the Bible teaches we need to have a healthy respect for the devil's power, only God is all-powerful.

Only God is omnipresent. Satan prowls about seeking someone to devour.

God is sovereign. Even the devil has to yield to His will.

God has demonstrated His tremendous love for you. Satan seeks your eternal destruction.

In the end, God will win. The devil will lose.

So, when you think about the two sides you can choose to stand with, is there really a choice at all?

Respect Satan's power but do not mistake him for the Almighty.

“remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me,” (Isaiah 46:9 ESV).

Do We Expect More In Others Than God Expects In Them?

As we bring ourselves into subjection to God's will, we sometimes have to make judgment calls on how we are to apply what He commands. Do we give \$10 a week or \$100 a week as our contribution? How do we help our brother in need? The danger in any specific application where God has not specified an action is that we are often tempted to take that judgment and hold others accountable to it.

This is perhaps one of the greatest bones of contention that Jesus had with the Pharisees. They elevated their man-made applications to be equal to God's law. And when Jesus broke their rules, they reacted as though God's law itself was broken.

I love how Jesus illustrates this in Matthew 11 when He explains how frustrated He and John the Baptist made the religious leaders:

“But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.'”
“(Matthew 11:16-17 ESV).

Just like children who make up rules to a game and then get upset with those who refuse to follow their rules, so did the religious leaders. They had expectations for how people were to act and neither John nor Jesus was playing by their rules. It wasn't God's rules that John and Jesus were breaking, but their own applications and expectations.

“For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds.” (Matthew 11:18-19 ESV).

But Jesus set the record straight about expectations.

“Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist.” (Matthew 11:11a ESV).

The application of what Jesus is teaching us is very important. God has designed His law in a unique way. While there are some commands that are clearly spelled out (we must show hospitality- 1 Peter 4:9), He often leaves

the application to us (do we invite people over for a meal or beverages, provide someone a place to stay, take someone out for coffee, or bring someone a meal). The danger we must guard against is confusing our application with God's law and requiring others to carry out His commands our way.

Personally, we need to give grace to each other when it comes to application of God's law when God has not specified application. How much time do we spend reading His Word each day? How many times do we pray? Should we wear a tie to worship? And the list goes on and on. Each of us will apply these things based on our heart. But it is a dangerous thing to equate our heart's decision to God's law and then require that application to others.

As we grow in His grace over time, these personal applications will change. His Word will continue to work in us and convict us. While it is human nature to feel that others should see the merits in our applications to God's Word, let's not give into the temptation of elevating them to the status of God's law.

We can tithe down to the mint leaf and fast twice a week, which is commendable if we do that in answer to a good conscience before God. But to expect others to do that will turn us into children more concerned with playing a flute and expecting people to dance to our tune than people who are content to honor God's law as written.

I have a King. I kneel before Him daily.

I pay homage to Him. He owns me and all that I have.

I am fearful in His presence because He has all power over me.

There is none who can restrain His hand against me. I am at His mercy, and His alone.

I approach Him daily with my hands outstretched, praying for my daily sustenance.

When He gives to me what seems good to Him, I take it with thankfulness and no complaint.

I have nothing to offer in return. Even my own life is not worth what He deserves.

What I have is all His. I can call nothing my own.

Yet in spite of being poor, weak and full of sin, I have 2 redeeming qualities before the Almighty.

I am made in His image.

He purchased me with His blood.

Apart from this, I have nothing of value before Him.
Because of this, I am priceless before Him.
And this is why
I have a King. I kneel before Him daily.

Do You Have Time To Read The New Testament?

In today's busy world, time is at a premium, isn't it? I understand how difficult it can be to find a few minutes here and there to spend in God's Word. It will take about 18.5 hours to read through the entire New Testament. But, if it is a worthwhile endeavor in your eyes, let me help you find some precious moments to spend with God speaking to you.

The average Netflix season is less than 10 hours. If you binge watch your favorite shows, you can read the entire New Testament in about the same time you spend watching 2 seasons of bingeable videos.

Are you an avid football fan? The average football game takes about 3.5 hours. In about the same time it takes to watch 5 games, you can get through the entire New Testament.

According to the government (National Center for Biotechnology-October 16, 2020), Americans spend an average of almost 2 hours a day on social media. Pausing our social media activities will get us through the entire New Testament in just over a week.

The average American spends about 1 hour a day behind the wheel. If you multitask and listen to an audio version of the Bible instead of the radio/podcasts, you can get through the entire New Testament in less than three weeks and then get back to your regularly scheduled programming.

Another multitasking opportunity... The average person spends 3.5 hours a week cleaning. Listening to the recorded New Testament will get you all the way through in 5 weeks while doing your household chores.

And finally, the average person spends 8 hours and 48 minutes sleeping (according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics). If you get up 30 minutes early, you can get through the entire New Testament in a little over a month.

If we are really motivated to find time to spend in the Word of the Creator, then we can use multiple strategies from above and we'd be surprised at how quickly we can read and re-read His holy Word.

“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.” (Ephesians 5:15-16 ESV).

Let's Call Down Fire From Heaven

In Luke 9, Jesus set His face to go to Jerusalem. The time had come for Him to make the final journey that would lead to His torture and crucifixion. Because He was traveling with a large group of people, He sent word to a Samaritan village to make preparations for their arrival.

“And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!” ... But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem.” (Luke 9:35, 53 ESV).

James and John became indignant when the Samaritans rejected them.

“Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” (Luke 9:54b ESV).

We can sympathize with the brothers' reaction. This was the Messiah, the Son of God they were rejecting.

“But he turned and rebuked them. And they went on to another village.” (Luke 9:55-56 ESV).

Jesus' response was not a gentle nudge for them to be more compassionate- it was a rebuke. Jesus was telling the brothers to stop talking this way right now.

You see, from the beginning, Jesus knew He was coming into a world that would not have a place for Him. Yet the Creator of everything would still do the work needed for those who would reject Him. In six months, the Romans would say, “There is no place for Your kingdom here” and they would scourge Him. The Jews would say, “You don't belong here” and they would crucify Him. The Samaritans' rejection was something Jesus would experience again and again.

Sometimes, we feel righteous indignation over things we know are injustices. But Jesus, who Himself was righteously indignant on occasions, is the Creator who knows the hearts of men. His righteous indignation is always accurate and perfectly measured.

Before we feel too comfortable with our righteous outrage toward others, consider that the Lord offers many more instructions for us to temper

indignation with grace than He gives instructions for us to call down fire from heaven.

Consider,

“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” (1 Corinthians 13:4-7 ESV).

And in Matthew 7, Jesus teaches

“For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.” (Matthew 7:2 ESV).

It was not only out of love for the Samaritans that Jesus rebuked James and John, but it was also out of love for the brothers themselves. In their zeal to condemn the Samaritans, they did not know that in six short months, they'd be guilty of the same thing themselves, and deserving the same judgment they were wanting to call upon the Samaritans. But Jesus knew. When He needed them most, the Scriptures says,

“Then all the disciples left him and fled.” (Matthew 26:56b ESV).

That included James and John.

Jesus wasn't going to Jerusalem to call down God's judgment upon man; He was going to Jerusalem to call down God's judgment upon Himself for man. And He asks us to give people the benefit of the doubt more than to lash out in righteous indignation. He asks us to love more than to accuse. He asks us to forgive more than to condemn. He asks us to give grace more than to exact revenge.

After all, isn't it our hope that Jesus will do the same for us?

Jesus was a man.

Jesus was a good man who taught good things.

Jesus was a man who did many good deeds.

Jesus was a man who stood firm for his values even when it wasn't popular.

Jesus was a man who could heal the sick, cause the blind to see and the

deaf to hear.

Jesus was a man who could feed the 5000 with a few loaves and fishes.

Jesus was a man who could walk on the water.

Jesus was a man who could raise the dead.

Jesus was a man who could speak and the demons would obey.

Jesus was a man who could speak and the winds and waves would obey.

Jesus was a man who could speak and the angels would obey.

Jesus is a man who could speak and there would be light.

Jesus is a man who could speak and everything would be brought into existence.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.” (John 1:1-3 ESV).

“but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.” (Hebrews 1:2 ESV).

“For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things were created through him and for him.” (Colossians 1:16 ESV).

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1 ESV).

Show Me The Coin

In Luke 20, the Gospel writer said that the enemies of Christ sent in spies to try to trap Him. And after careful consideration, they found the perfect opportunity... or so they thought. This crowd had a mix of people. On one hand, it consisted of the Sadducees who had power and wanted to keep the Romans happy so they could remain in power. On the other hand, it consisted of Zealots who believed that God had given the Jews a divine deed to Israel and that they should bow to no authority but God. This mix was always a powder keg ready to blow, and the enemies of Christ would try to

use Him as the fuse.

The trap: conquered lands were required to pay taxes to Rome and Israel was no different. The Sadducees wanted to peacefully pay the taxes but the Zealots felt it was sinful to do so. This was the classic no-win scenario that would certainly anger at least half of Jesus' supporters, or worse, cause the Romans to step in to arrest Him as an insurrectionist. And once the enemies of Christ could get His supporters fighting among themselves, or cause the Romans to step in and take action against Him, they could waltz in and pick up the pieces.

“Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar, or not?” But he perceived their craftiness, and said to them, “Show me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?” They said, “Caesar's.” He said to them, “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.” (Luke 20:22-25 ESV).

One side of the coin had an image of Tiberius and an inscription that equated to “The Son Of God” and the other side had an image of Tiberius' mother and an inscription that equated to “High Priest”. This would have made paying taxes with this coin all the more repugnant to the Jews. But Jesus answers in all wisdom as only God can do. As much as possible, His followers always serve as peaceful citizens. We give to the government what is due them- taxes, obedience and honor. This is confirmed throughout the New Testament.

But we give to God What is due Him- That is 100% of our allegiance. As long as service to the government does not take from God, part of our service to Him is to live peacefully and lawfully as much as is within our power. But when the government encroaches on what is due God-

“Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.” (Acts 4:19-20 ESV).

The time may come when the government asks us to render to them the things that belong to God alone. When that time comes, we must have the same spirit that Peter and John had. We must be willing to obey God rather than man. I pray that all Christians everywhere have the wisdom and boldness to render to God His due and the meekness and humility to render unto Caesar his due.

“And they were not able in the presence of the people to catch him in what he said, but marveling at his answer they became silent.” (Luke 20:26 ESV).

My 5-year-old son asked for about 10 kinds of candy while checking out at Walmart. I told him “No.”

When we got home, he tried to play ball in the road. I told him “No.”

When dinner came around, he decided he wanted Lay's potato chips and nothing else. I told him “No.”

He later got mad at his older brother and started to hit him. I told him “No.”

At bed time, he wanted to stay up and watch cartoons. I told him “No.”

It may not feel good at the moment, but when we think about it, aren't we glad that God loves us enough not to spoil us with every whim and desire we ask Him for?

What if Jesus came today? Would you be filled with joy and anticipation or fear and dread?

There will be a generation that will hear the Archangel announce the return of The King and the trumpets sounding around the world. That generation could very well be ours.

If we are that generation, will we run out to get everyone we know to welcome His return or will our first thought be to run and hide from His presence?

Today, live each moment knowing that sometime today, you will hear that voice and that trumpet. Treat your family well. Love your neighbor. Share your faith. Praise your God. And if tomorrow comes, live that day the same way. When the time actually comes, be ready and not caught off guard.

I'm praying for you all. I'm praying for me.

“He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20 ESV).

We are one day closer to the Lord's return. Are you ready?

One of my biggest fears: On the Day of Judgment hearing my kids say, “My daddy didn't tell me anything about that.”

Have you ever felt the weight of your past sins press so hard on you that you began to think, “Why would my kids ever listen to me now? Why would my spouse believe me this time? How could I influence my friends when they know the truth about me?”

Remember that it's Satan who wants you to create these self-fulfilling prophecies. It's God who gives you the strength and grace to become a new creature.

God is not glorified because of our strength to live the way we should. He is glorified when, in our weakness, we submit to Him and let His Word make us something we are not.

“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20 ESV).

Will You Honor Your RSVP?

Whether it's a birthday party, wedding or retirement party, a lot goes into their planning and execution. That's why the host will often send out an RSVP. We need to know how much food to buy, how big the venue needs to be, and how much money to budget. We neither want to buy too much or run out of food for our guests.

But how would you feel if everyone who replied to your RSVP gave an excuse at the last minute about why they couldn't come? All that planning

and expense would go to waste. Jesus tells the story of just that very thing happening.

“But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.' And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.'” (Luke 14:18-20 ESV).

You know the story. The host was furious and went out and grabbed the poor, the weak, and the forgotten in society to bring to his feast. He then vowed,

“For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.” (Luke 14:24 ESV).

Jesus then speaks of something that may seem unconnected on the surface, but Dr. Luke places it here for an important reason. Jesus teaches the importance of counting the cost. Who starts a building without first making sure he has enough money to finish it? Or what king does not first count the cost of going to war against a stronger king? (Luke 14:28-32).

So, what's the connection between the feast and counting the cost? Simply, Jesus is teaching the importance of making proper valuations. We do this all the time. When we shop for cars, houses or even vacations, we assess the cost and then decide if we place enough value on that item or experience to warrant that cost.

Jesus invites us all to His feast. He wants us to be there. But we must assess the cost and determine if His invitation is worth it to us. Will we come to His feast and honor the RSVP or will we come to Him with excuses that demonstrate what we really value above Him?

Jesus leaves no doubt where He stands on this:

“So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:33 ESV).

If we choose something above Him, what will we think of that choice on the Day of Judgment? Will we have truly found value in what we have chosen over Jesus?

“For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul?” (Mark 8:36-37 ESV).

Why do I bow my knee to King Jesus and confess Him today?
Well, we will all do so someday. I choose to do so now in submission to Him before being forced to do so when He returns.

“for it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” (Romans 14:11 ESV).

Be careful when you watch the news. It may lead you to believe that God isn't in control. The violence of evil men may make you forget that God is sovereign.

God is indeed sovereign. He does what He wants and answers to no man. No circumstance can thwart God's will.

When you begin to fear, remember that you serve a God who is always in control. Those who rebel will soon be held to account.

The evil we see in the world now is short lived. God's eyes are not averted from it. God has not fought and lost control.

Remember God's sovereignty. He will have the last word and hold all evil accountable to Him.

“all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, “What have you done?” (Daniel 4:35 ESV).

If we are not thankful for our daily bread, should God teach us thankfulness?

If we don't appreciate our home, should God teach us appreciation?

If we are not content with our possessions, should God teach us contentment?

If we take God for granted, should He teach us reliance?

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” (James 1:17 ESV).

Today is the Lord's day. What are your plans?

Do you put your trust in an all-powerful God or in something else?

Do you feel safe, living in a land with a strong military and separated by two oceans from our enemies?

How can our enemies touch us and bring us low? Perhaps they cannot. But God can.

Without firing a shot, our enemies can bring down the mighty if God ordains it. God can bring in incompetent men and women who do not know how to bridle the strength He has given.

I pray for God's protection, but do not be deceived. Our safety is dependent upon God and God alone. He is the source of any strength and protection we have. We scoff at this to our own peril.

The world is dangerous and unpredictable. There is only one place we can find sure footing in our lives. It is in our God who died for us and purchased us with His blood.

Today is His day. What are your plans?

“The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rock, in your lofty dwelling, who say in your heart, “Who will bring me down to the ground?” Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, from there I will bring you down, declares the LORD.” (Obadiah 1:3-4 ESV).

The next time you think you're having a bad day, remember that it wasn't nearly as bad as the day Satan once had.

As he was prowling about, seeking someone to devour, Satan happened upon a meek lamb. He pounced and killed it.

Three days later, the Lamb returned from the grave as a much bigger Lion and delivered a death blow to Satan that he would never recover from.

Yeah, it was a very bad day for him...

“Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,” (Hebrews 2:14 ESV).

Forgive Until It Hurts

Today’s message may perhaps be one of the hardest for us to read. It exposes us for who we are. I know that I cringe when I see how miserably I fail at what we will look at today. It stems from how we are to treat each other, even when they don’t deserve our kindness. Especially when they don’t deserve our forgiveness.

“Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.” (Matthew 18:21-22 ESV).

Jesus then goes on to illustrate what He means. And when we hear His parable, it makes us uncomfortable. Sure, we understand it intellectually, but when we start to see how we must apply it, we see just how radical He is calling us to live. And what He asks, what He expects, is not easy at all.

A certain king had a servant who owed him 10000 talents. For reference, this amount was equal to about 165,000 years of wages. And the man could not repay. So, the king ordered the man to be put into prison and to sell all that he had, so that the king could get whatever losses he could recoup.

“So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.” (Matthew 18:26-27 ESV).

What compassion! What grace! And you would think that this servant would be a changed man after receiving this life-changing gift. But we know the story. And if the truth be told, it probably sounds a lot like our story, doesn’t it? We have received from our God forgiveness of a debt that is far heavier than 10000 talents.

“But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.” (Matthew 18:28-30 ESV).

After receiving a life-redeeming gift of grace, this wicked servant shows no compassion to a fellow servant who owed him a miniscule amount. And when the news got back to the king about his lack of compassion, in anger, the king threw him into prison to be tortured until his 165,000 years' worth of debt was repaid.

Here is where this gets hard. If we have received the Lord's gift of salvation, freely forgiving us a debt so big that we could never repay, do we continually pay that grace forward to our fellow man? Do we hold the sins of our spouses over them with no mercy? Do we make sure that our brother, who betrayed us, is constantly reminded of his infraction? Do we withhold our forgiveness from those who purposely hurt us or hurt someone we love? Is there anyone that we refuse to forgive?

What Jesus was teaching to Peter, and to us, is that we must pay forward to others the grace God has shown to us. Forgiveness is not about someone being worthy of it; but like us, it is offered even when someone is unworthy of it. Especially when they are unworthy of it. Sometimes it hurts to forgive this way, doesn't it? But I suppose it doesn't hurt nearly as much as it hurt Jesus on the cross when he forgave us.

I'm really looking forward to heaven. Having that destination in mind helps me make it through anything life decides to throw at me.

As much as Satan would have me lose hope, and give up right outside the gate, I know my Savior will carry me over the threshold and that my hope will become realized.

Keep the faith and let God do the heavy lifting in your life today. You've got this.

Tuesdays With Tony

Here are ten things I am not ashamed to admit I believe:

1. If there was a big bang, it occurred as the result of God instantaneously speaking things into existence a few thousand years ago.
2. There was a flood that covered every mountain over the entire globe. A large boat saved 8 people and two of every kind of land animal.
3. God kept three men alive in the midst of giant kiln of fire so hot that the guards who escorted them burned to death before reaching it.
4. God once stopped the sun at the request of a man and even made it go backwards in the sky another time.
5. God left heaven, poured Himself into the body of a baby, and lived a perfect life among His creation.
6. He paid my debt of sin by taking my place when He was executed on a cross.
7. He draws a line in the sand with Satan by not allowing me to be tempted beyond what I am able to bear.
8. He has gone to His Father's house to prepare my home with Him.
9. He now sits on a throne with everything that exists firmly under His authority.
10. He will return to bring me home with Him or raise me from the dead to meet him in the sky if I should die first.

Having gone through Covid and gall bladder surgery within the span of a month, it has helped me learn something about prayer. While I pray for healing from God, I end my prayer, "But let what best glorify You be done." I have never felt such contentment in illness before. I love Jesus for better or worse, for richer or poorer, and in sickness and in health. It's been a long road for Jesus to get me to this point and I am so grateful He didn't give up on me.

Another week is upon us. We go to battle with the evil one. Did you fill up on God yesterday to help you in the fight?

I humbly suggest that you begin each day with prayer and Bible reading. Put good in to help keep the bad out.

Don't wait until the battle for your soul gets tough this week. Make plans at the beginning of each day to arm yourself.

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” (Philippians 4:8 ESV).

When you make the shift from creating expectations based on what you want God to do for you, to wanting God to be glorified through you, you will never be disappointed as His child.

This is a life-changing paradigm shift.

“But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Corinthians 12:9-10 ESV).

Flipping Tables: What Angers Jesus

We all love a fighter, don't we? Someone who isn't afraid to mix it up when there is a need, especially when our champion is fighting for a just cause. And when we see our Lord and Savior showing His righteous indignation, it can give us goosebumps and we find ourselves cheering from His corner for Him to bring it on. And this is the scene that John paints with simplistic, yet powerful detail:

“And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold the pigeons, “Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade.” (John 2:15-16 ESV).

But before we get too caught up in cheering our Champion on, let's consider what it is that's making our Lord angry. If we are not careful, we can get so caught up in the fight that we might miss the object of His outrage. Is it possible that if Jesus were here today, He might be turning over some of the very tables at which we are sitting?

These Jewish leaders had evolved their marketplace to such an extent that they were gouging well-meaning worshipers in need, and then taking that money and lending it to land owners in lean times. When land owners couldn't pay, they would quickly foreclose and take their lands and homes. This was a well-oiled money-making venture.

But that wasn't the worst part. They had moved this market into the Temple, specifically into the Court of the Gentiles. This was a holy area that God had set aside for His glory to be seen by non-Jews who converted to Him. And yet, instead of being able to witness God's glory when they made the trip to visit God's house, these gentiles were greeted with a Black Friday event. And when Jesus witnessed what was happening in His house, He lost it.

Today, what are we doing to the Lord's church on earth? The church He purchased with His precious and holy blood? Is our local congregation a destination for all those who are seeking and searching for salvation and redemption? Or are we turning it into a marketplace?

Elders, deacons, and preachers, are we content to work with a church that is focused on glorifying God, edifying the saints, and teaching sound doctrine? Or are we fretting over numbers and the size of our assembly? Do we strategize on how we can appeal to the largest number of Christians that we can attract? Do we place too much attention upon the personality and skills of a preacher that we lose sight of the power of the Gospel itself? Do we try to find the perfect program to cater to potential members rather than relying on God's simple, 2000-year-old plan that transforms people? Or worse, is there a certain demographic that we feel is the sweet spot for our success? I'm sure we all want to lead as many to salvation as possible, but is it the saving we focus on, or the numbers?

Christians, how do we evaluate a church? Do we seek a congregation that meets our needs- Is the singing any good? What does your church have for my kids? How talented is the preacher? Are the worship times convenient to my schedule? Do we have a "5 Star" mentality as we blend our consumerism into how we evaluate the church? Or are we seeking one that glorifies our Lord, teaches the simple truth, allows us to serve and sacrifice for our fellow brothers and sisters, and exemplifies what it means to love one another?

Size has nothing to do with being a first century church. But how we choose to evaluate a church, whether as a leader or as a member, tells a lot about the tables at which we are sitting. None of the questions we discussed are necessarily wrong to ask in themselves, but it's our focus when we ask

them that we should always be examining.

Have we turned the Lord's church into a bastion of consumerism more concerned about meeting our needs and desires or do we truly want to worship where the people want nothing more than to glorify God and sacrifice self to Him? While church is a place where we can grow and be strengthened, this is a by-product of a church that is focused on Him, and not one that is focused on ourselves.

If Jesus were here today and surveyed how we treat His body, the church, would He find it a place of prayer, worship and submission to His glory and power, or would He start flipping our tables because we have turned it into an organization eager to please and cater to our own whims and appetites? We all love a champion, but let us make sure that we are truly on our Champion's side, else we become the object of His indignation.

Social media has its fatal dangers that wisdom forces us to acknowledge. But God can also use it to achieve His purposes through us.

How great is it that we can deliver a sermon to someone with the click of a mouse?

How great is it that we can chat with a brother or sister thousands of miles away instantly and in real time?

How great is it that the brotherhood can be mobilized at a moment's notice to pray when a need arises?

How great is it that a brother or sister is right there when you need an encouraging word?

How great is it that you can confess Christ before man so easily?

I can only imagine how much Paul would have loved to have access to a Facebook or YouTube. Can you imagine what he could have done on social media?

Social media has its dangers. But wielded for God's glory, it can be an amazing blessing.

Assume that the Lord will return at 5pm today and live each hour of the day accordingly.

Tuesdays With Tony

Why is it so important to show thankfulness to God? Because thankfulness is rooted in our beliefs about the nature of God.

1. He is fully able to sustain us. Thankfulness demonstrates our belief that He has the ability to provide all our needs.

2. He is sovereign. Thankfulness demonstrates that we do not rely on ourselves, but we submit to His sovereignty in our lives.

We have three choices on how to respond to God's goodness in our lives.

We can ignore Him and take God for granted.

We can deny He has anything to do with our blessings.

We can acknowledge His goodness and humbly thank Him for it.

Thankfulness, or the lack thereof, tells a lot about how we view God.

“For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.” (Romans 1:21 ESV).

My heartfelt thanks go out to our elders at Campbell Road, and to all shepherds of the Lord's people around the world.

Many of us will never know the sleepless nights they have because of their oversight.

We may never understand the patience they exhibit as they lead us back to the fold. Most of us would give up trying after running into brick wall after brick wall. But they persevere.

It takes a love for the Lord and His people to step into this role. It's certainly not for any reward they receive outside the spiritual one. Often, they sacrifice a lot more than they personally receive.

To my elders, and to those around the world, I love you. Thank you for watching out for my soul.

“And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.” (1 Peter 5:4 ESV).

Do you have that special friend who you can bug anytime you need to talk? Someone who is eager to hear from you? Someone who will tell you what you need to hear, and not just what you want to hear?

If not, find one. To do that, you may first have to be that friend. This kind of trust and friendship doesn't happen without first investing into it. But once you find one, the burdens of life become much lighter.

“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.”
(Proverbs 17:17 ESV).

Here are three questions I humbly recommend that you consider as you start each day.

1. How can I confess Christ before man today?
2. What can I do to bring glory to God today?
3. How can I lift someone's burden, even if just a little, today?

I believe that it's in the striving of answering these three questions that will help us do more than we may feel that we are capable of doing.

What Kind Of Steward Will You Be?

A steward is someone who is entrusted with the possession of another. Often, a steward is given great leeway in handling property, but there is always a time in which he will be called to give account of his stewardship. Jesus teaches familiar lessons of stewardship to his disciples.

“He said therefore, “A nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return. Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas, and said to them, 'Engage in business until I come.'”
(Luke 19:12-13 ESV).

And

“For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants

and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away.” (Matthew 25:14-15 ESV).

In these two parables, we learn lessons of stewardship from our God. In the first account, the master gives each steward the same amount to manage, and he rewards them even though they produced varying profits. In the parable of the talents, the master gave different amounts to manage, each based on their ability. And in both parables, some stewards did well, while others returned merely what the master entrusted to them with no growth. These lazy people buried what was entrusted to them and returned it back to the master. And the master was not happy at all with their stewardship.

“For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 25:29-30 ESV).

I take away three lessons from these and other parables on stewardship.

1. God Expects Stewardship:

“Who has first given to me, that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine.” (Job 41:11 ESV).

God owns everything and gives to us as He pleases. Whether it is money, time, a family, responsibilities with our local congregation, or anything of value, ultimately those things are on loan to us by God. They are His and we will be expected to use them wisely for His benefit and glory.

2. We Need To Reexamine What We View As Mine:

“And he said, “Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” (Job 1:21 ESV).

While the Bible does teach the principle of private ownership, we should not uncouple that principle from the lessons of stewardship. The danger in forgetting that what is mine, is ultimately God’s, is that it can lead us to selfish and lazy stewardship of what He has entrusted to us.

3. There Will Be An Accounting Of All Stewards:

“Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did

not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (Matthew 25:44-46 ESV).

Stewardship is not optional for Christians. Jesus gave us the perfect example of how to be a good steward. He faithfully managed what the Father entrusted to Him for our benefit and the Father’s glory. Whether we have money, time, a family, a work or anything of value, it is on loan from God. On the day of judgment, will you dig up what you buried and return it to the Lord, or will you show the Lord how you put His resources to use for His glory?

Do you sometimes feel alone in your walk with God? Do you wish you had a little support from someone who really understands you and what you are going through?

That’s a common weight that we have all borne at one time or another to some extent. The good news is that the world is full of strong, faithful servants of God who live to bring glory to His name.

We have never lived in a better time to find these people and gain our fill of support. With the advance of technology, we can find people, 24/7, whom we can draw encouragement from.

Remember, the next time you feel alone in your walk with God, take comfort knowing that there are thousands, millions, all over the world who are bowing the knee before King Jesus. Reach out and find them and do not continue your walk alone.

“Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.” (1 Kings 19:18 ESV).

I wonder if Satan has taken hold of this country so firmly that God’s wrath is brewing against it. If so, we are in for a bumpy ride. Here are some things to lay hold of if this is indeed the case.

Embrace God’s Kingdom- It is never changing and will be your rock to anchor in when the world falls apart.

Choose To Stand With Jesus- If there is a battle brewing, now is the time to make the choice to stand with the One who will be victorious. If you wait to choose, I fear you will be swept away in the battle.

Embrace His Grace- Without Jesus, any upcoming battle will be overwhelming. We will not be able to stand without His Grace to give us victory. Surrender to Him so we can live victorious through Him.

Be Salt- We may be tempted to give up when faced with overwhelming odds. That's what Satan is counting on. But we need to continue being the world's salt. When things get impossible, the good and honest hearts will flock to the Gospel message even knowing what it will cost them.

Keep Your Perspective- Whatever cup of wrath awaits our nation, we will be asked to endure for only a short time. Eternity awaits us. We will be victorious in the mighty Lamb of God.

“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!”
(Isaiah 5:20 ESV).

I take no pleasure in saying this, but I advise, “Buckle up. We may have a rocky road before us.”

Before you speak evil of the politician you can't stand...

Before you lust after that person you desire...

Before you lash out in anger over someone who cut you off in traffic...

Before you hurt the one you love most...

Remember...

They are children of God made in His image. Speak well of His creation and honor them because they are created by Him. Do not sin against them lest you offend the Creator.

“With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.”
(James 3:9-10 ESV).

Have you really thought about what the first few moments in heaven will be like?

I imagine standing before the throne of the Mighty God and singing praises to Him.

I imagine walking the banks of the River of Life, and plucking a fruit from the Tree of Life.

I imagine that it will dawn on me, I will never have to wake again to go to my job. I will never have to take medication to give my body comfort.

I imagine having all the time I need to seek out the great Bible characters and chat with them- Peter, Paul, Abraham, Adam, Moses, Elijah, and the rest.

I imagine that I will be able to view the mighty hosts of heaven, angels and all the beings created to serve the God of heaven.

I imagine looking down at my new body and finding no surgical scars, no wrinkles, and no blemishes.

I imagine that after I have been doing all these things for a long time, realizing that night has not come and I do not feel tired.

I imagine falling down to worship God and realizing that this is my reality. I never have to worry or wonder ever again.

I don't know exactly what it will be like in heaven. But based on what the Spirit has revealed to us, I am confident that the reality will be even greater than I can imagine.

I hope to see each of you there. When we are, let's chat. We will have all the time we need.

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.” (John 14:1-3 ESV).

Do you have a simple prayer that you say all the time? Not from rote, but because it burst forth and cannot be contained?

I do. Several times throughout the day, I utter this four-word prayer: “God, I love You.”

Sometimes, that's all that needs to be said.

Crowds are shouting to silence the Bible because it isn't inclusive enough.
Crowds are shouting to believe in evolution because the creation account has no place in a world of science.

Crowds are shouting to allow people to choose their own gender because it isn't fair that the Creator has labeled them Male and Female.

Crowds are shouting to remove Christian values because they are too restrictive and violate personal freedoms.

Be careful when tempted to listen to the crowd.

“But they all cried out together, “Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas”-- a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder. Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus, but they kept shouting, “Crucify, crucify him!”

A third time he said to them, “Why? What evil has he done? I have found in him no guilt deserving death. I will therefore punish and release him.” But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. So Pilate decided that their demand should be granted.” (Luke 23:18-24 ESV).

Just as I start to think we are on a trajectory as a nation that makes me wonder if we've crossed the point of no return with God, I sit at the feet of my nephew and hear him proclaim Christ so passionately in the home of another young man who has dedicated his life to preaching the Word.

Who knows what is in store for our country; but I am encouraged that there are young men and women of God who will stand with Jesus no matter what is thrown at them.

This warms my heart and gives me hope.

“Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.” (1 Timothy 4:12 ESV).

I have been thinking a lot on the sovereignty of God lately. The more I

study, the more I am convinced that I have never really appreciated it.

I am beginning to see that all of God's attributes rest on the foundation of His sovereignty. As God, He can do what He wants and He never has to answer to man for His actions.

As God, He is under no standard that is imposed upon Him. His character is sure, and he acts consistently because it is in His character, not because any authority is imposed upon Him to act a certain way.

My God not only has the authority to act in any way He chooses, but He has all power to back it up. My God has the power to do all that He desires. There is nothing beyond His ability.

Knowing this, I submit to King Jesus and His sovereignty. He is my Potter; I am His clay. I do not fear living in an evil world because my sovereign God is always fully in control. His decision to act or stay His hand is His choice, and His longsuffering is born of His choice and not of impotence.

I do not question my sovereign God as to His why He does or does not act. I simply pray for His favor and His strength to live in His sovereignty.

It is because of God's sovereignty that I can sleep well each night. I submit fully to my awesome God.

“At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation;

all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, “What have you done?” (Daniel 4:34-35 ESV).

So, a few days ago, I started to read through the book of Isaiah, 10 chapters first thing in the morning, every morning. Not to deep dive into study, but to understand it at a high level.

I've never done that before. It's has been an amazing experience. You get to see who God is from many sides.

If you want to experience awe, respect, love, fear and hope in quick succession, sit down with Isaiah. You will never see God the same away again.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my

ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:8-9 ESV).

Things Angels And Prophets Longed To Know

****SPOILER ALERT**** - Ah, the dreaded warning for any movie lover. Do you remember the time you were excited to see a movie and hours before the showing someone made the innocent comment, “I did not expect {Insert Main Character Here} to die!” Arg!!!

Well, for today's post, thinking about this concept may help us understand this week's message. I find a couple of verses absolutely intriguing, and they help me understand why things unfolded the way they did. Both passages talk about angels and prophets longing to know a mystery hidden from them, but one that has been revealed to us. And this mystery pivots at Calvary. Those before Calvary didn't know the details of this mystery. Those of us after Calvary have the details of this mystery revealed to us.

The two verses are:

“It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.” (1 Peter 1:12 ESV).

And

“For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.” (Matthew 13:17 ESV).

Sitting on this side of Calvary may cause us to miss the impact of these verses, because until Jesus and the Holy Spirit revealed the fullness of the gospel, there was a tremendous mystery that angels and prophets longed to understand. Only God Himself knew the mystery, which was this:

Man sinned and brought upon himself separation from a holy God who

cannot have fellowship with sin. Yet God would somehow reconcile man back to Himself. Not for the Jews only, but for all of His created children- Jews and Gentiles alike.

The angels knew that man was sinful and unclean. The prophets longed to have a better understanding of how God would accomplish a reconciliation. But we have the gospel revealed and we can almost casually say, “Of course Jesus would die on the cross for our sins and reconcile us back to the Father.”

It seems so simple, and it is. Wonderfully, beautifully simple. But until it happened, no one knew it. No one would- could- fathom that God Himself would become man to suffer and die for His sinful creation. Even though He prophesied about it, no one could really grasp this mystery. Only God knew. Not the angels. Not the prophets. Not even Satan himself.

Understanding the scheme of redemption, I always wondered why Satan would help God in it by playing his role to have the Lamb of God sacrificed, thus ensuring his own defeat. But these two verses help me understand. Only God knew the fullness of the plan. It was conceived by the mind of God and carried out by God Himself. Before Calvary, all Satan knew was that he had to kill the Son of God to stop him from becoming the promised Messiah.

From this side of Calvary, we see the entire plan unfolded. From the other side of Calvary, reconciliation with God seemed an impossibility. Even the inhabitants of heaven- angels- knew sin could not reside in the presence of the Almighty. But they knew that God had a plan for man. They couldn't figure it out and longed to look into this plan to see how God would do the impossible.

But we know the mystery. We know the plan. We know the role that God played to make us His again. We know how Satan unwittingly played into the hands of God's simple, marvelous, wonderful plan. And having known what angels and prophets desired to know, what a shame for us to casually shrug it off and count it a common thing. I pray we all drop to our knees daily to thank God for having the mystery revealed to us, but more, for what the mystery means to our eternal soul.

“but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8 ESV).

Someone recently asked me how my prayers have changed. The truth is, they have changed significantly. Mostly, in my attitude that I have when I approach God while praying. To give you a flavor of what I mean, let me

walk you through my morning routine.

I get up around 5 am and the first thing on my mind is that I am about to go before the Throne of God. I wake up and take care of all my physical needs to prepare for what I am about to do. And eagerness starts to build.

When ready, I imagine in my mind approaching the throne of God. I see the Creator of the universe, Father, Son and Holy Spirit gathered in the throne room. As I step toward the throne, I imagine angels and all the created creatures of heaven standing silent as I make my way to God.

Then, all is silent. I have the undivided attention of my God. The Spirit stands with me, ready to help me utter things I do not know how to utter. Jesus stands as my mediator, with one hand on my shoulder and His other hand on God's shoulder to eliminate the gulf that my sins have created.

As I open my mouth, I am humbled that all three members of the Trinity are active in my prayer. Each is listening and helping me- me a sinner who doesn't belong where I am. But by grace, even I am there and the God of heaven is listening intently to me.

I find comfort knowing that what I don't say right, the Spirit helps me say. I find comfort that while I do not deserve to be before God, Jesus has brought me as his special possession. And I get to praise, thank, and bring my request before the one who created all things, owns all things, and can do all things.

How have my prayers changed? To me, prayer is no longer something I must do; it is something I cannot wait to do. It is something that humbles me and teaches me so much about the grace of God.

“Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:16 ESV).

What am I working on today? Seasoning my speech with love. Sometimes, it's not what I say, but how I say it that can build up or tear down.

“Lord, help me be a builder and not a wrecking ball to someone today.”

What does it mean to glorify God? It means that we do what we do so that He is honored and exalted. We say what we say so that He receives the

praise.

Our danger is falling into the snare that the Scribes and Pharisees fell into. That is, doing and saying things “for God's glory” when in our heart, it is secretly for our glory. So that we can be puffed up in the doing and the saying.

If I do good so that God is glorified, I do so praying He is honored though I may never hear about it or see it. It is enough that He take all glory and honor from what I do or say.

I may never see a like on my post, get a thank you for my deeds, or be recognized for my actions. But I continue to do what glorifies Him and praise God that He has all glory from my words and deeds.

It is enough to deflect all glory to God so that we never become puffed up with stolen glory that belongs to God alone. That is our true reward and honor in Him.

I've done things in my past that are causing me to reap consequences that I am facing today. Is it God's punishment upon me for the evil I have done?

That's not how I see it. Rather, I hear God's voice tell me this, “Son, I know you have a rough road ahead of you because of the seeds you have sown. But I promise to be there with you every step of the way as you travel that road.”

On the Day of Judgement, when the Lord ask to examine your hands, will He find them rough with service to His people or supple and tender from withholding service?

Sometimes it's easy to think that all we must do is to obey and honor God. But Jesus says that everything rests on the first two commandments- To love God and to love neighbor.

What will you do today to make your hands rough in the service to your brothers and sisters?

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”
(John 13:34-35 ESV).

What am I reading today?

A few days ago, I started reading the book of Jeremiah. I am almost half-way through and things are not looking good for the Israelites.

God is about to send the people into Babylonian captivity because of their sins and because they have turned away from Him. God's long-suffering and loving kindness has reached its limits. Jeremiah is told not to intercede for them, not to pray for them and not to feel sorry for them.

What a scary place to be. It makes me wonder if we are pushing God to a place where His loving kindness and long-suffering is being pressed to the limits. We know that what made God angry yesterday makes God angry today.

As you go to worship God this Lord's day- if you are indeed going to worship Him- are you doing so in the same manner that Israel did in the days of Jeremiah preceding the captivity? Are you going to pay lip service to Him today and turn to your own ways tomorrow?

I am interested in seeing how the book of Jeremiah turns out, but I am sure that it will deliver a message of stark warning for us today. Indeed, it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God and to push Him to the point where He pours out His cup of wrath upon us with no remedy.

Let me leave you with a chilling condemnation found in the first half of Jeremiah that sounds all-too familiar for our day:

“and because you have done worse than your fathers, for behold, every one of you follows his stubborn, evil will, refusing to listen to me.” (Jeremiah 16:12 ESV).

What's on my mind, Facebook asks... Well, I've been thinking a lot about the people who gave alms and made sure that everyone knew they gave. Jesus follows up with the instructions to not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.

There is something pure about doing your good deeds in secret. My God is omnipresent. He sees everything I do and everything I do not do. Is it enough for me to know that my God sees when no one else does?

Sadly, not always. My sinful, natural man often craves the praise of men. But my spiritual man is starting to learn how to exert its dominance. Not

always, but more and more.

And you know what? When I do as God wants me to do, I am so much more content. When my spiritual man wins the battle over my carnal man, I know it is God working in me. It is evidence that He has not abandoned me, but is committed to transforming me into the image of His Son.

I'm not perfect, and my carnal man often gets the best of me. But it will not dominate me. And I know that my Lord will continue to extend His grace as I continue to walk with Him.

It comes down to this for me: What is it that I am really after? Is it that which pleases the carnal man in me or is it that which satisfies the spiritual man in me?

I am not strong enough to be the man Christ wants me to be. But He is strong enough to transform me into that man, and that I believe with all my heart.

“Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. “Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” (Matthew 6:1-4 ESV).

The Biggest Lie

We live in a world where truth is starting to lose its virtue while lies are finding an increasing acceptance.

“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!” (Isaiah 5:20 ESV).

Isn't this starting to describe the culture we live in more and more?

Some lies are bold and easy to detect. But the truly dangerous ones are subtle and have a hint of truth to them. And if we couple those lies with the

ones that also minimize or delay consequences, then we have a lie so insidious that it may lead us as lambs to the slaughter.

I believe that Satan is not concerned with persuading us that there is no God; he is not obsessed with convincing us that heaven and hell are not real. Nor is he banking on the fact that he can get us to believe that we do not need to be faithful Christians to be pleasing to God. No, I am convinced that his biggest lie is this:

God is real. Heaven and hell are real. You need to live a faithful life to be pleasing to God... but you have plenty of time to do that later.

Jesus warns that no one knows the hour of His return.

“But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” (Luke 12:39-40 ESV).

Years later, Peter would echo his Lord's warning:

“Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!” (2 Peter 3:11-12 ESV).

How heartbreaking it will be for people who know what they need to do, plan on doing it later, only to fall victim to the devil's biggest lie, “You have time to get your life right tomorrow.”

Jesus pleads with us to be vigilant. He begs us to be prepared for His return with our lamps trimmed and ready. One day, He will come and gather those who have rejected Satan's promise of tomorrow:

“so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.” (Hebrews 9:28 ESV).

Right now, are you eagerly waiting for His return? If you hear the trumpet and voice of the Archangel announcing His return this moment, will you be filled with joy or dread? How will you feel about Satan's lie for a tomorrow that will never come?

“For he says, “In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.” Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” (2 Corinthians 6:2 ESV).

I read something interesting in Jeremiah. It was at the point where the Babylonians were knocking at the gate and God had determined to give Judah into the hands of these ruthless people.

Jeremiah had to tell the people not to fight it and they would be ok. But if they did fight, they would be slaughtered. And you know that King Zedekiah and his officials decided to fight God's judgement.

And as his reward for speaking God's Word, Jeremiah was beaten, thrown into a muddy cistern to die, and locked in prison with chains. Threats of death met him all the time. Yet he was faithful to God's mission for him.

In fact, even when he was banned from entering the temple, he sent his transcriptionist/scribe, Baruch, to read his latest message for him. Jeremiah always found a way to deliver God's message even when he knew it would be held in disdain.

Then something interesting happened. The king privately took Jeremiah aside and asked, "Is there any word from the Lord?" When everyone in the king's administration was ready to kill Jeremiah, the king in desperation went to the only one who could truly offer hope.

Later, the King again secretly comes to Jeremiah for a word from God. Jeremiah tells him that if he surrenders, he will live and God would spare the city from being burned. But the king feared that his own people would kill him if he surrendered to the Babylonians. Jeremiah told him that God would not allow that to happen.

King Zedekiah had a choice. But when the time came, he surrendered to fear rather than to God. And it cost him. As he ran, the Babylonians caught him and burned the city. They slaughtered his sons before his eyes before putting out the king's eyes. Imagine, the last thing he ever saw was his children being killed by his enemies.

It didn't have to be this way. God gave King Zedekiah an opportunity to avoid this, but he relied on his own plans rather than putting his trust fully in God.

What about us? Are we ready to put our faith fully in God or do we still want to do things our way? I pray we all submit to God. For us, the alternative leads to damnation and pain for all eternity.

Tuesdays With Tony

Good morning. God has given us each another day to enjoy His blessings and to be a steward who works to bring glory to Him. Today, think of ways you can act to end your day with a “Well done” from God.

Today is a whirlwind day... getting kids ready and taking them to school. Work with back-to-back meetings for 6 hours. I finished my last meeting early to have enough time to grab a bite before jumping to the next meeting.

But with 10 minutes left and a cup of coffee, I sit back and can praise God for who He is, sitting on His sovereign throne, and realizing that these thoughts represent my true reality. The rest is simply a pilgrimage as I travel toward my true home.

No matter how busy you get today, take time to set it in perspective. Live each busy moment in a way that takes you a little closer to home, where your rest and joy await.

If you don't understand what I'm saying, PM me and when my day slows, I'll be happy to share more.

God bless.

So, do you want to see two verses that just made my day? Well, I was thinking about this battle between my carnal and my spiritual man.

The thought of not sinning for the next few decades, if the Lord grants me that long to live, seems rather daunting. Then I read this:

“Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” (Matthew 6:34 ESV).

I don't have to worry about 10, 20 or even 30 years from now. I don't even have to worry about tomorrow. I just have to make it through today. That is much more manageable. Then, tomorrow, I have to do that again.

But what is really joyously overwhelming is when I combine what Jesus said in Matthew 6 with what Paul says in Ephesians 2:

“and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,” (Ephesians 2:6 ESV).

Isn't that awesome? In addition to only having to worry about today, Paul reminds me that I am not alone. I have been raised up and seated with Jesus in the heavenly places.

So, I will let my spiritual man win the battles today. I will say “no” to the carnal man today. And I will do it because I am with Jesus and He will give me His grace to be more than conquerors today.

Remember, if things start to get even rougher for people who honor and obey Jesus as King, we will have the honor to be His light in a dark and frightening world.

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28 ESV).

One of the things that Jesus condemned the religious leaders for doing was nullifying the Word of God for the sake of their own traditions. Let us be careful that we do not fall into the same snare.

When we read something in the Word that we don't like, we will always be able to make excuses as to why that does not apply to us.

Often that comes when we say:

“Times have changed. What was written is not applicable to me today.” We know that God's wisdom is timeless and applies from the time it was written to the end of the age.

“Yeah, But...” This is a tell-tale sign that we are about to nullify what is written by offering an excuse as to why it doesn't apply to me today.

“God's grace covers me.” Yes, God's grace covers me, but not for the person who chooses to sin and willfully ignore the council of God. We cannot sin that grace may abound. This nullifies God's Word.

Be careful when you read instructions from God's word and begin to look for ways to nullify it, to set up excuses as to why it does not apply to you today.

Rather, when you read instructions from the Lord, examine yourself to see how you may bring yourself into alignment with what is written. The

Word can transform us unless we resist being transformed.

Nullifying the Word, or making it void, in our lives gives us a false sense of safety. Yet the Word that will judge us in the last day will judge us as written. We may nullify it in our lives, but it is not nullified.

“thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do.” (Mark 7:13 ESV).

Well, this is interesting. I normally get up at 5 am to get in my Bible reading. But the last few days, between my hour reading, my chapter a day group and the Text Talk I do, I have felt rushed in the morning.

So, last night, I decided to try to get up at 4:15 to give myself a little more time to do all that I want. But I woke up before the alarm and grabbed my watch. 3:54 am- Close enough.

So, I turned off all my alarms, said my prayers and fixed a small breakfast and coffee. As I started to get my Bible reading ready to go, I noticed that the time on the computer said 2:30 am. I looked at my watch- yep, 2:30 am. This was the same watch that I thought I read 3:54 on just a few minutes before.

So, having breakfast and coffee, and awake enough to say my prayers, I am not sure what to do. Get another hour and a half sleep or take the opportunity to drink in even more of the Word and tackle the consequences tonight.

I guess I'll think it over as I finish my coffee.

Indeed, all things do work together for good for those who love the Lord...

Are You A Saul Or A Caiaphas?

When it comes to Jesus, I can confidently argue that these two men are right at the top of the list of our Savior's enemies. Neither could stand Jesus or the teaching that He brought to the Jews. Both saw Jesus as a blasphemer and one worthy of death. In fact, in their march to erase His influence, both men went as far as to murder. Yet, there is a big difference between the two,

and I believe that this difference is worthy to explore. And as we do, I ask you to consider the question, “Am I more like Saul or Caiaphas?”

Caiaphas was the High Priest during the life of Christ and he detested this “self-proclaimed” Messiah. Jesus came with no army, no name and was not a member of the right part of society. In fact, it seemed that Jesus took every opportunity to pronounce woes upon the elite and do everything He could to turn the people against them. How bad did it get?

Do you remember when Jesus raised his friend, Lazarus, from the dead? How do you suppose Caiaphas reacted?

“But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.”

He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.” (John 11:49-53 ESV).

And Caiaphas followed through on his threat. Under him, our Savior was executed. And then, we turn our attention to Saul. This man was zealous in his persecution of Christians. He consented to the death of the first martyr, Stephen, as we read in Act 8. After that, Saul caught fire in his single-minded purpose:

“But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.” (Acts 8:3 ESV).

So, both men share a zeal against Christ. But there is an important distinction between the two. Caiaphas was more interested in defending what he wanted rather than what God wanted. He wasn’t looking to serve God. Jesus gave him every opportunity, every bit of evidence, and every teaching needed to come to an understanding of what God wanted. But Caiaphas wasn’t going to hear anything that upset what he had already decided was important.

Then we move to Saul. Same zeal, same desire to stop blasphemers. But Saul truly was interested in serving God. Everything he did was in devotion to God:

“I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth.” (Acts 26:9 ESV).

But when faced with the same evidence Caiaphas had, Paul converted to Christ. Why? Because his zeal was for what God wanted, not in defending his current beliefs. When presented with this evidence, Paul stayed true to his love for God and changed himself to bring himself in alignment with God.

Both men were taught the Truth. Both men witnessed miracles. Both men read the same prophecies of the coming Messiah. Both men saw someone who was raised from the dead. But one man was single minded in his conviction to self while the other was single minded in his conviction to God.

What about us today? Are we more like Saul or are we more like Caiaphas? To what are we committed, God or our current beliefs? We talk about the virtue of having an open mind, but do we really believe that? Or will we defend our current beliefs without even considering if they are truly rooted in what God wants?

If we truly seek God, and His will, we should never fear examining every aspect of our faith. And if we learn something that is different from what we hold now, do we bring ourselves into alignment with what we learned or will we defend the old belief regardless?

We may never kill over our beliefs, but our attitude toward God's Word can be just as damning if we are not willing to let His Word continue to mold us, rather than us trying to mold It.

“When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.” (John 12:9-11 ESV).

The safest place on earth to be is at night in a small boat during a violent storm with Jesus. What a powerful lesson.

The same holds true for us today. The safest place we can be during the violent storms of life, when most would give up or give in, is with Jesus. Without Him, life can defeat us. With Him, we can endure any storm.

“And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”

And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Peace! Be

still!” And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?” (Mark 4:37-40 ESV).

It can be very discouraging when we bring the Gospel message to someone and they reject it. Sometimes we feel like we are a failure or doing something wrong.

It may help to remember two things when we evangelize:

1. The power is in the Gospel, and not in us.
2. Sometimes we fulfill our role by giving someone the opportunity to hear the Word, making them without excuse.

Remember, the Word will always accomplish its purpose through us.

“so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:11 ESV).

This week, I am wrapping up my daily reading from the Psalms. The Spirit has put so much in there that it could take a lifetime to uncover new discernment with each reading. But among the significant themes that pepper the Psalms, I read one phrase this morning that stayed in my heart.

“I will not set before my eyes anything that is worthless. I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling to me.” (Psalm 101:3 ESV).

I will set nothing worthless before my eyes. Wow, what powerful words. For out of the things we put into our heart will flow the issues of life.

I can't tell you how many times I prayed to be a better husband, a better father, a better steward of God. This verse reminded me that to fashion what I want to be, I must first choose to put in my heart the material to build me into what I want to be.

We have a lot of things fighting to be put before our eyes. Most of it is pretty worthless, if we're honest. But the choice is mine.

I'm trying to replace worthless things with good things. I'm trying to put the raw building blocks of a holy life into my heart. And I can tell you, that there is wisdom in that.

The less TV I watch and the more Bible I read, the better able I am to serve God. The less idle entertainment I engage in and the more spiritual blogs and podcasts I consume, the more wisdom God imparts to me.

We all need moments of refreshing and entertainment, but I have learned for me, to let it be less worthless and more worthy.

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” (Philippians 4:8 ESV).

“Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!” (Psalm 115:1 ESV).

Our Sentimental Lord

Sometimes, when we think about our relationship with God, we focus on how great He is and how small we are; how mighty He is and how weak we are. And with good reason; these things are true. God is the Creator of everything. There is such a gulf that exists between the Creator and His creation. He wills things to happen and without fail, they happen.

We see His fierce wrath in the Old Testament as He exacts vengeance on the nations whose iniquities are full. The New Testament says that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:31). These things and more paint a picture of a God who can be frightening. And for those who set their face against Him, He is terribly frightening.

But our God came to earth to live among His creation. And we see another side of Him that is just as real as His fierce strength and wrath. We see His matchless love. We see a God who heals and fixes the broken among His creation. We see a God who goes to the sinners because they need to be found. We see a God who eats with His friends and cries at their funerals.

And His relationship to Peter from start to finish always brings a tear to my eye when I read it. No novelist or screenwriter could have captured the

emotion better than this real-life event. You remember when we first read about Peter and Jesus, don't you?

“And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” And Simon answered, “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.” And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking.” (Luke 5:4-6 ESV).

What was Peter's response?

“But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” (Luke 5:8 ESV).

A hardened fisherman who knew his trade realized that this Rabbi who controlled the fish was someone far beyond him. But over the years, Peter stayed faithful to Him. All the way to the end, Peter showed he was willing to die for Jesus. But in a moment of weakness, he faltered and denied his Lord as Jesus was taken into custody before His crucifixion.

“And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly.” (Luke 22:61-62 ESV).

Yet unlike Judas, Peter repented. And after the resurrection, this fisherman was wholly committed to his Lord and God. But here is where I shed a tear each time I read the passage. Peter and the others decide to go fishing. They had fished all night with no luck. Then a man calls to them from the shore. If you are sentimental, get ready...

“Jesus said to them, “Children, do you have any fish?” They answered him, “No.” He said to them, “Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish.

That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off.” (John 21:5-8 ESV).

And so, the relationship between Peter and Jesus is bookended with the

Creator of all sending this fisherman another miraculous catch of fish. Instead of telling Jesus to depart from him because he was a sinful man, this time, Peter rushed toward his Savior.

When we consider God's awesome glory and power, we want to drop to our knees and tell Him to depart from us, because we are sinners. But as we grow in our relationship with Him; grow in our love for Him, we start to rush to Him. Yes, He is powerful. Yes, He is frightening. But our God is a sentimental God who deeply loves us. And He is a God who will keep us clean and in the hollow of His hand as He showers us with unspeakable love.

God gave us our relationships, not just for our needs here on earth, but with eternity in mind. We all are created to be with Him forever in heaven. Let's do what we can to share the good news of the Gospel to help others end up where they are meant to be, and let us be the encourager- not the stumbling block- in helping the people we know arrive safely where they were created to be.

If I want to enjoy God's grace, I need to be generous in the grace I extend to others. We give it, not when someone deserves it, but especially when they don't deserve it, just like God does with me.

Do you know what comfort I find when I read that Jesus notices the widow who gives her two mites and the publican who prays for God to be merciful to him, a sinner? I find it comforting that no one falls through the cracks with Jesus. He knows even the slightest things we do, for good or bad.

“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.” (Matthew 10:29-31 ESV).

A thought to ponder... Is it more likely that there is something wrong spiritually in my life if I am undergoing some persecution or if things are always going well for me? Perhaps I need to rethink the way I react to my circumstances. Just thinking out loud...

“Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,” (2 Timothy 3:12 ESV).

I live firmly in the grace of God. Nothing can separate me from His love. I will live with the confidence of a prince and the humility of a servant.

“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,” (John 1:12 ESV).

The Conversion Of Jesus’ Family

Not much is said about Jesus and His family, but what we do know stands as a strong testimony to who He is as the Son of God. Every time I read about His family’s conversion to Him as Lord, God and Savior, my faith is strengthened. If you follow with me for the next few minutes, I am convinced that your faith will be strengthened too.

So, here is what we know about our Lord’s physical family on earth. The person we know the most about, His mother Mary, is mentioned from the beginning of His story through to the crucifixion and resurrection of her Son. As a young teen, she was told by an angel who her Son was and she remained steadfast in her devotion to Him, treasuring up moments about Him in her heart as He grew (Luke 2:19).

We also read about Joseph, the earthy father who helped raise Jesus. He was a good and just man (Matthew 1:19) and when told by the angel who the

Child was that his betrothed was carrying, he chose to stand by her and Jesus, even if it meant people would always associate him with having a child before marriage. He was willing to endure this shame with Mary and Jesus. The last we see of Joseph is when Jesus was 12, in the temple, being about His Father's business. Nothing is said about what happened to Joseph, but by the time Jesus is 30 years old, Joseph is no longer in the picture. Perhaps, Jesus suffered the pain of having to bury His earthly father and take up the role as head of the house as the eldest son of Mary.

Yes, the eldest in the family. After His birth, Mary and Joseph had other children and Jesus grew up with younger brothers and sisters:

“Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?” (Matthew 13:55-56 ESV).

Put a pin in the name of two of His brothers: James and Judas. We will mention them a little later. But for now, imagine how it must have been to be the sibling to a perfect brother? I'm sure that they had a different view of His perfection, as any of us would have with our siblings. Regardless, they didn't know quite what to think when Jesus took up a nomadic lifestyle and went around the country preaching, attracting followers and insulting the religious leaders.

“Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, “He is out of his mind.” (Mark 3:20-21 ESV).

So, we get the idea that they were embarrassed of their eccentric brother. And this seemed to be the case until an extraordinary event happened that changed everything for them. They saw Jesus die on the cross, but then they saw Him live again. What would they do with this fundamental truth about their brother? Look who was waiting in Jerusalem with the apostles:

“All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.” (Acts 1:14 ESV).

Yes, something had changed in these siblings who once thought that their Brother was out of His mind. Now they were listening to His instructions right along with the rest of the believers. And do you remember the two names I mentioned- James and Judas? You know them. James became one of the pillars in the church at Jerusalem (Galatians 2:9; Acts 15) and wrote a

letter in the Bible that bore his name. And Judas, perhaps Jesus' youngest brother? He wrote a short letter named after himself as well. We know it as Jude. And in both letters, they never glory in their relationship as the brothers of Jesus, but these brothers simply refer to themselves as the servants of Christ.

My faith is strengthened when I see siblings who were once embarrassed of their Brother become people who knelt in submission to Him as Lord and King.

Pride is such an enticing thing that calls to us in so many ways. It seems to know what the weakness of one is, and what the weaknesses of another is. And it's ready to serve its self-will on us however it can.

For one, it may manifest in calling to ourselves glory that belongs to God alone. To another, it may cause us to condemn our neighbor, looking for the speck in his eye while ignoring the beam in ours. And to still another, it may cause us to be puffed up with a haughty and inflated assessment of our own worth and value.

If the Archangel Michael, who defeated Satan's army and cast him out of heaven was careful not to speak in pride, but said, "The Lord rebuke you", then how much more should we be careful not to let pride, in its myriad ways, manifest in us?

When you look at someone, do you assess and ascribe the best in them, or do you look for the faults and weaknesses in them? I have learned that I will usually find what I am looking for.

"Is anything too hard for the LORD?" (Genesis 18:14a ESV).

Do I love if I don't do the things that demonstrate my love?
Do I respect if I don't do the things that show respect?
Do I sacrifice if I don't do the things that exhibit sacrifice?
Do I have faith if I don't do the things that faith produces?

“But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” (James 2:18 ESV).

It is better to go to the house of mourning than the house of feasting. Why? Because when all is stripped away, naked we return to God. Then, we all are equal. No riches or power mark their distinction upon us. We kneel alike, either as servants or the conquered. How are you preparing for that day?

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.” (2 Corinthians 5:10 ESV).

A Day Never Forgotten

Let me take you through a fictional Tuesday. It's one that I have thought about many times and one that fills me with both joyous anticipation and acknowledged fear. To the best of your ability, see yourself in this fictional Tuesday.

It starts off like any other Tuesday. I get up at 4:15 a.m. (Insert your own wake-up time here as you travel through this day with me). I start my coffee and say my prayer, asking for the blessings and assistance for the day, and praising God for who He is. I set up my Bible reading for the day and finish the last 10 chapters of Genesis and then I read 1 Corinthians 9 and make the comments I will post online. I then open the podcast I listen to in order to hear the next thoughts on Matthew 7.

Now it's time to wake up the 3 kids and get them ready for school. While they are rousing, I sit down with my journal and plan out my day. I have a tough conversation scheduled with my boss that needs to be done, and both older sons have competing sporting events after school. A quick check-in with my wife paves the way to make sure we have everything covered.

I make plans to finish the PowerPoint for my Bible class for next Sunday and remind myself that I owe a friend a response to a text he sent yesterday. I add it to the list of things to do. It's 7:05 a.m. and I take the youngest to Kindergarten. My wife had left a few minutes earlier to take one twin to baseball practice. I return at 7:30 to wake up the other twin before jumping in the shower. While showering, I think through our weekend schedule to find out when would be the best time for us to have someone over to the house. I'm not sure how we are going to swing it with this schedule, but I know it's important.

After getting ready, and jumping in the car with twin #2, we head toward tennis practice at the high school. I have another podcast queued up, but I take this time to connect with my son. I'm half-successful, but I've been making progress over time. In 15 minutes, I drop him off and head back home, steeling myself for the meeting with my boss. My mind is racing in a million different directions as I get closer to home.

Then I hear it.

It's the sounds of trumpets playing loudly. Everyone else hears it too. People are stopping their cars and running out of buildings and houses to see what is causing this sound. I pull to the side of the road along with everyone else who is driving. I feel an uneasy feeling in the pit of my stomach. I am sure what this is. I thought I'd be ready for it with happy anticipation, but now that it is happening, I feel the strength drain from me as I realize that my eternity is set.

My eyes gaze upward, knowing what to expect. And sure enough, the clouds begin to part. The Archangel announces in a voice that I know is heard throughout all of creation that the Lord Jesus has returned. And sure enough, joined with a throng of angels and the saints who have died before, He is here.

He is here.

Time is over. The plans I worried about just a few short moments ago seem so futile. I will never make the meeting with my boss or see my sons play another game again. My wife and I will never invite another person into our home. I sit still, letting it all play out. People around me react differently from each other. Some pray. Some run. Some cry. Many start taking videos on their phones.

I wonder where my wife is right now? Where are my kids? Are they scared? I wish I was with them. But I am not. As a thief in the night, the Lord returned at His opportune time. This is simply where I was when it happened.

Then I notice that the saints who were brought back descend all over the earth and sea, I know they revisit their graves and watch as the dead are resurrected having their old bodies transformed into an eternal, spiritual body. I watch as they rise to return with the Lord.

I know what is next. Those of us who are living in the grace of the Lord will have our bodies changed in the twinkling of an eye and we will rise to meet Him in the sky. This is what I have been living for. This is what I have been waiting for. But the anxiety in me grows more and more pronounced. What will happen next?

The time is 8:47am, Tuesday, October 19th. I knew this day would come, but I didn't know it would be today. I wait to see if I will be transformed and rise or if I will watch the living saints rise to meet Jesus without me.

Our fictitious day comes to an end. I have hope that if I witness these promised events, I will be ready for the Lord when He returns. What about you? Will you be ready to rise and meet Him in the sky? On that day, nothing you planned to do earlier that morning will mean a whole lot, will it?

I implore you, be ready. If you have not done so already, call upon the name of the Lord, having your sins washed away through baptism as He has commanded. If you are His child, continue living in His grace. Do not walk away from Him. Nothing is worth being unprepared on the great day of the Lord. Remember Paul's words...

“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus,

God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

Therefore encourage one another with these words.” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 ESV).

I told myself I would never do this when I joined Facebook...
But I am about to get political...

And I may lose a few friends over this, but here goes....
Jesus Is King Of All And There Is No Way But His Way!

“and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood” (Revelation 1:5 ESV).

In Matthew 15, Jesus feeds the multitude. We marvel at the miracle, at how Jesus can do all things. And well we should because these miracles testify to who He is.

But in marveling at the sign, perhaps we miss one thing that should speak volumes to us, and convict us as we consider our commitment to Him. Yes, Jesus has compassion on the crowd, but why?

It is because the people were with him for 3 days, hungry to hear him speak the words of the Kingdom. They didn't break for dinner. They didn't rest when they grew weary. They couldn't break themselves away from hearing the Words of life spoken to them. That's what I find amazing.

And then I look inward, and I am often ashamed at what I see in comparison. How many times do I look at my watch when someone is preaching the message of the Kingdom on Sunday when it gets a little too close to lunch time? How many times do I feel restless when a Gospel meeting speaker spends too much time cutting into my evening plans?

I have a lot of introspection to do as I consider the value I place on the message of the Kingdom. The message that can save my soul and free me of my sins. The message my God suffered and died for so that I might live.

Three days without food just to hear the Gospel message? I have a lot of cultivating in my heart to do if I am to properly value this matchless gift delivered by God.

“Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I have compassion on the crowd because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. And I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way.” (Matthew 15:32 ESV).

So, why do I believe in Jesus as Lord, King, God and Savior? One reason

is the testimony of Jude. Yeah, the one who wrote the tiny book before Revelation.

Jude, or Judas as we are first introduced to him- no, not that Judas... not the one who betrayed our Lord- this Judas was first introduced in Matthew 13 as one of Jesus' younger brothers. And it didn't seem he was too impressed with his brother, until after the resurrection. Seeing his risen brother changed everything for him.

Judas, or Jude as we better know him, went from thinking his brother was crazy to this:

“Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.” (Jude 1:24-25 ESV).

One of many reasons I believe in Jesus as Lord and King is because of this testimony. A man who grew up with Jesus, argued with Him, played with Him, ate with Him, learned with Him, and slept in the same room with Him, called his Brother, Lord and Savior deserving of glory, majesty, dominion and authority now and forever.

In my daily Bible reading, I just noticed something interesting with the 7th plague- the plague of hail. This seemed to be a strategic turning point that the Lord brought about. Up until now, the land of Egypt was filled with Egyptians who did not fear God, among them, the hardened Pharaoh. But God changed this with the coming of the 7th plague.

In this plague, Moses tells the Egyptians exactly what is going to happen and gives each Egyptian the chance to avoid the devastation that is about to come. Notice the grace and warning Moses extends to his enemy:

“Now therefore send, get your livestock and all that you have in the field into safe shelter, for every man and beast that is in the field and is not brought home will die when the hail falls on them.”“ (Exodus 9:19 ESV).

Apparently, the previous 6 plagues had an effect on many of the Egyptians; not all, but many. And those who heeded Moses' warning were spared and given grace from God. Those who despised the word of God

were given judgement through the plague:

“Then whoever feared the word of the LORD among the servants of Pharaoh hurried his slaves and his livestock into the houses, but whoever did not pay attention to the word of the LORD left his slaves and his livestock in the field.” (Exodus 9:20-21 ESV).

This is the turning point for the Egyptians. After the 7th plague, the people who did not fear the Lord were killed. Those who were left had a healthy respect for the God of Moses. All but Pharaoh. That explains why the people become more vocal to Pharaoh to heed Moses as the remaining plagues come (Exodus 10:7) and why the people were eager to give the Israelites gold, silver and clothing when asked (Exodus 12:35-36).

The 7th plague stands as a wonderful example, not only of God’s might and power, but of His wisdom and providence. The 7th plague is a reminder that God’s ways are higher than man’s ways and how we can always put our full trust in Him because He knows exactly what to do in every situation.

Here is another interesting passage that I came across in my daily Bible reading today. This time taken from Exodus 23:

“I will not drive them out from before you in one year, lest the land become desolate and the wild beasts multiply against you. Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased and possess the land.” (Exodus 23:29-30 ESV).

Moses is setting expectations for the Israelites on how God is going to give the promised land to them as a possession. Rather than drive the inhabitants out all at once, He would do it at the moment they became ready to take possession of it. Otherwise, the land would remain desolate and become overgrown with wild beasts and become an even more dangerous place for them.

How many times do we want God to answer our prayers NOW, but He in His wisdom waits until the perfect time and perfect manner to give us what we need? Can we appreciate that the same love, care and providence that He extended to the Israelites as a loving God and Father is the same love, care and providence that He extends to us today?

Sometimes God waits to give us what we need until we are ready to receive it.

The Silent Testimony of Mary

One of the reasons I believe in Jesus as Lord, Creator and King is because of the testimony of His mother, Mary. It is hard for me to wrap my head around the relationship that the Lord and Mary shared- how a mother could provide unconditional love and life to the child Who provides unconditional love and life to everyone, including His own mother; how she could look upon Him through a mother's eyes, and He could look upon her through both a Son's and a Father's eyes.

But let's take a walk together through the Gospels to see what the Spirit has revealed and preserved for us to know about this remarkable and blessed among women. It starts with a heavenly visit from Gabriel when she was a young teen and betrothed to a good man. This virgin was chosen by God to bring Jesus into the world. Understandably, she didn't know how this could be, but Gabriel explains and she accepts:

“And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.” (Luke 1:38 ESV).

Her attitude was one of submission. Unlike 6 months earlier when this same angel, Gabriel, appeared to Zechariah and announced that he and his aged wife Elizabeth would conceive and bear a son, John. Zechariah doubted, even though he was a good man. And while Mary was receiving her message from the angel who stands in the presence of God in heaven, Zechariah was mute because of his unbelief.

Then a series of events happened to impress upon Mary that her Son was someone special, not the least of which was the pregnancy and birth though she never knew a man. She is visited by shepherds, wise men, Simeon and Anna. All were glorifying and worshipping her infant son.

“But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.” (Luke 2:19 ESV).

And how can we forget the instance when Jesus was 12 years old. Staying behind in Jerusalem during a family trip and impressing the most learned

among the experts in the Law. And as any mother would be, Mary panicked, realizing that she had lost God's Son who was entrusted to her. And when she made the trip back and found Him, His response was that she should have known He'd be about His Father's business. She didn't quite understand, but Luke 2:51 said that Mary treasured all these things up in her heart.

And then God gives her privacy to enjoy her Son before Jesus is given to the world. From age 12 until 30, we know nothing of His family life until this mother pushes things along. By now, Jesus has been baptized and is preparing for His work. But at a wedding feast in Cana, they run out of wine. Mary tells Jesus.

“And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” (John 2:4 ESV).

Don't you love this? Jesus, God's Son- the Creator of everything and the Judge of all, says, “It is not My time.” But never-the-less, the King of Kings submits to His mother's request. Only Mary, His mother, had this influence over the promised Messiah. This speaks volumes to the relationship that these two shared.

And for three years, she sees her son become greater, witnesses His power and hears His proclamations about who He is. And yet, I wonder if the words of Simeon haunted her when Jesus had been taken up in his arms as an infant and he said,

“(and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.” (Luke 2:35 ESV).

And this is the testimony of Mary that convinces me that her Son was who He claimed to be. As a mother, she was heartbroken as she witnessed her oldest Son scourged and crucified. Yet she never once said that He wasn't who He claimed to be in an attempt to save His life. She never once said that He was mistaken or denied Him to save His life. Mary remained silent, knowing who her Son was and that He was suffering and dying because He was exactly who He claimed to be.

I believe in Jesus as the Messiah in part because His mother loved Him, provided for Him, remained with Him, learned from Him, and when the time came, let Him go because she knew who He was. She remained silent, never once doing anything that could possibly save Him by denying Him.

Wanted: Person willing to work non-standard hours and to be on call 24/7. Must have thick skin and be willing to produce in an environment where you can thrive being under a microscope. Must be organized enough to schedule large projects but flexible enough to drop everything and work night and day when called upon at a moment's notice. Must not be concerned about getting the credit and be comfortable in an environment where blame is thrown at you from many directions. Must train others, guard those in your charge from dangers, and fight to keep them safe. When those in your charge become lost, it will fall on you to drop everything to find them. While there is no salary for this position, the retirement plan is second to none. Seeking only serious candidates, please.

Position Title: Local Church Elder

“So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed:

shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.” (1 Peter 5:1-4 ESV).

So, earlier today something happened that caused me to snap and lose my temper. Later, I began to wonder how I would feel if every time I did something that angered God, He responded to me the same way.

It reminded me just how imperfect I am, but how blessed Jesus has made me by teaching me how to repent and be forgiven, while learning the importance of giving grace so that I might also receive His grace.

“For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (Matthew 6:14-15 ESV).

Following Jesus When I Am Hurting

When we make the decision to give up everything and follow Jesus, we sometimes think that our commitment to Him will make everything in our lives easier. The truth is, sometimes that commitment makes things harder on us. Neither does that commitment mean that God will build a hedge around us to keep us from experiencing the pain and sorrows of life.

Why then, do we endure life as a Christian if we only have eternity to look forward to? Is it worth it to follow a narrow path, denying ourselves and the pleasures of sin for the reward that we will obtain in the next life? If the sun rises on the just and the unjust alike (Matthew 5:45), then why live a life now of denial? If following God will not keep our loved ones from hurting and dying, then is the promise of a future reward enough to endure the pain and sacrifices that being a disciple of Jesus will call us to endure?

The truth is, the previous two paragraphs look at life and our commitment to Jesus in an incomplete way. This paradigm presents a faulty choice. It says that if there is pain and hardships when we serve God, then the only benefit of being a Christian comes in the afterlife. But we know that this isn't true. As children of God, we have a lot to hope for, even in this life. We have access to a Father who loves us and wants to give us a fish rather than a serpent. Listen to how Jesus puts it:

“What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:11-13 ESV).

But sometimes when we struggle with mortal health issues, either with ourselves or someone we love, it feels like God is giving us a serpent, doesn't it? When we lose the job that allows us to provide for our family and feed our children, it feels like God is giving us a scorpion rather than an egg. It is especially important during these times, that we strengthen our faith in God and lean on Him all the more because it is especially in times like these that children of God have the advantage over those who have never entered into a relationship with Jesus.

God has never promised that He will keep us from enduring hardships, but He has promised that He will help us endure them, and in fact, shoulder the burdens of those hardships with us, This is the lesson that Job learned. This is the lesson our Savior taught us as He endured the cup of wrath that led Him to the cross.

So, how do we continue to follow Jesus when we are hurting? Allow me to offer up some biblical perspectives for us to consider:

1. **God Wants To Give Us Good:** As we learned from Jesus in Luke 11, God wants to give us good things. Our problem is that we don't always know the difference between a fish and a serpent. What often seems good to us, God understands to be a scorpion. When we don't receive the answers that we want to the prayers we send to Him, we need to have the faith that sometimes a "no" from God is because the answer that is best for us is something that for the moment may seem hard for us to understand as a fish. But Paul says:

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28 ESV).

2. **God Will Shoulder Our Burdens:** When we read about how Jesus interacted with His creation, we see that He had compassion on those who were hurting. When we hurt, God hurts for us. And while He may not always stop the thing that is causing us pain, He does promise to give us the strength to endure. He is the true and faithful Friend who walks the lonely road each step of the way with us. He offers His shoulders for us to lean on. Those who are in the world do not have this intimate, wonderful gift to aid them in their painful life moments. Psalms 46:1 says, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” and Peter encourages us with these words:

“casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:7 ESV).

3. **Pain Doesn't Mean That God Doesn't Care:** Sometimes the hardest thing for us to live in peace with is that a good and benevolent God will sometimes allow us to experience pain and hardships when we know He has the power to stop that pain. As we have already said, He promises to walk the painful road with us and burden much of the load for us. But He also promises that when the pain subsides, He will make us stronger having gone through it. And if the times should come that enduring the ultimate pain brings glory to Him, then He will not forget us and the faithful way we endured for Him.

“Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.” (James 1:12 ESV).

James sums it up well as he closes his epistle and points our remembrance

to the patience of the suffering Job. As we continue to wrestle with the question, “how do I follow Jesus when I am hurting”, remember this encouragement:

“Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.” (James 5:11 ESV).

If you are like me, you read the parables of the stewards and look back on how you have often been the one who buried what the Lord has entrusted to you. And, just as in the parables, Jesus has often removed what He has entrusted to you and has given it to another.

But do not lose heart. For the same Jesus who has taken from you because you buried what He has entrusted to you will give back to you if you repent. Up to 70 times 7 He will lay the talents back into your hands and give you the opportunity to again serve.

For as long as the Lord blesses us with breath to serve, He will give us the gift of service if we desire it, no matter how many times we have failed Him in the past. Truly what a wonderful, generous and loving King we serve.

“I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.” (Luke 19:26 ESV).

“Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.” (Matthew 18:21-22 ESV).

So, as I am reading in my Bible this morning in John, I am impressed with how many times Jesus heals on the Sabbath Day. Whether He is going out of His way to heal on this day or rather, the Spirit focuses on recording the works He performed on this day, there is one thing that I take away for myself.

Those men who had no desire to consider who He was, would not open their eyes to the truth about the Sabbath. They had a long history that taught

them incorrectly about the Sabbath. And rather than be open to what Jesus was teaching, they defended their beliefs, in spite of the divine evidence laid before them.

What about me? Where do I stand in what I hold Holy? Are they the things I was taught for the sake of being taught a doctrine? Or is it because I continue to search, study and meditate on God's Word? Am I holding to the traditions of my father or am I willing to change if, after reading and studying God's Word, the Truth convicts me?

May we all have such a love and respect for the Word that we never let man's doctrines or our own traditions rise to a level that causes us to curse Jesus for healing on the Sabbath. May we never honor a man who taught us more than the Man who is being taught. May we never fear examining our own beliefs to ensure we rest fully in the message of the Son of God.

“Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?” And there was a division among them.” (John 9:16 ESV).

“(His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.)” (John 9:22 ESV).

Sometimes, Jesus Doesn't Heal

Yesterday, I was reading the Gospel of John. It was written by “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (21:7; 21:20). John spent much of the time showing the deity of Jesus, which ultimately led to charges of blasphemy and the crucifixion of Jesus on the cross. But in chapter 5, we read a wonderful story of mercy and grace... at least for some people.

“Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. In these lay a multitude of invalids--blind, lame, and paralyzed.” (John 5:2-3 ESV).

This pool is where all who needed healing would come for a chance to be healed. One man in particular, was an invalid for 38 years. Can you imagine that? 38 years of living a life with a broken body. We don't know if he was

born with this condition or if he had been whole at one time and suffered an illness or an accident that left him unable to walk. But we do know that for almost 4 decades, this man longed to be healed.

So, he made his way to the famed pool. The pool that when the waters were stirred with healing power, the first to step into it would be healed of their infirmity by the power of God. On this particular day, this man was here with a great multitude of people who also needed healing. But most had an advantage over him. They had legs to rush them toward the pool as soon as the water stirred.

I wonder, where were this man's friends, his family, his loved ones? Where were the ones who would carry his burden and be his legs for him and rush him into the pool when the water stirred? We read about the friends of a man who, in Luke 5, cared so much for their friend that they lowered him down through the roof of the house where Jesus was teaching because the multitude was too thick for them to bring him to Jesus through the front door to be healed.

We're not told why this man was alone, but in spite of being beaten to the pool every time the water was stirred, this man was still there, waiting with the multitude of others who needed healing too.

“When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be healed?” (John 5:6 ESV).

What a question! Everyone there wanted to be healed of something. But it is in the man's response that our hearts go out to him.

“The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me.” (John 5:7 ESV).

And just like that, Jesus- the One John said who made all things (1:3) simply says,

“Get up, take up your bed, and walk.” (John 5:8b ESV).

And you know what? He did! Sure, it was on the Sabbath Day. Sure, Jesus would catch heat for healing the man on this day. But in that moment, a man who had suffered for 38 years received the grace and healing from his God who came and sat beside him on this day. No friends or legs needed. Just Jesus.

What a wonderful story of grace and love, right? But did you notice that when Jesus left, there was no mention of Him healing the multitude? Those

who were also suffering- the “blind, lame, and paralyzed.” - We never read of Jesus healing all those in this crowd. Sure, He may have and John just didn’t record it. And we know...

“Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.” (John 21:25 ESV).

But it is just as likely that this man was the only one who Jesus healed at the pool on this occasion. Why? Who knows? Does it take away from the grace and mercy that He showed to this broken man? Certainly not.

Jesus never came to take away all of the pain, illness, poverty or suffering in the world. But what He did come to do was to bring salvation to a spiritually sick and dead people so that

“all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,” (John 1:12b ESV).

Why does Jesus sometimes heal and sometimes leave people in their broken bodies? I can’t answer that. But I do know that while He may or may not heal us physically, our God will always do the greater service in healing us from our sins and giving us the grace to live with Him for eternity.

And yes, with a little patience, at a time of His choosing, He will one day take even our broken body and give us a perfect, everlasting one. This is the promise we all have. And on that Day, none will be left broken at the pool.

“For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.” (1 Corinthians 15:53 ESV).

I’m in the midst of some intense study and one conclusion that I have drawn is this:

We must all be careful with the presuppositions we bring about God. If they are wrong, they can lead us down a long, winding path away from the truth about Him and who He is.

This morning, I am reading Deuteronomy. It begins with Moses preparing the Israelites to enter the promised land. He tells the people that God is about to give them a land flowing with milk and honey. They would live in houses they did not build; eat from produce they did not toil for and drink from wells that they did not dig. Indeed, their houses would be full of possessions that they did not fill themselves.

God was about to make them rich with possessions that they did not work for. And he warns them not to become complacent in their newfound wealth. Not to shift their reliance from the Lord to their possessions. This hit me hard.

How many of us, if given the choice, would choose to be poor in possessions so that we would have to rely on the Lord for our needs, rather than to be rich in possessions and look at the Lord as simply an addition to our lives, but not struggle with the great need we have for Him daily?

We say that wealth is not sin but a blessing, and I agree. But are we so quick to justify our wealth that we lose the message of warning that Moses gives to the people about the dangers of false comfort; how we must always guard against complacency and self-reliance when the Lord blesses us with great wealth?

Aren't you glad that our shortcomings are never bad enough that the Gospel can't overcome them?

The world is full of good and evil. We will find what we look for.

As you surf the web, watch YouTube, read Facebook posts, watch streaming services or jump on any social media site, remember- you are the one who chooses what you see and what you refuse to see.

There is good if you are looking for it. And there is evil too. Will you turn your eyes away from evil and toward good today?

“I will not set before my eyes anything that is worthless.” (Psalm 101:3a ESV)

In the ancient world, people would approach their gods from a “I’ll scratch your back if you scratch mine” mentality.

They would bargain with their gods- If you give me fortune, I will sacrifice to you; If you heal me, I will give you a portion of my possessions...

This is how you approach a false god made with hands. But can you approach the one true God with bargains? Consider....

What can you bargain with? Can you say to God, “If you do this for me, I will give you 10% of everything I have.” God says to you, “I do not need your money. I own you, your home, your neighbor’s home, your city, your country, the Earth, the universe.”

What do we have to bargain with? When we bargain with God, we lower Him to the level of man-made gods who hunger after the things that men can satisfy them with.

Rather than bargain with the One who needs nothing we have to offer, consider approaching Him in the same way the publican approached Him.

There is nothing we have to offer the God who owns everything. There is nothing we can do for the God who can do anything. We are created beings relying on the grace of the Creator.

Rather than approach God as though we can sway Him with what we have or what we can do, approach Him in humility, realizing that we have nothing to bring to the One who has everything and needs nothing from us.

“God, I have nothing to offer you, but I need you. Rather than make bargains that are futile for me to make, I will approach you as the Sovereign one true God. This is my need. I know you can do all things. If it brings glory to your name by granting my petition, then let it be. If not, let Your will be done.”

At the end of the day, we only have the grace of God. When the publican approached God with no bargains, but a simple submission to His sovereignty and an appeal for mercy, Jesus- our Lord and Creator- said this...

“I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 18:14 ESV).

When someone does wrong to us, will we listen to the carnal man and lash out in vengeance, suffer the destructive effects of bitterness and anger, and forget about the compassion our Lord shows to us daily,

Or

Will we listen to the spiritual man who quiets the soul, turns it over to the Lord, and bathes in peace and gentleness that frees us from suffering the rottenness of vengeance?

Turning vengeance over to the Lord is not always about someone getting what is coming to them as much as it is about keeping us from suffering from the destructive effects that vengeance will bring upon us.

“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:31-32 ESV).

Did Paul Disobey The Holy Spirit In Acts 21?

In Acts 21, Paul set his mind to go to Jerusalem and so, he began his journey there. When he landed at Tyre, we read this:

“And having sought out the disciples, we stayed there for seven days. And through the Spirit they were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.” (Acts 21:4 ESV).

Well, Paul isn't swayed from his plans and eventually finds his way to Caesarea and the home of Philip- yeah, the same Philip we read in Acts 6, one of the first deacons and the one in Acts 8 who taught the Samaritans and Simon the Sorcerer, and then the Ethiopian Eunuch.

While staying with Philip, a prophet named Agabus, in dramatic fashion, tells Paul that if he goes to Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit tells him that Paul will be bound and handed over to the Gentiles. Still, this does not sway Paul, and we read:

“And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, “Let the will of the Lord be done.” (Acts 21:14 ESV).

But earlier in Acts 16, Paul had determined to go into Asia to preach, but

the Holy Spirit had other plans for him:

“And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.” (Acts 16:6 ESV).

It is after this that Paul received the famous Macedonian Call in a vision.

So, the question is, “Was Paul disobeying the Spirit in Acts 21 when the Spirit sent message after message to warn Paul about what would happen if he continued with his plans to go to Jerusalem?”

There is one huge difference in the Spirit’s revelation of chapter 16 and His revelation in chapter 21. In 16, the Spirit gave a direct command, forbidding Paul to travel to Asia. Had Paul continued anyway, he would have been in direct violation of God’s expressed will. But in chapter 21, the Spirit is merely revealing what will happen if Paul travels to Jerusalem. There is no prohibition. But the brethren who loved Paul did not want harm to befall him, so they took the revelation of the Spirit as a means to warn Paul in order to keep him safe.

In the end, Paul stayed within the will of God the Spirit. He never disobeyed Him. Paul understood what was waiting for him, yet he weighed the benefits of his visit to Jerusalem against the harm that would befall him and chose that paying that cost would be worth it.

Sometimes, we will plainly understand that the actions we take for the Lord will cost us something. Perhaps, it may cost a friendship, a job or it will bring derision upon us. Whatever the cost, we are left with the same choice Paul had in Acts 21. Do I feel that the benefits to the Lord outweigh the cost to me?

And a word of caution to those of us who love the one struggling with a decision like this. Let us be careful in our zeal to caution them from being harmed that we refuse to honor their decision to follow their conscience, even if it is a different decision that we would have made ourselves. The best way we can support someone who is struggling with a decision like this, when we see that they will not be swayed, is to pray that the will of the Lord be done.

In my daily Bible reading, I am in the book of Ezekiel, where God is pronouncing warnings and judgements upon the people of Israel for their

sins. And again, I see a cause of their pride and arrogance that should give warning to us today.

“They cast their silver into the streets, and their gold is like an unclean thing. Their silver and gold are not able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the LORD. They cannot satisfy their hunger or fill their stomachs with it. For it was the stumbling block of their iniquity.” (Ezekiel 7:19 ESV).

Wealth and possessions have always given man false hope and security. In it, we have the power to satisfy our immediate desires and to sway others to do our bidding. The power that wealth gives us will tempt us to think that we do not need God.

But when God brings upon His judgement, what can our gold and silver do for us? God will not be swayed from His wrath. Wealth cannot buy us a place of safety from His judgement.

Let us be careful in the trust we put into our things. For in the end, they will be burned up and we will all stand naked before the judgment seat of Christ- both rich and poor alike. On that day, none shall be richer or poorer than the one next to him.

“for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.” (1 Timothy 6:7 ESV).

“for it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.” (Romans 14:11-12 ESV).

What is the difference between God's mercy and God's grace?

God's mercy is extended when He doesn't give us the punishment we deserve.

God's grace is extended when He gives us the rewards that we do not deserve.

Blessed be the name of the Lord!

To do for God's glory means we will serve, teach and give so that He is praised and honored.

If we serve, teach and give and then step into the shadows so that no one praises us, but thanks God, it is the highest stewardship we can perform.

Do all for God's glory and none for ours. When we pray for wisdom, healing, food or gold and silver, do so that we may be better stewards to use all those things for God's glory.

We are Christians. Life is about serving the King and to live for the day we hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Master."

What will you do today to bring glory to King Jesus?

Are we at a disadvantage because we don't witness people performing miracles today? While miracles may help us see the gravity of the message, it was never the thing that saved. It was the message preached that prompted repentance. Look at how Jesus feels about this:

"Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent." Matthew 11:20.

Jesus was teaching a message that required repentance. He spoke with authority, but the people didn't have to take His word at face value. The miracles confirmed the message He preached.

When He ascended to heaven, the Spirit gave men the power to perform miracles to confirm their message. There was no New Testament to read or turn to and the Lord did not expect the world to take their new word at face value either.

But even then, it wasn't the miracles that led to repentance and gave salvation. It was the Word that the miracles confirmed that led to repentance and salvation.

Not everyone who witnessed miracles repented. Some walked away, even admitting that a mighty work was done, but with no intention of submitting to the message.

Today, we don't have to take a speaker at face value either. But we no longer need miracles to ensure the message is from God. We have the written Word of God to do that for us.

And today, the same truth stands. It is the Word that will prick the heart and lead to repentance and salvation. Miracles never had that power.

If we submit to God's Word, we will do that with or without miracles. Miracles were never a guarantee that people would accept God's Word.

If you own a Bible, you have access to something far greater than miracles.

Let it show you the way to Jesus and teach you repentance.

Cancel culture is nothing new...

“And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region. But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district.” (Acts 13:49-50 ESV).

Cancel culture is nothing new...As I continue in my daily Bible reading in Ezekiel, we see God’s wrath building to a point where He says that judgment is imminent. That means, there will be no mercy, no grace extended at this point. But Ezekiel gives us insight into God and His nature in a verse that is both exceedingly comforting and heartbreakingly sorrowful when we read it:

“And I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found none.” (Ezekiel 22:30 ESV).

We see that God is not quick to pour out His wrath upon those whom He loves. Peter calls it God’s longsuffering, or patience (2 Peter 3:9). Before God brought His judgment upon the nations in Ezekiel, God sought a righteous man who He could use to stand in the breach; someone who would give Him a reason to stay His wrath.

But how heartbreaking that there was not one man who rose to the occasion. Not one whom the Lord could find. It was therefore, in resignation, that the Lord had no choice but to pour out His wrath. Not because He was eager to do so, but because He could find no reason not to, though He earnestly sought a reason.

When the Lord looks upon a nation of people today who are guilty of many of the same sins (and much more, if we are honest) that brought about the wrath of God in the days spoken about in Ezekiel, will He find someone to stand in the breach? Will He find many who profess godliness, but when He looks upon the secret things in the heart, will find envy, hatred, bitterness, lewdness, or all manner of evil?

Let us all strive to be the men and women of God, who not only profess godliness with the lips, but in the integrity of our heart, harbor righteousness. Let us be the men and women He can find to stand in the breach today.

In Romans 3, Paul talks about a lot about people who walk in their own evil way and concludes:

“There is no fear of God before their eyes.” (Romans 3:18 ESV).

People kill with no remorse. People curse without a second thought. People lie, cheat and steal and then rejoice in their sin.

And we think how low people have fallen to commit such brazen acts of evil with no fear of God before their eyes.

But what about the times we sit in front of the television and bring swearing, immodest dress or people using the Lord's name in vain into our homes?

What about listening to a comedian known for coarse jesting?

What about engaging in whisperings, backbitings and gossiping?

Before we throw the book at the “really bad” people, should we consider whether we have the fear of God before our eyes when we invite evil into our homes, our eyes, our hearts without giving it a second thought?

Perhaps, we all need to have a little more fear of the Lord before our eyes as we consider the choices we make in our entertainment.

I am still going through Ezekiel in my daily Bible reading. I have an observation I want to share specifically with my fellow fathers. I know these lessons have weighed heavily on my heart. It starts with a proverb that was common in Israel in the days of Ezekiel:

“What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge?'” (Ezekiel 18:2 ESV).

This is akin to the false and destructive doctrine of Calvinism that teaches that we inherit sins. The Bible plainly teaches that each is responsible for their

own sins and God makes this very clear when He says:

“As I live, declares the Lord GOD, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die.” (Ezekiel 18:3-4 ESV).

Fathers, understand that God will judge you for your sins and your children for their sins. On the Day of Judgement, your sins will not pass to your children, nor will their sins be held against you. The soul that sins will die.

But in chapter 33, Ezekiel also teaches about the sacred duty of the Watchman:

“But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, so that the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any one of them, that person is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand.” (Ezekiel 33:6 ESV).

Is there any more appropriate situation in which fathers can be considered Watchmen than when it comes to protecting and warning their children of spiritual dangers? My fellow fathers, know that your children will fall in their iniquities because of their own responsibility, but have you warned them?

If we have taught and warned them, then we have fulfilled our duty as their Watchman. But if we have been easy in warning them; if we have withheld the council of the Lord from them; if we have turned a blind eye when they walk astray... then we have failed them as their Watchman. And what is the result?

They will fall in their iniquity because we did not warn them and the Lord will require their blood at our hands. Fathers, we are not doing our children any favors by protecting them from the statutes of the Lord. We need to warn them by giving them every opportunity to prepare in themselves a heart soft for the Lord.

My fellow fathers, if we truly love our children, we will be their Watchman. No matter how old they are, it's never too late to start being their Watchman.

Blasphemy Of The Holy Spirit

In Matthew 12, we read something that should scare anyone who reads it. Jesus speaks of the unforgivable sin. Think about that for a moment. A sin so bad that no forgiveness will be given for it. What is so bad that the sin will be with us for eternity, where God Himself will not overlook or pardon it? In His own words, Jesus says that if we blaspheme the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven.

“Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.” (Matthew 12:31-32 ESV).

Now, I will tell you that this is not an easy subject to speak on, and I suppose that not everyone who reads this will come to the same conclusion that I have come to. I would love to hear other thoughts on this. But based on my studies, and because this is such a dangerous condition to find ourselves in, I thought it would be worthy for all of us to think about this warning that Jesus gives.

In order to understand how we might find ourselves guilty of this unpardonable sin, let's back up and look at the context in which Jesus makes this statement, because I do not believe it was given in a vacuum. In verse 22, Matthew tells us:

“Then a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw.” (Matthew 12:22 ESV).

The miracle did what it was intended to accomplish; it confirmed who Jesus was and that His message was from God. The people understood this and asked if this man could be the Son of David. But the Pharisees who saw the same signs came to a different conclusion:

“But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, “It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.” (Matthew 12:24 ESV).

So here is the situation that we find; Jesus comes preaching the Kingdom of Heaven and in order to confirm that this message is from God, the Spirit

works in Him to perform the miracles He is doing. We know that the Father, Son and Spirit all worked in unity when Jesus was upon the earth. It is the Father's Word (John 12:49), confirmed by the Spirit (Luke 4:16-21) and spoken by the Son (Matthew 4:23).

In our passage in Matthew 12, the people accept the confirmed words (via miracles) of Jesus as the promised Messiah, but the Pharisees rejected the word and said that Jesus was performing miracles by the power of Beelzebub. This, in and of itself, I do not believe was the unpardonable sin of blasphemy of the Spirit. Jesus goes on and says that it couldn't be by the power of Beelzebub because a house divided against itself could not stand:

“But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.” (Matthew 12:28 ESV).

And here is where the crux of the warning lies.

“Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.” (Matthew 12:31-32 ESV).

We know that Jesus is full of grace and mercy. There is no sin we can do against Him that He is not willing and eager to forgive us of. There is no depth that we can fall where His grace cannot lift us.

But if we reject His words, the same words that have been confirmed through the Spirit, there remains no forgiveness. The Pharisees who refuse to come to Him as the only way to the Father (John 14:6) will not have their sin of rejection overlooked. When they speak against the Spirit by rejecting the word and following their own way in spite of the Spirit having confirmed the word, they will be lost.

And the people who rejected the words taught in the first century by Christians who had their words confirmed by the Spirit through miracles, will find no forgiveness. And today, we have the Word of God in the New Testament, which is inspired and confirmed by the same Spirit. If we do not accept that word, there is no forgiveness to be given. If we speak against the Spirit by saying we will not accept His confirmed word and die in that condition, then we cannot be forgiven since we blaspheme the Spirit by rejecting what He confirms.

The good news is that as long as we have breath and walk upon the earth, we will always be able to come to the Lord and submit to Him and His name. But if we leave this earth having rejected the one and only Truth given by the Father, confirmed by the Spirit and spoken by the Son, then there will be no

forgiveness found. What a terrible condition to find ourselves in.

Accept the Word of the Lord Jesus today before it is everlastingly too late for forgiveness and we find ourselves guilty of blaspheming the Spirit through our rejection of His confirmed word.

In my daily Bible reading, I read through Amos. Again, it is not a comfortable book to read. You may ask, why concern yourself about the prophecies of doom from the Old Testament. They were written to a specific people for a specific time. And to that, I say “Amen!” I do not think you can take the prophecies written for one people and apply them to another people.

But I remember the words of Paul that give me pause...

“For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” (Romans 15:4 ESV).

I take away this from the guidance that the Holy Spirit gave through the apostle: We can learn a lot about the character of God by looking at how He responded to sins in the past. For the same sins that pushed Him to anger in the past pushes Him to anger today. The laws we live under may be different, but God is the same. I will be a fool to ignore the things written in former days for my instruction.

And so, I read about the thing that made God angry, perhaps what we would say in our vernacular, things that made Him sick to His stomach. And it isn't the things we would naturally think of.

“I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” (Amos 5:21-24 ESV).

Sometimes, I wonder if I am guilty of the same things that made God angry in the days of Amos when God said, “Enough! I am sick of your dishonor!” How can this be when I offer my praise to Him; give Him my worship; sing to Him; attend church; give money in the offering plate? How can God be angry with me when I worship Him?

And then I see what He says in Amos. It is not about walking through the acts of worship on Sunday and then living like a sinner on Monday that will please God. That's what He is telling the children of Israel. "But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." (vs 24).

Do we truly believe that God would rather we take away the noise of our songs to Him if we do not live a godly life Monday through Saturday? Are we so deluded that we can convince ourselves, like the Israelites did, that we can throw God a bone of worship one day a week to satisfy Him and then He will ignore the willful way we live our lives?

Is this how little respect we have for the sovereign God Almighty; the Creator; the great I AM? I fear that sometimes I think like the Israelites thought in the days of Amos. I fear that sometimes I can soothe my conscience by peddling my worship to God and feel vindicated before Him when I turn toward my own way in my life.

Amos teaches me that God does indeed want me to worship Him, but He wants me to worship Him as an obedient believer who submits my life wholly to Him. Offering worship is no "get out of jail free" card we can expect to get from God.

Amos teaches me something about God. The prophet teaches me that God cannot be mocked or placated, manipulated into accepting me and my sinful life by offering Him a few trinkets of worship that He will greedily devour so that I might live unto myself and follow my own way.

I pray I learn the lesson of Amos so that I do not find myself standing against the great I Am on the Day of Judgement having thought I could placate Him with such profane contempt. Blessed be the name of the Lord, who loved me enough to preserve the writings of old so I may have instructions for my life today.

In my daily Bible reading, I'm in the book of Joshua. This is where we see that God delivers the promised land into the hands of the Israelites. The generation who doubted and sinned in the wilderness have died off, all but Joshua and Caleb, the spies who did not doubt God. Moses has died and God chooses Joshua to lead the Israelites in conquering the land.

In Joshua 6, we read about the fall of the great city of Jericho. This city was devoted to destruction, but one of the soldiers, Achan, coveted some of the treasures of Jericho and took it and buried it under his tent. Apparently, it was a family affair, because his whole family is punished for the sin.

But what I wanted to focus on is a couple of verses in chapter 7. What a

powerful message we learn about our God! After the stunning and complete victory at the mighty city of Jericho, they turn their attention to the small city of Ai. And we see what happens when God is taken out of the picture.

First, sin is in the camp and God will not continue to fight for the people until sin is removed. Is there a lesson for us today? How many of us want to bury the treasures of sin under our tent and expect to enjoy the blessings of the Lord?

But second, Joshua never sought the Lord's council before he went against Ai. He took it upon himself to dispose of this insignificant city. Perhaps he didn't think that he needed to bother God with such a small thing. Certainly, he could take care of such a small city by his own power. Who knows what he was thinking; but I cannot help but to think that a simple prayer to the Lord, even in the small things, might have saved him from a terrible defeat.

And so, Joshua takes it upon himself to fight this small city by his own might, never consulting the Lord's council. Perhaps it was a bit of pride that went before this fall, the fall we read about in chapter 7:

“and the men of Ai killed about thirty-six of their men and chased them before the gate as far as Shebarim and struck them at the descent. And the hearts of the people melted and became as water.

Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the LORD until the evening, he and the elders of Israel. And they put dust on their heads.” (Joshua 7:5-6 ESV).

Let the details of this defeat sink in. First, only 36 men died. In any war, that would be considered an outstanding victory! But not when the Lord is fighting your battles. What I take away from this is that when the Lord fought for the children of Israel, 100% of the men who went into battle came home to their families while 100% of their enemies were defeated. So, 36 men falling in battle was not what they expected from the Lord.

We know that they go on to take care of the sin, deal with Achan, and turn to the Lord. And you know what? When they go back into Ai, they do it this time with the Lord's council. Joshua didn't make the same mistake. And when they turn to the Lord, He tells them exactly what to do to defeat this insignificant city.

The lesson to me: I need to turn to the Lord for the big things in my life and realize that even in the “small” things, I need Him. For it's often in the small things that I begin to learn that I do not need God. In the small things, I often rely too much on my own power and strength. And it is often in the small things in life that I allow Satan to gain advantage over me.

What is your Ai today? Whatever it is, take it before the Lord. Never give occasion for pride and self-reliance to take root to the neglect of reliance

upon the Lord.

“Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.”
(1 Corinthians 10:12 ESV).

When we remove God from our hearts, life can get overwhelming. Too much unknown, too much hate, too much disappointment.

But when we keep God first and leave it all to Him, then there is a peace that underlies everything. Most people will unfortunately never understand this peace we have.

Blesses be the God of all peace. Enjoy this gift from the One in whom all blessings flow.

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7 ESV).

“Pray then like this:

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” (Matthew 6:9-13 ESV).

Love Your Enemies

In Luke 6, Jesus is teaching a radical departure from human action and describing just how different His Kingdom is from anything people experienced before. Observe:

“But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.” (Luke 6:27-28 ESV).

Think about this for a moment. Jesus isn't teaching that we simply avoid striking out against our enemies. He's not teaching that we should simply ignore them. Jesus is telling us to seek out the best interest of those who hate us and those who mistreat us. Sometimes we hear...

“To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either.” (Luke 6:29 ESV).

...and we think that this is the extent of my responsibility; simply withhold vengeance and refuse to get into an altercation. But what Jesus is asking goes far beyond simply withholding vengeance. Notice, He said: Love, do good, bless, and pray. These are action words that require us to be something more than a pacifist.

And Jesus is not talking about someone who simply cut you off in traffic; someone who you don't know. Jesus said it is for our enemies to whom we are to do good. Enemies are the people who hate us and wish us harm. These are the people who may go out of their way to make our lives difficult.

When was the last time we sat down and prayed for someone who has made themselves an enemy to us or our family? When was the last time we did good for them? When was the last time we truly hoped in our heart that only good would come to them?

When was the last time we truly put the Lord's Golden Rule into effect for the people who would never do that for us? You remember what the Lord said:

“And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.” (Luke 6:31 ESV).

Kingdom living is not always an easy thing to do. But that's what being a Christian means. It's living a radical life that people who are watching notice. And why would we live this way? This is the question that the world will be asking. And do you know what we tell them? We explain “why” by teaching them what Jesus teaches us.

“But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.” (Luke 6:35 ESV).

You see, this is what makes us different from the world. This is something people will notice and many will want to know why we treat people who hate us, who wrong us, who attack us- why we treat them in such a good way. People will understand Jesus' observation when he says,

“If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same.” (Luke 6:32-33 ESV).

And yet, by loving our enemies, we can teach people something amazing about our God; about the King we serve. We can teach them that we act in a radical way toward our enemies because Jesus acted that way toward us when we were His enemies. And we are just being His disciples when we do good to those who wish us harm.

Very few things we do as Christians can show the power of the Gospel more than when we live like Jesus. May we all fight the urge to be like the sinners when it comes to the way we treat others by learning to show mercy when mercy is not deserved.

“Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.” (Luke 6:36 ESV).

In my daily Bible reading, I'm in Esther. It's a book that demonstrates the power of God without ever mentioning God. But one verse caught my attention that I had not really paid much attention to before.

Haman had passed a law that all Jews would be slaughtered and plundered on a specific day. We know the story- Haman's evil plot became known to the King and he was killed on the same 50-foot gallows he erected for Mordecai to be hung on. Then Queen Esther approached the king to request that the order which Haman had decreed be repealed:

“And she said, “If it please the king, and if I have found favor in his sight, and if the thing seems right before the king, and I am pleasing in his eyes, let an order be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, which he wrote to destroy the Jews who are in all the provinces of the king.” (Esther 8:5 ESV).

What struck me is the honor and respect in which she, the queen,

addressed the king. She humbled herself, made her request, and respected his will as supreme. She didn't demand her way, nor did she make her request with expectations.

This is the way we need to approach our King- the King of kings. When we go before the throne of God, we need to have the same reverence for our King that Esther showed for her king. Ours is far greater, far more worthy of glory and honor.

The next time we go before the throne of God, let's do so with the same honor and respect that Queen Esther had when she approached King Ahasuerus.

In this holiday season, there is a lot of thought centered around gift giving and gift receiving. While there is definitely a commercial aspect to the season that we are approaching, there is also a fundamental spiritual nature to the gift-giving that has our minds and hearts center on this time of year.

Paul quotes one of the most famous sayings of Jesus, interestingly enough, a quote we only know about from Paul, a quote never recorded in the Gospels:

“In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'” (Acts 20:35 ESV).

It is more blessed to give than to receive.

And so, we have a choice in how we not only approach the holiday season, but in every aspect of our Christian life all year long. Do we focus on being a giver or a receiver? And while there is nothing wrong with receiving gifts (for by nature, if there is a giver, there must also of necessity, be a receiver), do we seek after giving or receiving more?

Even in the Gospels, we see this quote of Jesus living strong. On Judgment Day, Jesus commends those who are givers:

“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.” (Matthew 25:35-36 ESV).

I would encourage all of us who wear the name of Christ to consider how we can be more of that which the King says is “more blessed.” How can we

give our time, our money, our food, our attention, and our calendars?

Enjoy being the receiver during this holiday season, but do so with a remembrance and an appreciation that it is even better when we ensure that we are also givers.

In my daily Bible reading, I am in the book of 1 Samuel. In Chapter 15, King Saul is told by Samuel to wait 7 days for him and Samuel would sacrifice to the Lord before the King goes into battle against the Amalekites. These people were devoted to destruction by the Lord.

You know the story. Saul waited the 7 days, but the people of Israel were frightened and fleeing. Mistake 1 that Saul made was putting his trust in his military might instead of the Lord. In his eyes, he had to act to preserve his strength.

Mistake 2 that Saul made was panicking and not resting in the Lord when things look bleak. Friends, when things look bleak for us, that's the worst time to panic and try things our way. That's the time we need most to live by faith and trust in the Lord. For the Lord is a Lord who delivers when all seems lost. His ways are indeed higher than our ways.

Mistake 3 that Saul made was in doing things his way and not the Lord's way. Rather than waiting for Samuel to offer the sacrifice, Saul offered it by his own hand. And the sad thing was that Saul had waited 7 days but he sinned when salvation was but only hours away. If he had only waited a short time, Samuel would have been there. How many times have we taken things into our own hands just as the Lord was ready to deliver us because we acted too soon?

And mistake 4 was Keeping King Agag and his choice flocks alive, rather than devoting them to destruction. What a willful, self-centered sin that totally disregarded the commands of the Lord. And then when confronted with his sins, King Saul has the audacity to do what I fear we often do when confronted with our sins:

“And Saul said to Samuel, “I have obeyed the voice of the LORD. I have gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me. I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have devoted the Amalekites to destruction.” (1 Samuel 15:20 ESV).

Rather than have a heart of repentance and confess his sins and seek the Lord's forgiveness, he refuses to even acknowledge his condition before God, convincing himself that he has done nothing wrong. This is the most

dangerous and sad condition we can find ourselves in. When we get to the point where we can blatantly live in rebellion to God and say, "I have obeyed the voice of the Lord," then we are in danger of passing a point of no return in our willingness to live a life in obedience to God.

I urge us all to have a heart that is tender toward God, a heart that is eager to seek out His will and a spirit of repentance and godly sorrow when the Word of God sheds light on our sins and convicts us. Otherwise, we are living in the most dangerous condition we can live in.

"For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries." (Hebrews 10:26-27 ESV).

This is pure speculation, but I wonder if the angels in heaven could watch everything that the Lord God Jesus was doing on the earth?

If so, I wonder if they were waiting with swords drawn for the Father to utter, "Go!" as they watched the Jewish people cry, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

I wonder if they were straining to keep still when the Romans were beating, mocking and nailing Him?

I wonder if their ears tingled when Jesus asked Peter if he knew that He could ask the Father to send 12 Legions of angels?

I wonder if the enemies of the Lord God Jesus knew just how close they could have come to utter annihilation and defeat?

My King showed His tremendous strength in enduring the cross and not giving up on the Father's will. How many of us could do what He did with such deliverance only a breath away?

Could the angels see everything that was going on with Jesus? Just speculation on my part...

I do not always have to understand "how" or "why".

I know that my human reasoning does not compare to God's perfect knowledge and understanding.

Faith is the step beyond what I can see into the trust that I cannot see.

Sometimes, I just need to take what Jesus says at face value rather than try to figure out all the “whys” and “hows”.

It is enough that God said it and that settles it.

Perhaps, if the Lord will reveal to me answers in heaven, I will look back on my struggles to believe with embarrassment as I easily see answers to the dots I earnestly desire to see connected.

Or I may never know. Even in heaven, God will still be so far above me. So, today, I choose to believe in faith.

I will praise and worship Him today, as I will in heaven.

And I will not be any worse having never attained to the knowledge that God possesses.

“How” is in the accepting of the Lord as my Savior.

“Why” is because He told me that His way is the only way.

It is one thing to believe that God will not let anything bad happen to you.

It is another thing to believe that no matter what happens to you, God will help you endure it faithfully.

Just A Little More

At heart, I suspect we all know that we are stewards of God. We understand that someday, we will have to stand before Him and give account of how we have used the things that He has entrusted to us. And I also suspect that at heart, most of us want to be better at sharing the blessings that we have been given by the Lord.

And yet, times can be tight for many of us. And they can be tight for a number of reasons that are not important for the purposes of our thoughts today; reasons such as bad luck or self-induced financial hardships. But whatever the reason, we often find ourselves stressed over our resources- or lack of resources to be more accurate.

Perhaps we think, “If I can get just a little more, I can do better in giving or helping others.” There are a couple of problems with this kind of thinking.

First, it is often a deceptive belief that we will ever have just a little more. What usually happens as God blesses us is that we spend that blessing plus a little more on ourselves. While we still have good intentions to want to be a blessing to others, we find ourselves in the same situation of needing just a little more and then we'll be able to help others.

The second problem with this way of thinking is that it doesn't understand the crux of what God is looking for from us. We are preoccupied with amounts and values. We look at a small amount and think, "How much good can this miniscule amount do for someone?" And we think, when I can get just a little more, then I will be able to make an impact on someone's life.

Listen to what the One who will judge us as His steward says:

"And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward." (Matthew 10:42 ESV).

Jesus is teaching that we might not be able to take care of all of someone's needs, but if we can do even a small thing to meet a need for someone, we will by no means lose our reward. Shouldn't this tell us just how important even a small act of giving is in the eyes of Jesus? Can we really tell the Lord, "If You can only wait until I get a little more, I can help someone in need?"

And then Jesus dismantles our plea for just a little more when He shows us this:

"Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. And he said, "Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on." (Luke 21:1-4 ESV).

What do I learn from this? I learn that there is no "Just a little more" in the eyes of Jesus. He doesn't care about the amount of the gift. He cares about the giving of the gift. Remember, He is the one who will judge us one day on how well we have been His steward.

Do you know someone who struggles to make ends meet? Why not take them out to eat and ease their burden for a day? Do you know someone who is struggling financially and needs school supplies for their children? Why not buy a little extra when you get your children's supplies so you can share with them? It might not take care of all their needs, but it is a cup of cold water that they need.

There are a number of things we can do, if our heart is set on giving a cup of cold water or sharing our two small copper coins. And when we do, we warm the Savior's heart. We learn that we never have to wait until we have

just a little more in order to be pleasing to Him.

Jesus often says that His truth is spoken for the purpose of blinding some that they might not see. In fact, many claim that Jesus spoke in parables to make His lessons easy to understand, much in the same way that we employ storytelling techniques. But a fair reading of Jesus' purpose with parables does not fully support this. Consider:

“This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.” (Matthew 13:13 ESV).

And after He healed the blind man,

“Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.” (John 9:39 ESV).

Reading John 9, which also references Isaiah 6, helps us to understand why Jesus would teach in a way that His truth would remain hidden to some, rendering them blind to it. And it serves as a powerful warning to us today.

In John 9, Jesus speaks to the Pharisees and a man born blind. The same truth and evidence are given to both. To the Pharisees, their heart had already rejected any claim that Jesus was from God. And this rejection in their heart meant that they would not consider anything Jesus did or said. They were blind to His teachings.

But to the man born blind that Jesus healed, when the same signs and word was given to Him, the text says that he worshiped Jesus (John 9:38). The blind man could see spiritually while the Pharisees, seeing, remained blind spiritually.

This has nothing to do with God personally choosing some to see the truth and others to remain blind to it. But the nature of God's truth is that it lays before people one choice: Jesus is the only way to the Father. Accept Him or reject Him- those are your only two options. You will do one or the other. If you do not choose Him, you are rejecting Him.

So, if we have a heart that rejects Jesus, we will remain blind to His teachings. We will deny the Word and set up something else in our hearts as the truth. There is no other option. His Word is designed to either give sight or to give blindness. That sight or blindness is driven by our heart and what we do with His Word.

If we have accepted Jesus and strive to obey Him, constantly searching His word to live in obedience, then we are living with sight. But once we stop searching His word and start to live our way, according to the way we choose to live, then we shut off our heart to see His teachings and we will be blind.

It is a sorrowful place to find ourselves when we have a heart that stops seeking Jesus and instead, seeks to justify our own way to the Lord. When we do that, we will remain blind to the parables and truth, the only truth that can lead us to the Father through Jesus.

In my daily Bible reading, I am in the book of 1 Kings. The first half talks about King Solomon and the building of the temple of God. Because of God's blessings, Solomon had become rich and his fame spread across the world because of his wisdom.

In Chapter 10, the Queen of Sheba, who heard of Solomon's great wisdom and riches, decides to see for herself if what she heard was true. The stories seemed too good to be true. And while she assumed that the stories were exaggerations, there was enough that intrigued her to find out for herself.

So, she traveled to Israel and put Solomon to the test. She tried to stump him with very difficult questions, but his divinely appointed wisdom proved to be greater than even she could imagine. Suffice it to say that this queen was overwhelmed when she witnessed the blessings of wisdom and riches that God had bestowed upon Solomon. And then she made this observation:

“Happy are your men! Happy are your servants, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom!” (1 Kings 10:8 ESV).

And this made me think, as much as we believe in the grandeur of heaven; as much as we think of the glory witnessed by all of the angels and all the created heavenly beings who are standing before God continually, giving praise, honor and worship to the Creator, I have to believe that we are like the Queen of Sheba.

When we finally get to see heaven in its glory for ourselves, we will have no other thought than to think that the half has not been told. It will be far greater than the stories we hear. When we witness and experience the worship of those in the presence of God, we will be overwhelmed at just how blessed they are to continually stand before God and witness His glory.

And the best thing: We will be among those blessed to be able to stand before the throne of God continually to sing and to praise and to live in the

glory of God Almighty forever.

If the Queen of Sheba was overwhelmed when she came into the presence of King Solomon, can you imagine what it will be like when we come into the presence of the Great I AM?

In my daily Bible reading, I just finished the book of 1 Kings. The kingdom has been divided and God approaches Jeroboam and chooses him to be King of the northern tribes. God promises to make his house an enduring dynasty if he obeys the Word of God. But once he has power, Jeroboam forgets God and turns to his own way.

Fearing that the people will return to the southern King of Judah if allowed to travel to Jerusalem to worship, the King of Israel created two idols and set them up to the north and the south of the land and tells the people that this is the god who brought them out of the land of Egypt. He also makes priests of people from tribes other than the tribe of Levi.

Here was a man who was promised it all, yet he decided that he didn't need God and that he would follow his own path. He had power and money, everything he needed to do all that his heart desired. But the Word of the Lord came to Jeroboam and a reckoning was about to come upon him from the Lord.

“but you have done evil above all who were before you and have gone and made for yourself other gods and metal images, provoking me to anger, and have cast me behind your back,” (1 Kings 14:9 ESV).

The kingdom was going to be taken away from him. But did you notice what the Lord said to him: “and have cast me behind your back”? This is the crux of Jeroboam's sins. He did all these evil things because he cast God behind his back. Instead of putting the Lord in the forefront of all he did, like King David had done, Jeroboam cast the Lord behind him and walked in his own way.

Is there a message for us today? Do we cast the Lord behind our back and walk in our own way? Do we know what the Lord wants us to do? Do we understand His will? If so, we are faced with the same choice that Jeroboam was faced with. Do we put the Lord at the forefront of our lives or do we cast Him behind our backs and live in our own way?

Let us be careful before we throw God behind us. If we do, our ultimate end will be the same that Jeroboam faced. There will be a day of reckoning and the God Who we threw behind us will stand before us, face to face, to

render judgment.

What does it mean to have a “seat at the table”? In business, it means that your department is represented when important decisions are made and that you get a say in the outcomes that will affect you.

As children of God, do we appreciate the fact that because of Jesus coming to the earth and living as man, He became the perfect High Priest for us and we now have a “seat at the table” before God; someone who will represent our interests to the Father? No other part of God's creation has this amazing blessing.

“My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.” (1 John 2:1-2 ESV).

What Jesus does for us even now is amazing.

Before He came to earth, He existed as God Almighty over all of His creation.

Then, because we needed a Savior, He put on the flesh of His creation and lived as one of us.

While living among us, Jesus represented heaven to us on earth. Even when Philip asked Him to show them the Father,

“Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” (John 14:9 ESV).

But when He ascended into heaven and was seated at the right hand of God, Jesus' work continued.

Having lived the life of a man, the Son of Man began to represent earth to heaven.

“For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the

presence of God on our behalf.” (Hebrews 9:24 ESV).

How truly blessed we are to have a Savior who first represented heaven to us and now represents us to Heaven.

If you are like me, you read passages that say we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ and give account of every word and every deed that we do, and think, “I am in trouble on that day, because I have done so much to be found guilty.

Consider what Paul says in 2 Corinthians:

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.” (2 Corinthians 5:10 ESV).

Now, while I do believe that this is a day that we should never take lightly, as I read this passage, especially in the context of 2 Corinthians, I see that Paul is mentioning this day as something that we can look forward to; a day where vindication will be made on our part.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could look at this day as a day of comfort rather than a day of fear? This is how I see that Paul was looking at it and the way he was presenting this day to us.

His enemies were accusing Paul of being a false apostle and of teaching falsehoods. Much of his time was spent in defending his apostleship and his devotion to God. But he looked forward to the day when nothing would be hidden. No claims against him would stand because on that day, truth would be brought forth and his words and deeds would be testified to and no false claim against him would stand.

And the words and deeds of those who falsely accused him would be laid before everyone on that day as well. Nothing would, could be hidden. To Paul, it would be a day of vindication; to his enemies who were falsely accusing him, the truth would be uncovered as well.

Paul knew he had sinned, even calling himself the chief of sinners. But because he repented and lived to the Lord, those sins had been wiped clean by the blood of the Lamb, and would not be brought against him on that day. But his good words and deeds would be before all, even though many accused him otherwise.

My point is that if we are living a life devoted to serving God, confessing and repenting of our sins, then the Day of Judgment should be a day that we

are looking forward to experiencing. Why? Because the Judge will be perfect and righteous; the Judge will be merciful and gracious; and the Judge is seeking to save us and not condemn us.

But there are some who should fear this day. Those who do not live under the Lord's authority; those who refuse to repent and confess their sins before God; those who accuse and tear down rather than those who edify and build up.

It is on that day when all will be made known. To His faithful servants, have faith in the Lord that He will do all He promised to do for you. Be eager for that day to come, resting in His gracious forgiveness and His ability to see the wonderful secret things you do for Him in your closet. And if people judge your heart harshly without cause, then take comfort that the true righteous Judge will not be duped into believing the evil spoken against you.

While I do not underestimate the stakes on that great day, for me, it is a day I look forward to. I hope that those who are faithful to the Lord can see this as a day of comfort as well.

Sovereignty. God's purposes being accomplished and nothing can keep what He determines from coming to pass. No matter what man chooses, God's Will prevails.

Consider Daniel and Samson. God worked through each of them and yet each of them chose through their own free will to serve or not to serve God.

Daniel chose to serve God faithfully and God worked through Him. Not because Daniel was faithful, but because the Lord is sovereign.

Samson chose to sin in regard to his appetites and against his Nazarite vow and God worked through him, in spite of his sinful actions that ended up costing him his life.

God's sovereignty can be seen in this: Had Daniel acted in a selfish and sinful way, God in His sovereignty would still accomplish His purpose.

Had Samson been as faithful as Daniel, God would have still performed all in His heart and according to His sovereignty.

God's sovereignty is not dependent on what we do or do not do. And His sovereignty does not limit or take away our free will.

In spite of the free will that God has given us, it cannot change what God has determined in His heart.

That is what makes Him sovereign. That is what gives us comfort in the trust that we can place in Him.

We can choose what we wish, and God is still sovereign and will accomplish His purpose. This is why we must submit to Him in all things.

This is why we must choose to obey Him.

The Flocking Of Sinners

Why did the lost flock to Jesus? Everywhere He went, they came to Him. When the elite in society walked by, they couldn't help but to rail against Jesus for eating with sinners. Do you remember when He called Matthew to be a disciple?

“And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them. And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” (Luke 5:29-30 ESV).

And then a woman, who was a sinner, approached Jesus and it caused the Pharisees to lose it:

“And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment.

Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner.” (Luke 7:37-39 ESV).

Jesus tried to tell the religious leaders why He spent time with the sinners.

“And Jesus answered them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” (Luke 5:31-32 ESV).

But why would the lost flock to Him? What was it about Jesus that caused them to crash a Pharisee's dinner party or climb a tree just to catch a glimpse of Him and then throw Him a lavish party?

Jesus never overlooked their sins. He never pretended that they were ok

when they needed to repent. And yet they couldn't stay away from the Lord. The reason they could come to Him so readily is because He held His arms open wide to them. While the Scribes and Pharisees made sure that the sinners knew how far down on the rungs of society they were, Jesus was giving them what they needed. Attention and a way up. A way to God.

And the Pharisees hated it.

While the shepherds of the land rejected them and made them feel worthless, Jesus showed them that they mattered. The worst thing we can do today is to think that the lost won't be interested in hearing us speak about Jesus to them. People are still looking for a purpose. They do this because God has put eternity in our hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

Maybe we'll also find out that they will still flock to Jesus today if they learn that they still matter. Maybe they are looking for something of value to replace the emptiness and void they have without God.

People tell them that they can find purpose in riches or fame. They can find contentment in a life of service or education. Perhaps they can find happiness if they can climb the rungs of success in a blossoming career. But as the writer of Ecclesiastes testified, all this is vanity.

But Jesus offers purpose. He offers redemption. He offers salvation. When others say you are worthless, Jesus says that you are worth so much, He would die for you. When was the last time someone said that to you? When was the last time someone did that for you?

Why did the lost flock to Jesus? Because they needed Him. And He gave them what only He could offer. He gave them everything that society couldn't give them.

And so, they threw Him a feast and He ate with them. They washed His feet with their tears and He wasn't afraid to touch them. They cried over their broken lives and He forgave them. And this is what the lost can get from Him today. And we get to be the ones who can introduce them to the One who can do all this for them even today.

It is one thing to say, "Lord, I'm totally committed to serving and following You, whatever You say."

It's another thing to say, "Lord, I'm totally committed to serving and following You as long as You ask me to do it the way I think it should be done. "

Will the Lord find you today?

God is not passive.

He is not the God of the deists who believed God created everything and then stepped away from His creation to leave it alone.

He is active in our lives and He earnestly seeks those who have a whole heart that is pure for Him.

Today, when the Lord searches the earth, will He find you?

Today, keep your heart whole. Be found by the searching eyes of the Lord and rest in the support that the Lord will give you.

“For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him.” (2 Chronicles 16:9a ESV).

What is your 300?

Do you remember the story of Gideon, the judge that God appointed to deliver Israel from the hands of Midian? 32,000 men gathered to fight with Gideon. But God looked at the army and had an observation that would make most men weak in the knees:

“The LORD said to Gideon, “The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.'” (Judges 7:2 ESV).

So, God sent 22,000 men home because they were afraid. Only 10,000 men were left. Still, God did not like the odds before Gideon. If most of us were in Gideon’s shoes, we’d start to worry about now, wouldn’t we?

“And the LORD said to Gideon, “The people are still too many. Take them down to the water, and I will test them for you there, and anyone of whom I say to you, 'This one shall go with you,' shall go with you, and anyone of whom I say to you, 'This one shall not go with you,' shall not go.” (Judges 7:4 ESV).

When all was said and done, God whittled the great army down to 300 men. These were the men who God would use to deliver the people of Israel. At the end of the day, Gideon, nor Israel, could boast that they were delivered

by their own hand, but they'd have no choice but to give glory and honor to God for His deliverance.

Think about this the next time that you face an impossible situation. Maybe the help that you pray for does not come about as you are asking for it. Perhaps you find that all options have been cut off and you see that the Lord has said "no" to your prayers for help.

Before you are quick to jump to the wrong conclusion and give up in trusting the Lord to deliver you because the situation has grown "impossible", consider that the Lord may be whittling your options for deliverance down to a place where you will have no choice but to see the Lord's hand in what He is about to do for you.

What is your 300? What situation seems so bleak that you see no other option but defeat? What do you see that you have no choice but to say that the Lord has said no?

Before you stop praying for deliverance, leave open the possibility that the Lord may be whittling your options down so that you will have no choice but to see His hand in the help He is about to send your way. Follow in the steps of Gideon when you are in an impossible situation and continue to put your trust in the Lord. See if He is about to work a great thing for you that leaves no doubt that the help is from Him. And if He does, be quick to praise Him for being a God who can deliver by the hands of 300 instead of through the hands of 32,000.

I just finished 1 Chronicles in my daily Bible reading. In this reading, we see where David wants to build a house for the Lord but the Lord says "no" to him. Instead, that honor will fall to his son, Solomon.

"Go and tell my servant David, "Thus says the LORD: It is not you who will build me a house to dwell in." (1 Chronicles 17:4 ESV).

Can you imagine how this must have disappointed David? Yet, David accepts the Lord's decision without complaint. He doesn't try to justify building the house of the Lord anyway. He honors God and is humbled that God is instead building a great, enduring house for him.

But it's worth looking at all that David did when the Lord told him "no".

He made provisions by storing up huge quantities of gold, silver, bronze and wood for the temple.

He had the inspired plans drawn up and archived until Solomon could use them.

He organized the people who would be serving in the temple.

He sat down with his son, Solomon, to prepare him for the work of building the house of God.

When God told David “no”, David accepted it, but he didn’t walk away from what he could do. Instead, David made do with the best he had. If he couldn’t be the one to build the temple of God, then he would do everything in his power to support the one who would build it.

What a lesson for us today. Perhaps things don’t work out for us to do for the Lord what is really in our heart. What do we do when that happens? Do we walk away and wash our hands of any responsibility?

Or do we look at how we can be a support to the one who is doing what we had hoped and prayed to do? Do we shift our thinking from being the one who delivers to being the one who supports the hands of the one who delivers?

Whatever role we play, let us never forget that we do all for the glory of God. Whether the one who steps up or the one who supports the person who steps up. God recognizes and rewards both of these men equally. And both give equal glory and honor to God.

Earlier today, I shared how excited I was that I am a couple of days away from reading through the entire Bible for the first time. It has taken me about 3 and a half months. Many have reached out and asked me to share my system with them. The system I use works great for me, though it may not be something that works for everyone.

For me, my mind often wanders during extended reading. But I have noticed that with audiobooks, I can consume large volumes of books with high comprehension and retention. So, I found a way to combine reading the Bible text while listening to it through a dramatic word-for-word reading (multiple actors reading different parts, along with sound effects like a crowd screaming or thunder crashing for example).

The result: I can sit for an hour and read the text in an online Bible as I follow along while listening to it being read word-for-word. The combination of hearing and reading has dramatically increased my retention and comprehension.

To make this experience even better, I downloaded on my laptop a Chrome extension called Simple Auto Scroll which allows the Bible text to automatically scroll as I read. Through some trial and error in the settings, I set the slow scroll speed to 80 and it usually does a good job at scrolling at a reading pace, though some adjustments may be needed in longer readings.

You don't need an auto scroller, but it helps me. If you use another browser, you will have to search for another auto scroller.

Another important ingredient in my reading success was in finding the perfect time of the day to consistently read. For me, that meant getting up at 4:00 am and starting by 4:15am -4:25am. When I tried to do it later in the day, I had too much going on and my reading became spotty. But when I started the day with my reading before anyone else woke up and before any daily distractions started, not only could I get in my scheduled reading, but it was amazing at how much of the day later was spent on thinking about my reading.

So, here is my routine for reading through the Bible in three and a half months at around an hour a day (that averages about 10 chapters a day).

1. Set my reading time. For me, it meant getting up at 4am.
2. Choose my daily reading. This time around, I randomly chose a book, alternating between the Old and New Testaments. (In the future, I will read straight through from time to time).
3. Open the "Faith Comes By Hearing: dramatized ESV Audio Bible on YouTube.
4. Open the Blue Letter Bible in another tab and open to the start of my daily read. Set the version to ESV to match what is being read on the audio in YouTube.
5. Assuming the Simple Auto Scroll is installed on a Chrome browser, I start the auto scroll on the Blue Letter Bible tab and then play the YouTube of the ESV dramatized Bible in the other tab.
6. When my reading is done, I pause the YouTube video. It will start where I left off the next day when I open it.
7. Mark the Bible Reading Tracker when I finish a book. I have shared my copy with anyone who wants to view it. Feel free to download and use it. It's simple, but it works and helps you remember what you've read if you jump around like I do.

When you stop the YouTube video, it will remember your starting place the next time you load it, so you can pick up right where you left off.

So, this is it. It's not too complicated, but it works for me. If you try this, let me know how it works for you. Also, feel free to share tips that work for you. And if you have any questions about this at all, feel free to IM me and I will help as much as I can.

May God bless each of you as you strive to let His Word dwell in you richly.

Links Used:

Chrome:

<https://www.google.com/chrome/>

Simple Auto Scroll:

<https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/simple-auto-scroll/dccjkemhmfmljlnnofljpkhkfpldff>

Faith Comes By Hearing dramatized ESV Audio Bible:

https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLp_jt3uit3qE440z3KWOT1XmPRdT2sd-N

Blue Letter Bible:

<https://www.blueletterbible.org/>

Bible Reading Tracker:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1S557lqhVM8EMg9mbwOfMvyhQjWMHf25SGXo-vsIEYz8/edit?usp=sharing>

After finishing 1 Chronicles in my daily Bible reading, I have jumped into 2 Chronicles this morning. Earlier I wrote of David being forbidden by God from building the house of God. That honor would fall to Solomon.

In today's reading, we see where God was with Solomon and the temple was built just as God had said. In his dedication speech, Solomon harkens back to his father's desire to build the temple:

“Now it was in the heart of David my father to build a house for the name of the LORD, the God of Israel. But the LORD said to David my father, 'Whereas it was in your heart to build a house for my name, you did well that it was in your heart.'” (2 Chronicles 6:7-8 ESV).

Isn't that wonderful? Our Good understands what is in our hearts and credits that as good for us. Sometimes, things don't always work out the way we intend. But the Lord knows our hearts. Sometimes men misunderstand or misconstrue our intentions. But the Lord never does.

While this should bring us great comfort, it should also bring us great warning. For just as the Lord can understand the good intentions of our hearts, as He did with King David, so can He understand the evil intentions of our hearts as well.

We may be able to put on a good show and fool the people around us, but we cannot fool God. While God is quick to praise and reward the good intentions of our hearts, so is He quick to lay bare the evil intentions of our

hearts as well.

We can fool our neighbors. They may not always be able to ascribe the good in our hearts to us. But God never misunderstands or is fooled. The good in our heart is always before Him as is the evil.

Let us praise God that He will always look at our heart and not only at our outcomes. We have 100% control over what is in our hearts, but not our outcomes. And God will remember the intentions of the heart. When Jesus later came, He made this focus on a clean heart the mainstay of His new Kingdom.

Just a reminder... we are all one day closer to the return of Jesus.

The Curse Of God's Blessings

In 2 Chronicles, we read about two good kings, separated by four generations. The first is Uzziah who grew strong in Judah because the Lord was with Him. And his fame spread throughout the world. He was able to build a strong army along with engines of war that kept him strong with an army that was much smaller in size than many that the kings had before him.

But rather than humbly accept the blessings from the Lord and realize that it was God who was the true strength of his might, King Uzziah grew proud in his heart and started to think that he was the one who was strong. And this pride caused him to forget God and do what was right in his own eyes. But the God who made him strong was watching Uzziah.

“But when he was strong, he grew proud, to his destruction. For he was unfaithful to the LORD his God and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense.” (2 Chronicles 26:16 ESV).

Uzziah thought that he could do all that his heart desired because he confused God's blessings with his own power and sovereignty. Blessings from God are something we should accept with thankfulness and enjoy; but when we forget where the blessings come from, we drop the guard of our

heart and let pride permeate. And when we let pride go unchecked, it blinds us and we begin to think that the blessings we have were given by our own hands. Pride causes us to forget God altogether.

Uzziah suffered a lifetime of leprosy because this good king let pride cause him to take God's blessings and turn it into a curse for him. That's what pride does. It takes the good gifts and blessings of God and turns them into a curse.

Four generations later, his great grandson King Hezekiah ascends to the throne. He too was a good king and he too was blessed by God. And he too let pride enter his heart.

“But Hezekiah did not make return according to the benefit done to him, for his heart was proud. Therefore wrath came upon him and Judah and Jerusalem. But Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the LORD did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah.” (2 Chronicles 32:25-26 ESV).

The difference between the two kings is that we see Hezekiah humbling himself before the Lord and purging his pride from his heart. He goes on to become one of the best kings that Judah had.

The lesson for us is that we need to be careful with the blessings God gives us. They are given so that we might glorify Him and not ourselves. It is always by the hands of the Lord that all blessings flow. We must guard against pride in our hearts that will tempt us to think that we have these blessings by our own hands alone. The moment we forget God, our blessings from Him can become a curse to us.

What has God blessed us with? When was the last time we counted our blessings? Let us always give credit where credit is due and give humble thanks to the One who can both give and take away. Let us stay humble in our hearts when blessed and not let those blessings become a curse and a snare to us by allowing them to cultivate pride in our hearts.

Yesterday, I finished reading through the Bible and today, I am starting to go through it again. This time around, I listed all the books in the Bible in the order in which they were written. I am still going to go back and forth between the Old and New Testament; but today, I started in the new Testament.

A passage in my reading struck me that I will dwell upon today:

“Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.” (Galatians 6:7 ESV).

I am sure that we have all read this many times, right? But what is weighing on my heart is the phrase, “God is not mocked.” Perhaps it is because I am spending so much time studying the sovereignty of God for a book I am writing, but I am deeply in tune with God’s supremacy and His absolute wisdom.

We fool each other all the time through our hypocrisy and we even fool ourselves into believing that we are justified before God even while we continue to live our own way. We adopt an entitled attitude that we can do what we wish and we will still reap the benefits of righteousness.

But God is not mocked. We will not be able to discard what He says and expect to reap anything other than what we sow. It is a fearful thing to sear our conscience to the point where we feel safe in our sins; where we feel that we can continue to disregard the Lord’s commands and expect to avoid reaping what we sow.

I’m not talking about the steps that we take where we falter in our walk with Jesus. I am talking about the times we walk in darkness and refuse to walk in the light, while thinking we will be able to reap the harvest of those who walk in the light.

“For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.” (Galatians 6:8 ESV).

Let us be sober in how we walk. God is not mocked. If we are walking in the flesh, then let us come to Him and start walking in the Spirit. How we walk is our choice, but the consequences we reap are not ours to choose. They come from what we sow.

Sometimes, we get so caught up in living that we forget what living is about. We plan and set goals, which are good; but they often can cause us to justify forgetting or ignoring what is important.

Jesus condemned the religious people of His day who withheld support from their parents by saying that the money was devoted to the Lord:

“But you say, ‘If anyone tells his father or his mother, “What you would have gained from me is given to God,” he need not honor his

father.' So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God." (Matthew 15:5-6 ESV).

The apostle John gives us similar warnings decades later because things do not change much. And it is the warning of John that I ask that we all prayerfully consider this morning. After experiencing the gift-giving and sharing of the holiday season, let's make sure that we don't relegate generosity to a season or a day. Consider what should be part of our walk with the Lord:

"By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth." (1 John 3:16-18 ESV).

Isn't it easy to say in our hearts, "The gift that I would have given to you is already appropriated elsewhere. I have it committed to my future planning; I have it committed to a rainy-day fund; After I save for my vacation, then I will help."

I am not saying that we must give everything we have away. But when we see someone without food, clothing or shelter, then we need to take a look at what we have planned for our material blessings. Can we in all good conscience say that we have already assigned our goods for another purpose and let our brother go away hungry, naked or homeless?

We will always find a million excuses to say why we cannot use what the Lord has blessed us with to help others. As we contemplate what we will do with the world's goods that God has entrusted to us, let us not forget why we are here. Jesus puts it in perspective for us:

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal." (Matthew 6:19-20 ESV).

Imagine being a faithful child to your parents and having to live with resentment from your siblings who struggle in their faith.

Imagine doing what God wants you to do, and then being arrested and sent to jail for a crime you didn't commit.

Imagine how hard it would be to stay faithful to a God who allowed

hatred against you to prevail even though you only responded with good.

Imagine watching evil men prosper while you remained forgotten by those you helped.

Imagine that this all happened not over a few weeks or months, but year after year.

Where would your faith be?

This is what Joseph experienced. In my daily Bible reading, I read in the course of a few minutes what he lived through for about 13 years of his life.

When given the chance to repay his brothers for the evil that they brought upon him; for taking away his father from him; for stealing his youth; for sending him to a pit, to slavery, to a prison, this is what he says instead of repaying them for their sins against him:

“And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest.

And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.” (Genesis 45:5-8 ESV).

Are you in your pit today?

Are you in your prison?

Are you forgotten?

Not by God if you are His faithful child.

Never forget that.

Why Did God Love Abraham?

Abraham had a special relationship with God. The Creator chose Him and James gives us insight into this relationship when he says:

“and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”--and he was called a friend of God.” (James 2:23 ESV).

A friend of God... what an awesome thing to be called. What was it about this patriarch that God called him His friend? In all likelihood, he served idols with his family when God first called him to follow Him (Joshua 24:2). And when he did, Abraham wasn't perfect in his faith. Twice, he lied to save his own skin rather than trust in the Lord who had already promised to protect him.

And when God promised to make him a great nation, Abraham took it upon himself to fulfill the Lord's promise, even going as far as to have a child with his wife's slave woman. And yet, this man was called the friend of God. Because when all was said and done, he believed God. He may not have understood how God would do all the things He promised, but he nonetheless believed.

His faith was a journey. God showed loving kindness, patience and mercy to Abraham who learned to love this God who called him out of his father's land. And God allowed Abraham to grow in His love for Him. And though not perfect, when all was said and done, Abraham believed God, and God counted it to him as righteousness.

Sometimes we think that God is a sniper, propped on a rooftop with us in His sights, just waiting for us to step out of line so He can take us down for our missteps. But that is not the God of Abraham, our father. It is not the God that Jesus teaches us about. Our God is patient with us, longsuffering, full of mercy and abundant in forgiveness.

Our God is a God who helps His children succeed, not one who waits for them to fall. He is a God who is committed to investing in our transformation into the image of His dear Son. Paul says it like this:

“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” (Philippians 1:6 ESV).

God loved Abraham because Abraham believed Him, not because he was perfect. And this belief caused Abraham to do what God asked him to do: leave his father's land; sacrifice the son he loved; worship Him as the only true and living God. And when Abraham had his moments of sin, God didn't throw up His hands and write off His friend. He continued to work on him because Abraham continued to believe Him.

Do you believe God? Not a mental exercise like the demons believe; but do you believe God? Do you know He is the Creator and that there is none like Him? Do you believe that He has only asked you to do the things that are in your best interest? Do you believe that He will never leave or forsake you? Do you believe that God will faithfully carry out all His good promises to you? Is that belief causing you to leave your life of sin and sojourn in a foreign land as He leads you home?

God loves His children, not because we are perfect, but in spite of our

imperfection. And as long as we continue to walk in faith, seeking Him and a relationship with Him, confessing our sins and repenting, then He is committed to completing that work in us.

Satan would have you believe that you are a failure in God's eyes when you falter in your walk with Him. He would love nothing more than to have you give up your relationship with God in resignation that the Almighty sniper in heaven has shot you dead because you were not perfect. But that is not the God of Abraham. That is not the God that Jesus tells us about.

And the disciple whom Jesus loved reminds us of this fact:

“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:8-9 ESV).

Never give up believing God. He will never give up on you.

A hidden sin cannot be forgiven,
But a confessed sin repented of is forgotten forever.

We may be able to fool each other, but God sees truth always. He knows the heart. For those who have a whole heart, we find joy that when all may condemn us, the Father will confess us.

And when we put on a good show for others, but have a heart of deceit, God also knows that. We cannot mock God. Consider the ominous warning that King Jesus gives to the church at Sardis:

“And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: 'The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. "I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead." (Revelation 3:1 ESV).

For those with a whole heart, this is of immense comfort. For those with a heart that harbors sin and hypocrisy, it is an eye-opening revelation to the truth of our all-knowing and all-seeing King.

And yet even those with an evil heart are still loved by our God. That is

why He mercifully pleads with the people at Sardis to choose life and repent:

“Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you.” (Revelation 3:3 ESV).

God does not want His people to die. He wants to shower them with blessings they cannot fathom. And so He tells us plainly that He sees all and we cannot hide anything from Him. Knowing this, we should wake up and repent before the King. Only then, will we receive His eternal blessings.

If someone asked me if I believed in the doctrine of Limited Atonement, it may surprise you that I'd tell him, “Yes, I do.” But not in the way that most people think of it when they use that term.

Most people who follow the Calvinistic doctrine, believe that God chose His elect to be saved and when Jesus died, His atoning blood was limited to only the elect that God had already predestined to save.

I do not believe that this definition of Limited Atonement is biblical in the slightest.

I believe that Jesus died to save the world, and that is everyone in the world. Among many verses that teach this is the beloved John 3:16:

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16 ESV).

But unlike some who believe that God's love will overlook all sins and the atoning blood of Jesus will save everyone regardless of whether they follow Jesus or not, I believe the atonement is limited to those who accept the gift of salvation; to those who call upon the name of the Lord:

“For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” (Romans 10:13 ESV).

The problem arises when we conflate these two truths to create a false doctrine that denies both truths; 1) That Jesus died for the world and, 2) That His blood's atonement is limited to those who accept it.

Then we get the false doctrine that teaches a man has no free will because God has already chosen who to save and that the blood of Jesus is limited to only those who were predestined to salvation.

Yes, I believe in the biblical principle of Limited Atonement, but the good news of the Gospel is that His atoning blood is freely available to all who call upon His name, but it is also limited to only those people who freely accept it.

“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12 ESV).

I am back in the book of Exodus in my daily reading. It seems that every time I read through the story of the ten plagues, I learn something new. What I am writing about today is a hard lesson. It applies to mothers and fathers, to elders, to anyone whose decisions have an effect on others.

Part of being responsible for someone else is to ensure to the best of your ability that you minimize consequences by steering them in wisdom toward the right path. But what happens if that right path is the cause of terrible consequences? The godly man and woman then has a gut-wrenching choice: Do I make a choice that sacrifices what God wants and keeps harm from falling on people I am leading; or do I lead them in the way of God knowing it will bring suffering on them?

This is what Moses faced. God told him to go to Pharaoh and say, “Let My people go!” Do you remember the consequences of that obedience to God?

“The same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and their foremen, “You shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks, as in the past; let them go and gather straw for themselves. But the number of bricks that they made in the past you shall impose on them, you shall by no means reduce it, for they are idle. Therefore they cry, 'Let us go and offer sacrifice to our God.'” (Exodus 5:6-8 ESV).

Because Moses did what God wanted, the people he was sent to help ended up suffering because of his actions. How easy it could have been for Moses to apologize to Pharaoh to ease his people’s burdens. How tempting it could have been for Moses to rationalize how it could have been the right thing to do not to provoke Pharaoh.

But Moses did what God commanded and let the consequences fall where they may. Leaders, there is a lesson in this for us. Do we trust God enough to lead people in God’s way knowing it may have tough consequences on them? This is an act of faith for us. Do we trust God enough to know that

obedience to Him will ultimately lead to a greater reward that will justify the consequences we bring on the people we lead?

Or does the vision of our leadership focus on the immediate consequences to the neglect of the eternal consequences? Having that heavenly, eternal perspective will help us make the tough choices in the moment.

Moses saw the land flowing with milk and honey, and because he let his people gather straw for a moment, they ended up inheriting a paradise on earth. When we are faced with a tough choice in our leadership role, we need to keep our eyes focused on the land flowing with milk and honey that we are leading our people toward.

How many times have we read a small verse that seems insignificant to us, especially when surrounded by powerful lessons that capture our attention? Sometimes it's in these verses that we breeze by that some of the most powerful lessons are found. In my reading today, I stumbled on just such a verse. Let's look at it and then see the awesome way it glorifies the Lord together.

“The LORD said to Moses, “Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward.” (Exodus 14:15 ESV).

To set the stage, God has led the people out of Egypt and He has decided to take them to the Red Sea. He makes an interesting observation that He is choosing this route instead of the more direct route because He knows the Israelites are not ready to see war with the Philistines (Exodus 13:17). Don't we serve an awesome God who knows all things and always leads us in the right way?

But the Egyptians come to their senses and realize that their whole workforce is gone. When they see that the Israelites made a terrible blunder by boxing themselves against the Red Sea, they see that this is their moment to bring them home. Honestly, this is very sound military wisdom.

But God's wisdom is greater than man's wisdom. God knew exactly what He was doing and He was setting up something that would glorify His name for all times, both to the people of Israel and the whole world. When the people cry to Moses because they find themselves in an impossible situation, we read our verse:

“The LORD said to Moses, “Why do you cry to me? Tell the people

of Israel to go forward.” (Exodus 14:15 ESV).

How many times do we have to see that God is the God of the impossible? Is there anything too hard for Him? The Israelites could not have predicted how God would deliver them. It would have been futile to try to figure it out.

The next time you run into an impossible situation, then pray to the God who sees no impossibilities. Don't try to tell Him how to deliver you, just ask and watch what He does. If you are dead set on one course of delivery, you may be disappointed and you may miss the deliverance He has in store for you.

When you are against your Red Sea, remember, you are a child of the I AM. You are a redeemed son of the only true and living God. Ask for His impossible deliverance and see how He chooses to glorify Himself in answering your prayer. He will. It may not be the way you want, but it will certainly be the way that brings glory to His name. Ask for wisdom that you may see His deliverance, that you may see how He is glorifying Himself when you face the impossible.

We serve a great and awesome God!

It is a new year. The old is gone. Let us forget what has passed away and set our minds on what glory we can bring to the Lord anew.

Satan will tempt us to focus 2022 on ourselves. Let us remember the admonition of Moses to the people of Israel:

“Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.' You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day.” (Deuteronomy 8:17-18 ESV).

May God richly bless us in the new year, but let us never forget that it is He who blesses us, and let us give praise to Him in whom all blessings flow.

So, as I am reading through the Bible again, I often come up with

questions that pose curiosities to me. Things that on the surface seem inconsistent, or contradictions, within the text. There are a few ways we can handle these perplexing questions.

As some do, we can assume that the apparent contradictions are just that: errant writings that prove that the Bible does not issue from the divine, since the divine could not error. In fact, many people lose their faith because they cannot reconcile the questions that they have.

Or, we can refuse to dwell on these questions of faith and harbor a deep troubling spirit that causes us to ignore these things, yet leaving the needling questions to chip away at our faith.

I propose another option. Approach these questions with these assumptions:

1. Assume that there is always a perfectly good and rational explanation for what we are reading that seem to be contradictions or inconsistencies. We just may not be able to see them at the moment. That does not mean that a rational answer does not exist.

2. Sometimes, we may never be able to see the answer for 2 reasons: First, there are secret things that belong to the Lord that we may never know (Deuteronomy 29:29) and second, sometimes God wants us to live by faith, and take the leap that shows we believe in Him even when we cannot see by sight. For without faith, it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6).

With that in mind, let me pose an interesting thing that I came across in my daily reading. I am in Exodus where God is talking about the grain offering and the bread that is made from wheat. Yet, we know that there was no food in the wilderness and the Israelites cried out to God for food, lest they starve. And God provided manna to sustain them for 40 years.

So, where did this wheat and grain for the offering come from? Some may read this and say, "Aha! See, a contradiction!" These people may be looking for a reason to find fault with a holy inspired Word to show that no such work really exists.

Some may read this and say, "I don't know- It's foolish to think about these things" and never give it another thought.

Or you can look at this and say, "I believe the Bible is correct. God did provide manna to feed the people and the priest did offer grain offerings in the wilderness and make bread of wheat. Just because I don't know where the grain and wheat came from, doesn't mean that both truths cannot co-exist."

Perhaps the grain and wheat were taken as plunder when the Israelites defeated the Amalekites in Exodus 17.

Perhaps the Israelites traded for these provisions with the people around them. They may not have been able to trade for enough to feed the entire nation, but they could certainly trade for the relatively small amount needed to keep the Lord's law.

The bottom line is that these types of questions do not challenge my faith. I don't always have to know the details of every answer I have in order to have a strong faith. I assume that the text is accurate and just because I don't see the answer now doesn't mean that the text is in error. It may simply mean that I don't know what the answer is.

If you are looking for a reason to disbelieve God, you will always be able to find it. If you are looking for reasons to believe Him, you will always be able to find it as well. You will always be able to find what you are looking for. God has given everything needed for a good and honest heart to find Him and have faith in His Word.

Once you truly grasp the sovereignty of God, your question changes from,

“How much can I do before I sin?”

To

“How much more can I do to glorify You?”

I was reading the story in Genesis 24 where Abraham sends his servant back to his family to find a wife for his son, Isaac. The servant took the responsibility seriously. Obviously, Abraham had done a good job in teaching his people about the power and holiness of the one true God. So, after taking an oath, he sets off on this crucial mission.

When he arrives in the land, the servant appeals to the Lord for success, and to help him by making known the Lord's choice for Isaac. We read:

“Let the young woman to whom I shall say, 'Please let down your jar that I may drink,' and who shall say, 'Drink, and I will water your camels'-let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master.”
(Genesis 24:14 ESV).

As the words were still in the servant's mouth, God sends Rebekah to him. And she not only offers to give him water, but to water his camels as well. This was the answer to his prayer.

Do you suppose Rebekah had any idea of the momentous consequence

that this simple act of kindness would bring not only to her, but to all the seed of Adam? It reminds me of something that Jesus teaches us:

“One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much.” (Luke 16:10 ESV).

Sometimes we want so much to do something momentous for Jesus, that we may forget that God can turn the little things we do into something big. Never underestimate the importance of even a small act of service.

Do you have any idea what a kind word and disposition toward a waitress may have on her? Perhaps her life is falling apart and you do or say something that allows God to show her the peace she has been praying for.

After a long day at work, do you suppose that a loving word or your loving attention shown to your spouse or children can create a lasting memory that will one day help them through a terrible trial they will face?

What about a prayer offered for someone who flips you off in traffic because you were going too slow? Could that prayer bring blessings that they need to help them combat their anger, or could it help you learn to be more like the Lord who has done far more for us who have done far worse to Him?

Never underestimate the power of being faithful in the little things. Perhaps they are not as little as they seem to us at the moment.

I have long since passed the ten plagues in my daily Bible reading, but the lessons still linger with me. In Exodus 8, the Lord sends frogs to the land of Egypt and Pharaoh pleads with Moses to ask God to remove them, which he does (more on this in my Tuesdays With Tony post tomorrow).

We often find ourselves in Pharaoh's situation where something bad happens and we plead with the Lord to take away the thing that is troubling us. In fact, we often make rash vows to the Lord when we become stressed or totally lost and find we are in a situation beyond our control.

What happens if the Lord answers our prayers? What does that deliverance cause us to do? God always expects that we look at answered prayers as something to strengthen our faith in Him and something that humbles us in His eyes.

But I fear that when the Lord answers us and delivers us from our troubles, we often have the same reaction that Pharaoh had when God removed the plague of frogs:

“But when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart and would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.” (Exodus 8:15 ESV).

When the Lord answers our prayers and we no longer feel the intense desperation of that which was causing us to cry out to Him for deliverance, and He gives us respite, what do we do? Do we praise Him and strengthen our walk in obedience to Him with all thanksgiving or do we harden our heart and go back to walking in our own way now that we no longer feel a need for the Lord?

The Lord knows our response and we will not mock Him in our actions. We cannot keep calling out to Him for deliverance and expect that He will always be there for us if we always forget Him when it is no longer convenient for us to follow Him.

God goes on to bring plagues of gnats and flies upon Egypt. After the flies, pharaoh even agrees to let the people go and worship. He just wanted these plagues to end. Notice Moses’ response to him:

“Then Moses said, “Behold, I am going out from you and I will plead with the LORD that the swarms of flies may depart from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people, tomorrow. Only let not Pharaoh cheat again by not letting the people go to sacrifice to the LORD.” (Exodus 8:29 ESV).

“Only let not Pharaoh cheat again...” Pharaoh’s habit was to plead for deliverance, and then when deliverance was given, to forget the Lord and go back to his wicked ways. What a lesson for us today. Deliverance is primarily to bring us closer to God and help us to realize how much we need Him. It should strengthen our walk with Him.

But when we go back to our evil ways when the Lord gives us respite, we cheat Him. And the Lord sees it. Let us all be humbled in the presence of the Lord’s care and let us use deliverance as something that will strengthen our walk with Him, and let us not be so quick to forget Him when we have respite.

Last Sunday, Jordan Shouse had a remarkable lesson on Noah, which you can watch on the Campbell Road Church Of Christ’s YouTube page. In it, he made the observation that it is possible that it had never rained upon the earth until the flood. He then ends with a wonderful message about the

rainbow being a sign to us and to God of his covenant with all living creatures to never again destroy the earth by water.

That got me thinking... if it indeed had never rained upon the earth until the flood, perhaps the sign of the rainbow initially had a much more dramatic impact upon people than it does even to us today. Consider...

For the 600 years that he was alive, Noah had never seen rain. I wonder what he envisioned when God tried to explain what He was about to do. He couldn't draw on his own experiences to really know what it would be like.

For hundreds, even thousands of years before him, his relatives and ancestors had never talked about rain. There was nothing in their collective consciousness that could even understand what rain would be like- if indeed, it had never rained on the earth before.

And I could imagine his sons Ham, Shem, and Japheth asking their dad to again explain what rain was as they were building the mammoth ark designed to protect them from it. And no wonder Peter tells us that the people Noah preached to while building the ark scoffed.

And then it happened. The rain fell. And the fountains of the deep broke forth. And the waters above the heavens were released. We may know what rain is, but I am convinced that if we were on the ark, nothing in our experience could prepare us for what Noah and his family witnessed.

We often see scenes of cute animals boarding a cartoonish ark painted on the walls in children's rooms. And while I think there is nothing wrong with that, as adults, we should never forget that the real story of the rain that Noah witnessed was more of a horror story than a cute children's story. When all was said and done, God's wrath and justice had killed all living land creatures and birds except those alive in the ark.

Which brings me back to the rainbow. If this was the first time that Noah had ever seen rain, what do you think raced through his mind the first time after the flood that he heard the crack of thunder and felt the first drops of a new shower fall onto the earth? Perhaps he would experience something akin to PTSD.

And yet, God in his tender care, assured him that no other rain would do what this first rain had done. And every time Noah and his family were frozen in their tracks when the thunder started rolling, all they had to do was to look at the rainbow to know everything would be okay.

Thousands of years have passed and we no longer have PTSD when we hear thunder, see lightning, or feel the rain fall. But we still have the rainbow. To us, it is a reminder that our God is still faithful to His promises, even thousands of years later. The rainbow to us might not have the same calming effect it had upon the first generations after the flood, but it is a comfort nonetheless that our God always keeps His promises.

One More Night With The Frogs

The ten plagues that God brought upon Egypt were just that- they were plagues. We can understand how hail was a plague because it left the land devastated and people died. The darkness, boils, all the water turning to blood? Yeah, we can see that. Of course, the death of the first born; these were plagues.

But frogs, a plague? I have lived in places where this might have been considered an all-you-can-eat buffet. But in all seriousness, sending a plague of frogs shows the mighty hand of God. He can take the most nondescript and make it a blessing or a plague.

Just how bad were these frogs? What made them rise to the level of being numbered with the other nine plagues? Consider how Moses describes it:

“But if you refuse to let them go, behold, I will plague all your country with frogs. The Nile shall swarm with frogs that shall come up into your house and into your bedroom and on your bed and into the houses of your servants and your people, and into your ovens and your kneading bowls. The frogs shall come up on you and on your people and on all your servants.”¹ (Exodus 8:2-4 ESV).

Do you get the picture? These were not just a few frogs hopping around you. Try to think of this as a breathing, undulating carpet of green everywhere you went. Imagine waking up to the deafening sounds of millions of frogs croaking; rolling over in bed onto cold squishy amphibians. Imagine slipping on your shoes only to have your toes stopped by these innocent little creatures.

You say you like fried frog legs? Well, good luck making them. Your ovens, pots and pans and kitchen are so full of frogs that you cannot do anything. The picture I get from the plague is that we are talking about so many frogs that life stands still. This isn't a few frogs that you can sweep away, There is no place to sweep them void of other frogs.

Are you starting to get the picture; can you see how these innocent creatures can rise to the level of being a plague when the hand of the Almighty God is behind them? Well, you are not alone. So can Pharaoh:

“Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and said, “Plead with the LORD to take away the frogs from me and from my people, and I will let

the people go to sacrifice to the LORD.” (Exodus 8:8 ESV).

This was the second plague. The first was water turning to blood. In response to that, Pharaoh walked away and the water stayed blood for seven days. But with the frogs, Pharaoh asks Moses to plead with God to remove the frogs. Though his heart will remain hardened by God, Pharaoh is starting to learn who the one true God is. And he is starting to learn who he will have to turn to for respite.

Moses then replies with an interesting answer:

“Moses said to Pharaoh, “Be pleased to command me when I am to plead for you and for your servants and for your people, that the frogs be cut off from you and your houses and be left only in the Nile.” (Exodus 8:9 ESV).

In essence, Moses says to Pharaoh, “Tell me when you want the frogs to leave.” What an interesting question. Slip yourself into Pharaoh’s sandals; if given that same question, what would your answer be? Most of us would probably say, “Now! Please take the frogs away from me this very instant!”

But he doesn’t.

“And he said, “Tomorrow.” Moses said, “Be it as you say, so that you may know that there is no one like the LORD our God.” (Exodus 8:10 ESV).

Tomorrow. For some strange reason, when given the choice, Pharaoh decided to spend one more night with the frogs. One more night of squishy sleep, deafening ribbits, and wading through a sea of green as you tried to move from one place to another.

Before you think, “What an idiot!” Let me ask you this: Are we really much different from Pharaoh? If given the choice, would we really give a different answer ourselves? Do we not all face a plague today far worse than frogs; worse than water into blood; even worse than the death of the first-born? Don’t we all live with the plague of sin before us continually?

And guess what? Jesus appears before us just as Moses appeared before Pharaoh and He says to us, “Tell me when you want Me to remove this plague of sin from you. I have shed My blood to make this possible. Just tell me when.”

How many of us want this terrible plague removed- but just not now? How many of us are not as different from Pharaoh as we’d like to think? How many of us answer our Lord with the very same answer that Pharaoh gave to Moses? In response to the Lord’s gracious offer, we say, “Tomorrow.”

How many of us choose to spend one more night with the frogs?

“For he says, “In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.” Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” (2 Corinthians 6:2 ESV).

Two years. Is that a long time or does time fly by? It depends on the circumstances you are in, doesn't it? As your children get older, it seems that time marches at a breakneck speed as you start to lose your grasp on them. But if they are struggling with a grave illness, two years can seem an eternity.

Authors often use the passage of time as a transition from one scene to another. We see this in the book of Genesis when Joseph is in prison before being lifted up by Pharaoh to reign over the most powerful country in the world, second only to him.

You remember, while in prison Joseph had just given the cupbearer a favorable interpretation of his dream, revealing that the servant would be restored back to his position of honor. Joseph knew that it was a good thing to have friends in high places, and in a demonstration of humanity, he pleaded with the cupbearer...

“Only remember me, when it is well with you, and please do me the kindness to mention me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this house. For I was indeed stolen out of the land of the Hebrews, and here also I have done nothing that they should put me into the pit.” (Genesis 40:14-15 ESV).

Who could blame him? It's probably what each of us would do, right? Well, everything happens just as the Lord had revealed. The cupbearer was indeed restored to his position of service to Pharaoh. But in the next chapter, we see the transition of the author from one scene to another:

“After two whole years, Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing by the Nile,” (Genesis 41:1 ESV).

Two whole years... What do you think; did the time fly by for Joseph or did they drag on agonizingly slowly? I think we all have a pretty good idea because we have all found ourselves in the position of suffering. But before we read this transition as one scene to another, let's think about these two whole years. Let's make some educated guesses at what may have happened.

It may surprise you to realize that the two whole years could have been from God for a specific purpose.

The first few days might have been filled with hope and anticipation. Certainly, the cupbearer would see that the Lord was with Joseph and he'd trip over himself to share this good news with everyone, especially Pharaoh. He'd be able to ensure justice was served and that this innocent man was remembered.

Why did the cupbearer forget Joseph? Moses doesn't tell us. Maybe it was orchestrated by God because God wasn't done preparing Joseph for the plans He had for him. If Joseph had been released now, then where would he be when Pharaoh had his dreams two whole years later?

Or perhaps the cupbearer was overwhelmed to have his position back and he was not going to do anything to jeopardize it. He had lived under the threat of execution and in all likelihood witnessed the baker being hung because he referenced it later. To him, the prudent thing might have been to accept the grace of Pharaoh and not do anything to upset him on his birthday of all occasions.

But whatever the reason, the hours turned into days for Joseph as he waited for the jangling of the keys to unlock his cell. Then the days turned into weeks, months and then two whole years.

Joseph soon had to make a choice. Was he going to still walk with God in prison or would he give up on Him and blame God for not helping him? It's a choice each of us will have to make many times in our lives.

Who knows why God waited two full years before delivering him? The Bible doesn't tell us. Perhaps Joseph met a string of government officials in prison who taught him how the economy and bureaucracy of Egypt worked. Perhaps the people Joseph would one day need to use to carry out his plans as overseer of Egypt had met him in prison.

Perhaps Joseph needed to see God in the dungeon long enough to ensure he would continue to see Him when God elevated him to a throne. Whatever the reason, don't be tempted to read through that transition "after two whole years" without realizing that it would have been a struggle and a refining time for Joseph.

But Joseph remained faithful to God. How do we know? Because when he was set before Pharaoh, he told the king that he couldn't give the interpretation, but God would give the interpretation to Pharaoh. Imagine the faith he had to say that. After two whole years of suffering for a crime you did not commit, you're going to stand before the man who claims to be god on earth and ascribe deity to Someone else? We know people were executed for displeasing this man. Joseph was treading on dangerous ground.

But he lived through the dungeon faithfully. He stayed true to God when forgotten by others. He grew in his faith during times of trials and when remembered by God, whatever happened in that prison of two whole years

helped prepare him for what God had in store for him.

Are you living in your transition? Never assume that God has forgotten you. Stay faithful to Him and wait upon the Lord. Perhaps He is using your two whole years to prepare you for the next phase of your life in a way that will bring glory and honor to His name.

Something I just overheard...

Shame on you if, when you are struggling, that Facebook or Twitter are your first place to share your needs rather than in prayer to God.

I say, "Amen."

We all know the story of Daniel and the Lion's Den. We know how Daniel's coworkers were jealous of him and tried to find a way to accuse him before the king. But Daniel was a man of integrity and there was nothing they could find against him.

Daniel may have been in his 80's during this time. He had seen a lot and learned to lean upon the Lord God for all things. God had taken care of him in exile, not in one foreign land but in two. And Daniel's reputation was rock solid; so was his faith in God.

Everyone knew about his relationship with God and his integrity. So, when his enemies could not find fault with him, they knew where to turn:

"Then these men said, "We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God." (Daniel 6:5 ESV).

Isn't that amazing? These evil men had enough faith in Daniel's integrity toward God, that they hatched a plan that was dependent upon it. Had Daniel taken a short one-month break from serving God, their plan would have failed.

Here's the million-dollar question: What about us? Is our integrity that dependable? If someone wanted to use our Faith against us, could their faith in our devotion to God cause their plans against us to succeed?

We live between “God can” and “God may.” That is not always an easy place to live. We know that God has the power to do all; to hear and answer our prayers; our gut-wrenching prayer.

But God is sovereign in all that He does. As hard as we sometimes pray, we need to realize that the God who can is also the God who may. It is His choice. He may or may not answer our prayer the way we want Him to answer it.

Jesus knew this. God could send 12 legions of angels to deliver His Son. But Jesus stepped back from His earnest prayer that the cup pass from Him and said, “Not as I will, but as You will.”

God can take away all of our suffering. But that doesn’t mean He will. In my opinion, our biggest challenge is not in accepting His will for us; it is not thinking that it is either what is best for God and His glory or what is best for us.

The challenge for us is to remember that what is good for God’s glory is always what is best for us as well. Sometimes we need faith to see that. Sometimes we need wisdom. But when God is glorified through us, it is always what is best for us.

Sometimes it is hard to live between “God can” and “God may.” But when we have a relationship with Him, whatever He chooses will, in the end, always be what is best for us.

“But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Corinthians 12:9-10 ESV).

Imagine that your football team is playing the final game of the season. At stake is a trip to the playoffs.

You are watching the game live with your friends. Your team is up by 3 with 2 minutes left in the game and they have the ball. The quarterback drops back and throws to the end zone but the ball is intercepted and the other

team runs it back for the pick six.

How do you feel right now? Think through your emotions. Most of us have lived through something like that, haven't we?

Now let's change things up a bit. This time, the game is played during worship service and like a good Christian, you attend worship and DVR the game to watch when you get home. This is the same game with the same plays as in the first example.

When church is over, you get in the car and tell yourself that you will not listen to the news. By now, the game is over and the team is either celebrating or dealing with disappointment. But you are committed to watching the game yourself without spoiling it for yourself.

As you get within 5 minutes of your home, you can't control yourself any longer. You have to know... is my team in or out? So, you do the unthinkable and turn on the radio.

Within seconds, you learned that your team pulled off the impossible and marched down the field for the game winning score as time expired in a spectacular hail-Mary pass.

You get home on top of the world and decide to watch the game anyway. You get down to the final 2 minutes and watch as your team's quarterback throws a pick six to lose the lead and go down by 4.

This time, knowing that your team will pull out the upset, how does it make you feel to watch that interception at the final 2-minute mark? I imagine that it's nothing like the torment of having to witness that play live, not knowing how the game will end.

Knowing how the game will end makes all the difference in how you handle the disappointments and let-downs.

In life, God has DVR'ed the way things will turn out for you. It's in the Bible. Spoiler alert: God wins.

The next time you feel that things are crumbling around you and you are not sure how you are going to make it, remember... the end is already a foregone conclusion. Just keep on keeping on and stay on the winning side.

When we make decisions as to what will enter through our eyes and ears, and go into our hearts, what standard do we use? That standard is set by us and is fully under our control.

When watching a show on TV and we hear the Lord's name being taken in vain, do we feel anger and switch the channel immediately or do we waver, thinking that this one time that our Lord's name was profaned does not rise to the level of causing us to have to end our entertainment?

Do we rationalize that all shows have this evil in it and if we changed the channel every time our Lord's name was taken in vain, we'd be left with nothing to watch? (Is that such a terrible consequence from honoring God?)

When we hear coarse jesting, see too much skin, watch evils and abominations in our living room, do we exercise our free will and shut off the TV or do we exercise our free will and watch and listen to just a little more?

When someone suggests that these are not things that we should put into our minds and hearts, do we grow indignant and protective of our rights or do we consider what the Lord would have us do at that moment?

If we could see Jesus sitting next to us on the couch, would we tell Him that if they used His name in vain 2 more times, we'd change the channel? If sexual immorality played out on the screen while He sat next to us, would we avert our eyes and peek until it was over so we could continue watching the program with Him or would we turn off the TV because that show has brought blasphemy and into our home?

Would we choose to not watch the program if He was sitting next to us but watch it if it were just us?

Daniel's integrity caused him to act in godliness whether people were watching or not. Job made a covenant with his eyes not to look upon a young woman. Moses smashed the tablets in anger when he witnessed people sinning.

The choice is ours. It will always be ours. It shouldn't be guided by anyone shaming us. It shouldn't be guided by who is or isn't watching us. Our choice should be guided by our devotion to God.

If we hesitate in turning away from evil, then we need to work on developing a clean heart before the Lord.

“Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you. Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you. Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure. Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil.” (Proverbs 4:23-27 ESV).

The Second Greatest Commandment

The more I read and study the Bible, the more I realize two things about the second greatest commandment: First, I have totally underestimated how important it is for me to have a life defined by serving others; and second, much of God's judgments have been triggered not only when men broke the greatest commandment, but also when they broke the second greatest commandment.

You remember what Jesus said in response to the lawyer's question about what was the greatest commandment, don't you?

“And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:37-40 ESV).

The greatest commandment to love God is one that we have no problem understanding the importance of keeping. But if you are like me, it's the second one that we often need to work even harder to remember and to keep. How important is this second greatest commandment? Consider these examples of the Spirit's view on it:

“Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him.” (Proverbs 14:31 ESV).

We often think that the great sin for which the people of Sodom were punished was their perverse sexual abominations. But listen to what the Holy Spirit reveals to Ezekiel about the true grave sin that brought down that city:

“Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty and did an abomination before me. So I removed them, when I saw it.” (Ezekiel 16:49-50 ESV).

In the New Testament, we see just how much the second greatest commandment permeates the Kingdom of Jesus in His realm. Paul said,

“Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.” (Galatians 2:10 ESV).

And James:

“If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?” (James 2:15-16 ESV).

We can tell people to go to the church if they are in need; we can tell them to look into local charities; we can tell them to check out government programs; but if we do that and send them on their way without also helping them when we have the ability ourselves to provide aid, then could we be guilty of doing exactly what James says is useless?

Earlier, James references the second greatest commandment by calling it the royal law:

“If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well.” (James 2:8 ESV).

I encourage all of us, especially those of us who live in a land that flows with milk and honey, to sit down in prayer with the second greatest commandment to see how we are letting it mold us into the image of Jesus. We cannot expect to make it to heaven unless we not only understand this commandment but let it characterize who we are as citizens of the Kingdom of Jesus.

“Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.'

Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (Matthew 25:41-46 ESV).

In Numbers 25, the people were on the edge of the promised land. Moses was still alive, but nearing the end of his leadership among the people. Aaron

had died and God elevated his son, Eleazar, as High Priest. Most of the people who did not believe God but heeded the word of the 12 spies some 40 years earlier had died.

Things were ripe for this new generation to do what their fathers didn't do. But as they camped on the edge of the land that the Lord was about to give them, we read this:

“While Israel lived in Shittim, the people began to whore with the daughters of Moab. These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel yoked himself to Baal of Peor. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel.” (Numbers 25:1-3 ESV).

Why did the people of God do this? For context, let's see what happened just a bit earlier. It gives insight into what would cause the people to act this foolishly and that insight gives warning to us today.

“And the people spoke against God and against Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food.” Then the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died.” (Numbers 21:5-6 ESV).

The people were still complaining, still rebelling. God had provided and instead of being content and thankful with what God had given them, they cursed the blessings of God. And it angered the Lord.

Now we jump ahead to the camp in Shittim. Instead of keeping themselves pure and separated, they had started to yoke themselves together with people who were doing detestable things before the Lord.

Instead of keeping their eyes on the Lord, they bowed down to the false gods of their neighbors. And instead of eating the holy food provided from the hand of God, they indulged in the food of the people who didn't know God.

This is not simply a series of commands that the people had broken. It was a heart problem. These people were not wholly devoted to God. They refused to see God's blessings and complained to Him about what they didn't have.

It was a heart problem.

They traded their sanctification to wallow in the sinful pleasure with the evil followers of a false god and enjoyed their delicacies- giving up the Lord's blessings to enjoy what their eyes were fixed upon.

It was a heart problem.

They went as far as to turn their nose up at the one true God who created

everything and who is the source of all good blessings to bow down to an image of metal and wood to fit in with the people around them.

It was a heart problem.

Yes, the people of Israel violated the commands of God, but if we see God's reaction to them as simply a God who is angry because they violated His laws, we are missing the greater problem. These people violated God's laws because they had a heart problem. And this heart problem both angered and grieved God Almighty.

So, when things progressed to the point where a leader among God's people committed open fornication with the daughter of a leader of the land, Eleazar's son, Phinehas, had enough and drove a spear through both man and woman as they were in the act of fornication.

Here is what God said:

“Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, has turned back my wrath from the people of Israel, in that he was jealous with my jealousy among them, so that I did not consume the people of Israel in my jealousy.” (Numbers 25:11 ESV).

When we turn our nose up at what God has said for us to do and where after the world, it is not a simple violation of God's commands. It is a heart problem. And when we give our heart over to sin and to idols; when we long to be like the world and to be part of the world; when we take pleasure in indulging in what the Lord has forbidden us from indulging in, then we provoke God to jealousy.

God not only wants our obedience, but He wants our heart in our obedience. Are we reluctant servants, obeying out of obligation but longing after what the world offers? If so, it is only a matter of time before we follow our heart and become unequally yoked together with unbelievers. And we too will provoke the Lord to jealousy.

If we have a heart problem, we need to fix it before it leads us to throw away the matchless gift of grace that the Lord bestows upon all who seek after him with a whole heart.

There is a verse that I read over and over which overwhelms me each time I read it. I used to read it in passing, but as I try to imagine the scene, I realize how utterly fantastic it is. And the verse is spoken by Jesus, who is a first-hand witness of what He shares:

“Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” (Luke 15:10 ESV).

Imagine the scene. I for one love imagery. I love to see the scenes from the pages of God’s word played out in my mind as one watches a movie scene. And I read this passage and play out suppositions...

My first question is, “Why do the angels rejoice over the repentance of a sinner?”

Perhaps it is because they fully understand what is at stake, maybe even more than we do at times. They are in heaven and stand before the face of God. They know what it is like to live in a paradise and in the Lord’s presence. I’m sure that they cannot fathom being banished from this place or before His face.

Perhaps when they know that one sinner repents, it is from acute realization that another soul will be granted the amazing blessing of being with the Father in bliss and will no longer face exile to eternal torment, away from His presence.

Another question I have is, “When do these angels rejoice?”

I wonder if the angels are given glimpses from heaven of my lot in life and do they watch, along with the great cloud of witnesses, my life as it unfolds? Is the tension of life and death bound in them so that when they see me repenting, they erupt in uncontrolled joy?

Or perhaps when angels perform their holy duty from the Lord and are sent to aid men, do they race back overjoyed to heaven to tell everyone when I repent, which then leads to this rejoicing in heaven? I don’t know exactly what angels do now, but I suspect that they are all around us, veiled from our perception as they reside in the spiritual dimension. Perhaps one is sitting on the couch next to me at this very moment. Perhaps they fill my city of Wylie, Texas, with chariots of fire, awaiting the command of the Lord to render aid. I really don’t know for sure, but the Bible lends this possibility for consideration.

Or perhaps they witness our High Priest and King Jesus walk into the temple in heaven to remove the Book of Life. Perhaps they watch Him in breathless anticipation as He opens the cover and moves to the next blank page. Does their excitement start to build in them as they see him take his pen and begin to write my name on the next line when I repent? Is that when the joy over one sinner who repents breaks out in heaven?

I really don’t know all the details about how it works, but this I do know. The angels are aware when the lost sheep are found, and when that happens, joy erupts from them. Thousands, perhaps millions of angels who know the value of the gift given to me when I repent.

If heaven is overcome with joy when I repent, what should my realization of this gift of forgiveness do in my heart? How much should I treasure the

amazing grace and sacrifice of my King who gave it all that I might send joy ringing throughout the halls of heaven because I have come back home to my father?

Want to hear something amazing? Before the Word was written down, the apostles went all over the world to preach the Gospel.

They never had to convene to ensure they were all on the same page.

They never had to consult with commentaries to figure out the right take on a spiritual concept.

They never had to offer multiple plausible applications when preaching.

They just spoke what the Spirit inspired them to speak.

And people all over the world heard the same message, not because the apostles set up refresher courses to ensure they were all in line with each other, but because the Spirit was providing the same message to them all.

I love the Bible, not because it was delivered by wise men, but because faithful men taught only what was in God's mind.

It never ceases to amaze me how easy it is for us to look at the glass as half-empty. Though God were to bestow up to half His kingdom upon us, we often still see the negative way our lives are impacted.

Perhaps you know someone like that; perhaps you ARE someone like that. No matter how much God has piled blessings upon blessings, rather than recognize His good hand upon us, we complain about what we do not have; about how hard our life is; about how things are not just how we want them to be.

And we comfort ourselves as we lay back in a bed of luxury, and eat of the abundance of the food that are stored in our pantries, and we spend 30 minutes in a closet that has so many clothes that we have to overflow them into another room.

Yet, we somehow do not see these things when we cry out to God about how our lives are hard; about how we are not in the occupation we want to be in; about how the castle we live in is not the palace our heart is set on; about how the vacations we take are not the luxury stays we really want- dare I say, deserve- to take.

I believe most of us most of the time recognize the overflowing blessings

that the Lord bestows upon us. Yet, too often, we are tempted to give into the needling that Satan brings upon us to forget God's goodness and complain, as the Israelites did in the wilderness, about how God's current blessings are really curses upon us because we don't have what we really want.

As they were about to enter the promised land, Moses writes of God's people:

“And you murmured in your tents and said, ‘Because the LORD hated us he has brought us out of the land of Egypt, to give us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us.’” (Deuteronomy 1:27 ESV).

God was about to give them paradise, and they saw His blessings as a curse. But it wasn't always like this with the people. In Deuteronomy 5, the people are humbled by God when he speaks to them from the mountain and they praise and glorify His name. In longing appreciation, God says this about them:

“Oh that they had such a heart as this always, to fear me and to keep all my commandments, that it might go well with them and with their descendants forever!” (Deuteronomy 5:29 ESV).

But we know the path that His people often took that led to complaints and murmuring against Him. No matter what God did for them, it often wasn't enough.

The problem with complainers is that they often have no desire to change. They want the right to be heard. They want others to know and acknowledge how bad their lot is. They want people to commiserate with them and to declare their grievances as legitimate.

So, all I can say is try to learn from the Israelites what happens when people despise the blessings they have from God and complain about what they do not have, or complain about what they have to do. I understand that the lessons of contentment and appreciation are often only learned when the Lord's hand comes down harshly to teach us to appreciate Him, but it doesn't have to be this way.

To those who have to endure being around complainers, take heart and do not let their leaven weaken your humble heart. Never forget the bountiful blessings that God has showered upon you and never cease to give thankful praise to Him.

Perhaps, your content and thankful spirit will teach them to see the glass that God has set before them as half-full, which will change the very way they get out of bed each morning.

We all have the same choice: to focus on what we have or what we do not have. Both are worthy to bring to God in prayer. But where do we linger?

A new week is upon us. Remember these truths as we seek His glory this week:

1. God will win.

Period.

Stay on the right side.

2. Satan is NOT God.

- He is not sovereign

- He is not all-powerful

- He is not omnipresent

- He is not omniscient

- He can only do what God allows

Period.

3. Satan WILL flee from you when you resist him.

- “The Devil Made Me Do It” is a lie

-But “I Made The Devil Do It” is the truth God gives you when you resist and he flees from you.

4. God will not let anything happen to you this week that you cannot handle.

ANYTHING.

Period.

5. Read His Word every day and talk to Him in prayer without ceasing.

-With that combination, nothing will overcome you.

-With that combination, you can do all things through King Jesus who gives you strength.

6. Seek out a way to love your neighbor this week.

-It's the way to Jesus' heart.

-He loves it when we do that.

A Jealous God

Jealousy does not have a good connotation when we hear the word, does it? We call it “The Green-Eyed Monster.” It is a character trait that often

represents weakness, insecurity and overbearance. Jealousy has destroyed relationships and corrupted what was good and pure because of its corrosiveness. It often robs people of the joy and bliss that should exemplify a healthy relationship.

And the Bible has some words about this emotion. Consider these passages for starters:

“Surely vexation kills the fool, and jealousy slays the simple.” (Job 5:2 ESV).

“Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity... jealousy, fits of anger... and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” (Galatians 5:19-21 ESV).

“for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?” (1 Corinthians 3:3 ESV).

Jealousy sounds like something we need to guard against, doesn't it? Yet, when we read about God, the Bible is clear that jealousy is a trait that characterizes Him. In fact, God Himself is very clear about this. Consider...

“You shall not make for yourself a carved image... for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me,” (Exodus 20:4-5 ESV).

“But Joshua said to the people, “You are not able to serve the LORD, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins.” (Joshua 24:19 ESV).

“Then the LORD became jealous for his land and had pity on his people.” (Joel 2:18 ESV).

These are just a few of the many passages we can look at. And as the world becomes more openly atheistic and antagonistic toward the God of heaven, we see the charge made that either God does not exist because of this contradiction of passages or if God does exist, He is not worthy of our worship because He is a petty, self-centered God who surrenders to base emotions like jealousy.

But in truth, the Bible teaches God as a relational God to His people. His jealousy is not because of an egotistical need for us to love Him and Him

alone. It is based on Him giving Himself totally to us. Yes, the sovereign Creator of the universe longs for an exclusive relationship with His creation.

Think about that. Our God who needs nothing from us longs to enter into an intimate relationship with us. In fact, the Old Testament likens God's relationship with His people as a marriage. In the New Testament, the church is the bride of Christ.

And our earthy marriages, when healthy, have two people totally committed to one another. They become one flesh. And when something- or someone- threatens that unity, jealousy is rightly the outcome.

Jealousy within the bounds of a marital relationship when that relationship is threatened is a show of love when mutual commitment is present. But when jealousy is brought about by envy, self-centeredness or a disregard of the other in the relationship, it is always condemned in Scripture.

When the Bible says that God is a jealous God, it is because He loves us and has committed Himself wholly to us and our well-being. He not only will shower us with love, but He is also committed to providing all of our needs. He is the faithful lover Who will treasure us above all.

His jealousy is aroused, not because He, in an egotistical outrage, is angry because He is merely jilted, but because He knows that the only place safe for His people is in a committed relationship with Him. When we leave Him for another, He is jealous because we go after that which cannot give us happiness or fulfillment. He is jealous because of His great love and commitment for us.

God's jealousy shows His tremendous love for us. If we did not mean so much to Him, it wouldn't be any skin off His back if we went after other gods. But He loves us tremendously. For some cosmic reason that we will never understand, the great I AM loves us and is jealous over us. And it breaks His heart when we choose another above Him.

It is because of His jealousy over us that we know just how much He loves us. And when we read that He is a jealous God, let us drop to our knees and thank Him; praise Him; and worship Him for that great love He freely offers to us.

You realize just how old you are when you tell your kids about your childhood and they have to Google what you say to know what you are talking about.

After spending a sleepless evening going through one mock trial after another...

After spending the morning being beaten to the point where his back was ribbons of flesh and blood...

And after struggling to bear His cross even with the help of Simon...

Do you suppose that as much agony as He was in, as they nailed Him to the cross and hoisted His broken body up...?

Jesus may have thought, "In 6 hours, I will get to see Your face, Father."

Remember, no matter what lies before us, it is only a vapor of time before we, too, will get to see the Father's face.

As I finished my daily Bible reading, I thought about a couple of lessons I learned from Achan. Coming off an impressive victory over the mighty city of Jericho, the Israelites turned their attention to the small city of Ai.

God had told them to devote all the spoils of Jericho to the Lord. But Achan coveted some of the wealth he found and took it for himself. Of course, his sins were found out and he paid the price with his life.

Unfortunately, so did 36 innocent men.

Here are a couple of the lessons I take away from Achan:

1. The things that Achan coveted were not worth it. In fact, he never had the chance to enjoy them. We need to remember that the sins we covet appear enticing for the moment, but in reality, they will not bring us lasting joy.

We sacrifice all of value for a mess of pottage. I promise, when judgment is given to us, we will look back in regret over the great treasure we traded away for trinkets of no value.

2. We need to look at enjoying the blessing of God His way, in His time. Often, we take what is good and make it evil because we put it before the Lord. Had Achan waited a few days, he would have gotten his spoils from Ai. But he wanted it his way, and in his time.

We often take the good blessings of God and corrupt them by taking them our way, in our time. Do we trade the Lord's day of worship for rest and recreation, corrupting these blessings because we want them in our way and in our time? Do we covet wealth to the point where we sin by seeking after it in our way, and in our time rather than in God's way and time?

If we can only learn the lesson of keeping the Lord's commands and seeking after His blessings His way and in His time, we can enjoy the

blessings of God and avoid the corrupting influence of Achan's greed and covetousness.

“And Achan answered Joshua, “Truly I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and this is what I did:

when I saw among the spoil a beautiful cloak from Shinar, and 200 shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels, then I coveted them and took them. And see, they are hidden in the earth inside my tent, with the silver underneath.” (Joshua 7:20-21 ESV).

We bow before King Jesus.

He is Lord of lords and King of kings.

When rebellion lifts its hand against Him, we stand firmly at His side.

When enemies attack, we enter the warfare protected by His defense.

We wield the most powerful weapon created- the Sword of His Word.

He goes before us, victorious and unmoved.

Today, we bow at His feet in our closet. Soon, we will bow before His throne in heaven.

Today, we see Him by faith which pleases Him. Tomorrow, we see Him with sight and faith will be no more.

Until that glorious, eternal day,

We continue to bow before King Jesus.

Starting tomorrow, I am publishing my notes I made on Mark 14, 15 and 16 during the Chapter a Day group started by Kris Emerson. I'll publish one chapter each day. I won't quote the text, but I encourage you to read the chapter as I post the notes.

These three chapters, like the ones in the other Gospels that speak of the crucifixion, take you through the highs and lows that our faith is centered on.

I still laugh and cry as I read about the most intense emotional rollercoaster ride in history. But the end is in power. The Lamb of God is victorious.

I invite you to travel with me through this look into the final hours of Jesus before death was swallowed up in victory.

See you tomorrow.

Mark 14

It begins.

The decision to kill Jesus is set and the course of history and prophecy is now in motion. Jesus, God's Son, sees everything that is about to unfold from a heavenly perspective. And those who think they win have indeed lost. And those who think they have lost, have indeed won.

Consider, the woman who anoints Jesus. She does so in love and service to Him, and yet Jesus sees it as a preparation for what He knows is about to come. Everyone else was blissfully unaware of the significance of what this woman was doing; and as Jesus ordained, we are still speaking of her act of service 2000 years later.

And during this brief insight Mark gives us into the last supper, we see Jesus prophesying about what will happen which will scatter the 12. One would betray the Son into the hands of sinful men but all would betray. We focus on Peter because the scriptures give us details of his betrayal, but the other ten also left Jesus in the time of need just like Peter. None were faithful during this hour of need.

Yet they all were ready when the time came. Peter drew a sword and drew blood when their Master was arrested. It is evident that if Jesus gave the order, all were ready to strike out for Jesus. But the Savior orders them to put the sword up. And this submission to arrest confused and terrified the disciples. If they couldn't fight for Jesus, then they were at the mercy of sinners with bloodlust in their eyes. So, they fled.

And it is during the meeting with the High Priest that the die is cast. Jesus looked at this His high priest, the one whom He ordained for that position, and with firm resolve told the man, "I AM". Of all men, this one, who was chosen to intercede for the people, should have dropped to his knees, seeing that he was face to face with the One to whom he made intercession. Yet his heart was hardened, and instead of embracing the Son of God as Messiah, he played his part into delivering the holy Christ as the lamb who would be slain to take away the sins of the world.

Jesus, the Man, did not want to endure what was before Him; but Jesus, the Son of God, saw a sea of lost souls in whom He was their only hope. He would endure this alone, only with the Father to walk with Him through the coming few hours. He would endure because He loved us. And the Father would permit it, having loved the world so much that He was giving His only begotten Son for this hour.

Mark 15

The crucifixion of the Lord. Perhaps one of the most gut-wrenching things for us to read. And in the account that Mark leaves for us, we see the humility and unbelievable strength of Jesus under control. Consider...

Jesus, the Creator of all, is about to have nails made of iron ore that He placed deep into the earth driven into His body; He was about to be nailed to a cross of wood from the tree that He created and whose seed he made and planted for this purpose; He was delivered to be crucified by a people He chose as His special people and He was sentenced by the Romans who He ordained and placed in power by His sovereignty.

And yet, our Savior stood silent when reviled. These men thought they had the power and that they were exercising authority. But they did not know that they were sentencing the one Who made all things, the one Who could do all things, and the one Who could end all of this if it had been His will.

And so, they give our God the worst they could offer. They nail Him to a tree and revile Him while He is suffering. The Romans mock Him, the Jewish leaders laugh at Him, yet by His power, Jesus stays on the cross until His work is done and His spirit leaves the body and He awaits to conquer death for each one of us.

Wealthy Joseph gives Him the respect and honor in His death that the people denied Jesus while He was on the cross. And as prophesied, Satan has bruised His heel.

But in three days, the death blow to Satan is coming...

Mark 16

This is where everything that Jesus taught pointed. Even though Satan bruised his heel, a minor injury through the crucifixion, when He arose from the grave, Jesus delivered a death blow to Satan's head that would prove fatal (Genesis 3:15). That which was prophesied at the beginning of time was fulfilled in Mark 16.

And Jesus had told the disciples on many occasions that He would die and would rise again. They should have been awaiting this with assurance and anticipation, but instead, they followed the natural progression of grief when we lose a loved one and were in shock and denial. Even when people who saw the risen savior appear to them, when told that He lived, the apostles

would not believe.

This led Jesus to rebuke them for their unbelief. Not just in the testimony of the ones who were witnessing about the risen savior, but because of their unbelief of Him and His word. Yet we see in other accounts that denial and unbelief is quickly turned to joy and faith.

Perhaps, there is a lesson here for us as well. We know that Jesus loves us and has promised never to leave or forsake us. He has promised to walk with us through every trial and hardship. He has promised that we will be able to endure anything He allows us to face. Yet, how many times do we feel abandoned and in despair? How many times does our belief waver toward unbelief?

Satan has lost. He knows it. There is no path for victory available to him. So, if he is going down, he is intent to take as many with him as possible. In our moments of despair and grief, when it looks like we are all alone, let us remember that the Lord conquered that which only God could conquer. And because of that, we are more than conquerors because we bring ourselves into faith in Him, allowing ourselves to be wrapped up in His grace.

Mark shows us that Jesus is victorious. Let us not allow Satan to snatch away our blessed assurance from the victory our Lord has won for us. And let us remain true to His desire that we share this blessed assurance and Gospel with everyone we meet, so they can have the victory in Christ that He made possible on the cross through His resurrection.

No matter what you are facing today, God is with you.

Satan wants you to feel alone, abandoned, and forgotten.

You are not.

The momentary troubles you are facing are just that: momentary. It will come to an end.

Eternity will not.

Live by faith for the eternal blessings, not by sight for the momentary distractions.

A Tale Of Two Blind Men

In today's post, we'll take a few brief moments to look into the hearts of two blind men. But we are not going to focus on their blindness. We're not going to focus on a miracle that Jesus performs. We're not going to make a spiritual truth about being blind, yet seeing or seeing, yet being blind.

In today's post, we're going to focus on the heart. And this focus should hit each of us squarely between the eyes. For the heart has nothing to do with physical sight. A blind man can have a good heart or a bad heart. The same is true of a man who can see. But I found two men I want to look at this morning and compare their hearts, for their hearts are distinctly opposed to each other.

The first man- or more accurately- men of Sodom. You remember the story. God had just pronounced judgment on this wicked city for sins that go far beyond the sexual perversion as we read in Isaiah. But nonetheless, we see a picture of their heart played out in that sexual perversion. The angels who came to rescue Lot were in his house and the men of Sodom come calling...

“And they called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them.” (Genesis 19:5 ESV).

You know the story. The men insist that Lot send these men out so they can rape them. Lot, in an act I am convinced deserves no praise whatsoever, offers his daughters to them, but they refuse.

“But they said, “Stand back!” And they said, “This fellow came to sojourn, and he has become the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them.” Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and drew near to break the door down.” (Genesis 19:9 ESV).

Well, the angels rescue Lot for the first time this night by striking these men with blindness. You would think that this act of judgment would give pause to the evil who received it. But their heart was corrupt and even an act of God did not sway them from their evil ways:

“And they struck with blindness the men who were at the entrance of the house, both small and great, so that they wore themselves out groping for the door.” (Genesis 19:11 ESV).

The other man we look at lived thousands of years later during the time our Lord walked upon the earth. His name was Bartimaeus. Though blind, he had a heart that was in tune to the things of God. How do we know? Because when the Messiah passed by, he was keenly aware of who this Man was. His heart was opened to the things of God that his ears heard. The result:

“And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Mark 10:47 ESV).

The people rebuked him, yet this blind man was not deterred:

“And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Mark 10:48 ESV).

His persistent heart paid off. Jesus called to him and asked him what he wanted. Because of his heart, this man went away seeing.

So, let’s compare these two blind men. But let’s focus on the lessons of the heart that they had, not their lack of sight. For it is in the lessons of the heart that we all will learn what we need to take away.

1. Our heart is not dependent on our circumstances. Sure, our circumstances can influence our heart, but whether it is whole or impure is up to us. Blindness had little to do with the heart of these two men. So, it is with us. If we have a bad heart in our circumstance, our heart is bad in spite of what we are dealing with. It is a grave mistake to link the two, which will ultimately lead us down a road of excusing our bad heart rather than focusing on mending it with the help of the Savior.

2. Our heart will help us seek the Truth or seek the sin we crave. In the days of Lot, these blind men groped for their perversion. With Bartimaeus, he groped after the Savior. Even when rebuked by society, he beat down the door to reach Jesus.

3. Our heart will either call “Good” good and “Evil” evil, or it will call what is “Good” evil and what is “Evil” good. The men of Sodom cast reproach on Lot and accused him of evil. They said that he was a foreigner who wanted to be a judge over them. But Bartimaeus saw Jesus who he was- “Jesus- Son of David!” Seeing what they chose to see had little to do with the eyes and everything to do with the heart.

It is our heart that we need to focus on. We will give ourselves all kinds of excuses to endure with a bad heart if that is what we truly want. Even when we suffer consequences for our sins, a bad heart will point the finger of blame elsewhere and we can find ourselves continuing to blindly grope after our sins.

Or we can have a heart that is pure, created anew by the Lord to seek

after His way. It will cause us to call out to Jesus, Son of David, for help. It will seek when all around us command us to be silent. It will cause us to beat upon the door until the Savior answers. It is this good and honest heart that will accept the seed of the Word and plant it, cultivate it and let it transform us into the image of His dear Son.

But our heart is ours to cultivate. Good or bad- it is our choice.

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.” (Psalm 51:10 ESV).

As a nation, we are walking away from God. We make arguments as to why He does not exist.

We dethrone Him from our hearts. We take up evil with no thought that One is watching and One will judge.

Those who acknowledge God take heed: Follow the ones who deny God and be found guilty with them when judgements come.

Or stay true to what you know to be true: there is a God in heaven who reigns over all.

Follow Him even if all turn from Him and laugh in His face. The day is coming when that face will bring terror or deliverance.

“To the choirmaster. Of David. The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.”

They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is none who does good. The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God.

They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one. Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers who eat up my people as they eat bread and do not call upon the LORD?

There they are in great terror, for God is with the generation of the righteous. You would shame the plans of the poor, but the LORD is his refuge. Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion!

When the LORD restores the fortunes of his people, let Jacob rejoice, let Israel be glad.” (Psalm 14:1-7 ESV).

“Prove me, O LORD, and try me; test my heart and my mind.”
(Psalm 26:2 ESV).

Have we prepared our hearts and our paths to say this to the Lord today?

Without pain, there is no ease.
Without fear, there is no rescue.
Without trouble, there is no deliverance.
Without falling, there is no lifting up.

Too often, we measure God’s goodness in how He keeps evil from befalling us. We experience a problem or hurt and think that God must not be with us.

But it is not in the trials we face that we see God. It’s in the deliverance; in the endurance; in the results we gain from those things we must experience. It’s in looking back and seeing that He was with us.

I love this passage from Psalm that I read in my daily Bible reading today. It helps me keep perspective:

“The steps of a man are established by the LORD, when he delights in his way; though he fall, he shall not be cast headlong, for the LORD upholds his hand.” (Psalm 37:23-24 ESV).

God will not keep us from falling, but He will keep the fall from destroying us.

If we delight in His way, God will establish our steps.

This is all about trust when we walk in the painful, scary paths of life. We walk through whatever we must face knowing the Lord has our hand and whatever happens, we are not alone. He will deliver in His way and in His time.

So, we walk knowing He is by our side.

I am in the Psalm in my daily reading. One of the most beloved is the 51st Psalm, where David pleads with the Lord to create in him a clean heart. It’s a beloved Psalm because it is one we can all identify with.

How many times have we sinned and felt the weight bear down upon us? How many times, in regret and sorrow, do we relive that moment over and over, wishing that we could have the chance to do it all over again?

Having a heart cleansed by God is our new beginning. It is the answer to our prayer that we are not irredeemably broken; that there is hope for us even when we fall short of God's glory. Listen to the words of David and see if you can identify with him:

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.” (Psalm 51:10-12 ESV).

One of my take-aways as the Spirit bathes me in comfort with these words is this: A clean heart is available for all who earnestly seek after it. There is no sin that makes us irredeemable.

But I must seek after it.

God will not force a clean heart upon me.

God will not give it to me while I pursue my own way.

I must be driven by godly sorrow and not only seek after a clean heart, but also ready to accept it when the Lord answers my prayer. When He wipes the iniquity from me, I will live in the joy of His salvation.

My spirit will let His Spirit find a home in me. I will prepare myself for the Lord to answer my plea for a new heart.

And when cleansing comes, I will hang on to the Spirit so that He will not depart from me.

This is more than just forgiveness; it is the ability to put the guilt I feel away from me as the Lord cleanses me. It is having a heart that sorrow has tendered to help guard against the fall again because I, with my newly cleansed heart, am living in that 2nd chance I longed for; my chance to do it all over again.

This is the prayer of one who walks with the Lord. One who, when he stumbles, stands to continue his walk. One who does not walk away from the Lord, but longs to be cleansed from iniquity and to continue living in the Lord.

Noah looked foolish when he built the boat.

Noah's message was the same warning, decade after decade with no indication that his warning had teeth.

Noah probably had to have some tough discussions during family dinner time.

But we know that Noah looked a lot smarter when the rain started.

Perhaps his respect skyrocketed with his children when the thunder rolled in.

In the end, all who mocked were silenced and Noah was the last man standing.

When people mock the godly lifestyle you live...

When people laugh when you turn off the TV as people use the Lord's name in vain or participate in coarse jesting...

When you endure the tough conversations around the dinner table with your children about why we are different...

Ask yourself, when you are among the last men standing, will all you endure really seem that awful?

“For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.” (Matthew 24:37-39 ESV).

There once was a sweet old grandmother who loved her family more than anything. She made sure that her children and grandchildren knew that her house was always opened to them.

When they showed up, it pleased her to no end to feed them sumptuously; to slave over a hot stove to provide meals seasoned with her love.

She made a habit of leaving her house unlocked so that if her family showed up unexpectedly and she happened to be out, they could enter to the warmth and safety of her home until she returned.

One day, after spending the day out shopping, she came home to find her grandson in her house. He had brought a female friend and it was apparent they had engaged in behavior she found appalling.

They were sitting on the couch half-dressed and taking drugs together. The grandmother was heartbroken. Her grandchildren knew her rules and knew how she felt about such behavior.

When she entered the house, her grandson rose to greet her with a hug and a kiss, but she took a step back. Looking at him and then to his female friend, she said, “I'd like you two to leave right now.”

Taken aback, he said in a curious voice, “I don't understand, Grandma.

You said we were always welcomed.”

“You always are welcome, Grandchild, and I open all that I have to you. But you cannot come into my home and disrespect me and all that is important to me.”

“But Grandma,” he protested, “if you really love me, you'll accept me the way I am.”

“If you really love me,” she replied, “then you will accept my grace and love with thankfulness and with the respect I deserve from you.” She continued, “My grandchild, I offer you everything I have. It brings me joy to provide for you. I never keep a ledger of what I give you.”

The grandson rolled his eyes but remained silent as she went on. “All I have I want you to have. But you cannot accept my grace and disregard what is important to me. When you come into my home and engage in sexual behavior and use my home to take illegal drugs, and do it all with utter disregard to me, it is not me who doesn't love- it's you.”

The inebriated grandson turned to his friend and giggled. “Okay, okay. Whatever. I'm sorry. I promise not to do these things in front of you again.”

He reached for a lighter and his drugs. Before lighting it, he looked at his grandmother. “Do you mind leaving while we finish this?”

The grandmother had a tear roll down her cheek and she embraced her grandson. “How I love you so much. But as long as you choose to not follow the rules I have set out, you are not welcome in my home. Please leave now.”

The grandson's giggles slowed and he looked at her quizzically. “You're serious, aren't you?”

“I'm afraid I am.”

The quizzical look soured to indignation. “Fine. I'll leave! You're just a liar anyway. You said you love me, but no loving grandma would throw me out because I'm not exactly the way you want me to be. That's not unconditional love! He turned to his friend. “Get dressed and let's go!”

The two gathered their clothes and their drugs. With contempt in his eyes, he turned to the grandmother who had opened her home to him anytime he needed it, who had fed him whenever he was hungry, who had given him shelter whenever he had no place to go, and he said to her...

“When you decide to accept me for who I am, I'll come back. But as long as you cannot love unconditionally, I'll never step foot into your house again.”

The grandson stormed off, swearing under his breath never to return to such an evil and unloving person again.

The grandmother took a few moments to wrestle with the grief in her heart. Then, she stood and prepared a place for her grandson in case he repented and returned to her home again. She made sure her pantry was stocked with the food he loved.

And she waited for his return. She sat next to the window, watching every

day for him to walk up her pathway to her door. She longed to run out to meet him and fall on his neck in love.

She knew he might not see the tremendous love she had for him, but just because her grandson didn't see the love, it didn't mean it wasn't there.

She would always be there waiting, with her door unlocked to him when he chose to repent and return.

Sometimes it's easier to understand how we should treat the ones we can see than it is the One who we can't see. We would never disrespect a loving, selfless grandmother, but how many times do we treat God the way that this grandson treated his grandmother?

“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” (Matthew 6:33 ESV).

Tomorrow is the first day of the week. Could this be the week that God has marked on His calendar to send His Son back to earth?

It's an exciting thought, isn't it?

“He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20 ESV).

Is God a god or is He my God?
Is Jesus a king or is He My King?
Is God a creator or is He my Creator?
Is Jesus a savior or is He my Savior?
Is God a deliverer or is He my Deliverer?
Is Jesus a judge or is He my Judge?
Yes, He is A....
We will do well if He is also ours....

Sometimes we confuse God's chastisement with God's judgment. Both

come from God and both are meant to bring His hand against us. But each has a different purpose.

God's chastisement is given to those whom the Lord loves in an attempt to wake up His erring child and to humble him and bring him back home with God.

“For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” (Hebrews 12:6 ESV).

But when we talk about God's judgment, we are talking about God bringing punishment upon someone when His patience with them has come to an end. Ultimately, His final judgment will happen at the end of time.

But God will sometimes bring His judgment upon us to bring an end to evil. God is in control of all things and we see many examples when God steps up and stops someone from continuing to act in evil.

Sometimes chastisement and judgments are directed at individuals and sometimes they are directed at a nation. But here is what we need to keep in mind:

God will often send His chastisement upon people or nations to guide them away from evil. But there will come a time when He turns people who do not respond to His chastisement over to their own willfulness. This is a very dangerous place to be. When God stops chastising us and lets us continue in our own way, judgment is the final response He has when a rebellious heart goes too far.

When is that line drawn? How “bad” does bad have to be before God brings about His judgment? We do not- cannot- know. That is solely up to God in His sovereignty.

The answer for us is to respond in repentance if we are in sin and feel the loving chastisement of God upon us; strip rebellion away from us and humble ourselves before the mighty hand of God.

We need to thank God for His loving chastisement and fear God's wrath and judgment.

And if we should make it through life in rebellion and never face His judgment this side of eternity, remember, God is not mocked. Judgment is coming upon those who do not acknowledge God and live under His rule.

The God Over the Cosmic And Insignificant

We serve a God who is sovereign over all the universe. He commands nations and leaders to rise and fall at His will, When He does, nothing in His purpose fails to come to pass. His timeline can stretch thousands of years, and yet His memory never fades. In one night, God can slay 185,000 soldiers in the strongest army in the world with a single messenger. He can work through generations to accomplish His purposes.

And yet God can remember the poor, forgotten foreign widow who is starving. He can hear the cries of an Egyptian slave woman who has been cast out into the wilderness by her mistress. He can hear the call for children from a man and woman and give them a son who would be a deliverer and the strongest man who ever lived.

God's capacity to accomplish things is not human. The phrase, "walk and chew gum" doesn't scratch the surface when we think about what He can do. Sometimes, we impose our weaknesses upon God and forget that He is the God over the cosmic as well as the insignificant.

Yes, God has the nations at His commands. The world scene will play out exactly how the Sovereign allows it to. He stops and He allows events and people to proceed as He desires. But when a man in Wylie, Texas is struggling with a problem and reaches up to heaven, the same God has the ability to focus 100% on what this insignificant person needs. And He can spend as much time molding this man as He does the leaders of the mightiest nations who threaten each other with war.

Consider Luke 1:

"In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years." (Luke 1:5-7 ESV).

These were two insignificant people. They were old and childless, yet the Master of the Universe knew them. He heard them and He remembered them. Zechariah was a Levi and he was about to win his personal Superbowl, the chance of a lifetime that many would never experience. He was chosen by lot to have the honor to burn incense in the temple of the Lord.

“Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense.” (Luke 1:8-10 ESV).

Only the lot was not random. God, who was about to do a cosmic thing on the world stage would also do for the insignificant. The last time that God sent a messenger to Israel was over 400 years prior. To put it in perspective, our country is not even 250 years old. If the Lord had visited us on our founding, we'd have to wait until the year 2176 before hearing from Him again. Think about all that has changed in the last 400 years for us.

And yet, the promised Messiah was about to come into the world. That is a cosmic event prophesied at the beginning of time in the Garden of Eden. This event would change the world. The eternal Kingdom would conquer all other nations and it would begin to come to pass at the moment that Gabriel appeared to Zechariah.

“And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.” (Luke 1:11-13 ESV).

We know the story. This good man could not wrap his head around the truth that he and his wife would have a child in their old age and God gave him a sign by making him mute until all came to pass. But the wonderful story is how God can be involved in the cosmic events of time and still be able to be intimately involved in the insignificant. What a wonderful, powerful God we serve; a God who can do both the great things and the small things with equal purpose and devotion.

When we pray to God, we understand that He is busy being sovereign in the affairs of nations and the world He created. But He is also intimately aware of the needs of the insignificant who may never have their names recognized by men. He hears my prayers and He hears yours. He really does.

And God is never too busy to talk to you. You never have to make an appointment to see Him. He has an open-door policy that He urges you to use daily. Paul said to use it without ceasing. And He will sit down with you as though you were the only person in the world at that moment.

Luke 1 teaches us that God can do the cosmic things while still doing the insignificant things at the same time, equally well. Never underestimate His power or His willingness to work in your life.

May I share what the most amazing verse in the Bible is to me?
You will definitely be able to challenge my verse because God's holy Word is full of amazing verses.

But this is the one that causes me to scratch my head and ask, "Why?"

It is the verse that shows what is possible with God.

It tells of a love that is impossible.

When we dig into the verse, we see the only way by which man has hope.

It defines sacrifice

It defines love

It defines providence

It defines protection.

When we read and understand this verse, we have no recourse but to drop to our knees.

To me, this is the most amazing verse in the Bible; a verse that explains all other verses...

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."
(John 1:14 ESV).

There is a parable that I think we may not appreciate like we should. It is the parable of the barren fig tree in Luke 13. Perhaps, a better way to think about it is the parable of the patient vinedresser.

There are different ideas on who the vinedresser is; who the land owner is; who the fig tree is. Here is what Jesus says:

"And he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, 'Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?'" (Luke 13:6-7 ESV).

Rather than immediately carrying out the landowner's decree, this is what the vinedresser proposes:

“And he answered him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’” (Luke 13:8-9 ESV).

That’s it. That’s the extent of the parable. We might be tempted to walk away and simply think that we need to be producing more fruit, to be productive in the Kingdom of Christ. And I would say that is true. But let me put forth a dynamic that I believe is playing out in this parable for your consideration. It may change the way you see it and the way you see our Father and our King in heaven.

I believe that the landowner is God. The vineyard is what He planted. Immediately, it’s the people of Israel. But it can also refer to us as well. Whatever God plants, He does so with the expectation of producing fruit. He gives all that the fig tree needs to flourish.

First, let’s recognize that we are the work of God’s hands. He planted us. We are not wild fig trees that He stumbled across. We are His handiwork.

Second, He demonstrates patience with us. He doesn't cut us down when we first go without bearing fruit. He comes back year after year. But God in His justice and righteousness will bring judgment upon those who are willingly unfruitful.

And then we read about the vinedresser. This is the one who stays the hand of the Landowner, pleading for just a little more time that He may nourish and give every opportunity for the fig tree to blossom and produce fruit. This, I believe, is our Lord and King Jesus.

Jesus understands what will happen to the unfruitful fig tree. But His heart is bathed in love, not willing that the fig tree should perish, and in grace not deserved, pleads for just a little more time to work on this tree that it should produce fruit.

And the Landowner, the Father, in love is quick to give the vinedresser, His Son, another season to work on the fig tree that perhaps it might become fruitful.

Isn’t that an amazing story of love and of grace? That’s why I said I think we might do better to think of this as the parable of the patient vinedresser. Perhaps we never know how close we are to justice demanding that we be cut down.

But in an act of intercession, Jesus pleads for just a little more time that He might help us become fruitful. My earnest plea is that we turn to the Lord in repentance before it’s too late and we surrender to His work in us that will make us fruitful.

Let’s all appreciate the loving grace that the Lord extends to us on our behalf and become the fruitful tree in the Land Owner’s vineyard before there is truly no remedy but to be cut down and cast into the fire.

I have learned that there is a practical thing I can do to help my walk with God. It is found in this message from Jesus:

“The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!” (Matthew 6:22-23 ESV).

You see, our heart will be fashioned by what we put into it. And once fashioned, it will help us do the things it is fashioned after. If we want a heart fashioned after God and His Word, then we need to put His Word into it.

And what Jesus says is that the eyes are the lamp of the body. It is through the eyes that many things enter into our heart. If we allow good through the eyes, then our whole body will be full of light. But if we let bad pass through our eyes, then we will have a dark body, a dark heart.

Listen to what the Psalmist says:

“I will not set before my eyes anything that is worthless. I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling to me.” (Psalm 101:3 ESV).

Why go to the trouble of working to set nothing worthless before our eyes? Because of what Jesus says. And the more life-experience we have, the less we need to have someone teach us this lesson. We know it to be true.

Job knew the dangers of letting the wrong things through the eyes and he made a covenant with his eyes to help keep his heart pure:

“I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin?” (Job 31:1 ESV).

Indeed, the eyes are the lamp of the body. We need to be careful what we let into them, because they will have an impact on the whole body, on the heart.

Our eyes can let in the things that cause our feet to walk toward evil.

Our eyes can let in things that cause our tongue to say things that we shouldn't say.

Our eyes can let in things that can cause our hands to do evil things.

Or...

Our eyes can let in things that can help our feet go to godly places.

Our eyes can let in things that can help our tongue say godly words.

Our eyes can let in things that can help our hands do godly things.

Why is it important to turn off the television when evil is on? Because we will be affected by what it sends through our eyes. We are fools if we think otherwise. Instead, seek out godly programs and videos to pass through our eyes to bring light into the body.

Be careful what we watch; be careful what we read; be careful what we look at; for we will train our heart based in large part by what we let enter through the lamp of the body.

What kinds of things should we seek to let in through our eyes? Let Paul give us guidance:

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” (Philippians 4:8 ESV).

Let the things we want to think about pass through our eyes.

Life is an open book test. On the Day of Judgment, there will be books opened before us.

The Book of Life will have every name of those who will receive life with Him.

But the books of the Bible will be opened as well. On that Day, we will be judged by what is written in those books.

So, if God in His goodness has given us the answer key to the greatest judgment we will ever face, what should we do?

Read daily. If we are not spending time in His Word, then how can we have assurance of our salvation? Our assurance comes from knowing His Word so we know how to live and what to do.

No one will accidentally stumble into heaven. We must know and we must do, and we can only do that if we read.

I know time is at a premium for us all, but honestly, is there anything in our lives more important than to read the answers in the Books that will be opened on Judgment Day? May I suggest that if we are too busy to find time in His Word daily, then we are just too busy.

Judgment is coming. The Book of Life is being written at this moment.

The Books that will determine if our name is written in the Book of Life are in our hands now.

Judgment is coming. The earth will be burned up. We have the answer

key to eternal life right now.

“Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness,” (2 Peter 3:11 ESV).

Read His Word today, tomorrow, until the Day we stand before Him. It is the only way to know and to prepare.

Election season is upon us. For many, it’s a time of excitement and activity. For others, it’s a drudgery and they can’t wait until it ends. But for Christians, I have some advice that I lay before you as we see the political activity elevate.

I am not going to tell you to go out and become active, using your influence during the political season.

I am not going to tell you to stay home and have nothing to do with the affairs of men.

Either path is yours to choose. And one side has no cause to throw stones at the other. But let me share what the Lord says in the 146th Psalm to help everyone, regardless of your political persuasion; regardless of your level of political activity or passiveness.

“Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation. When his breath departs, he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish.” (Psalm 146:3-4 ESV).

If you have a man you stand behind- good. Go out and do all in your heart to support your candidate. But be careful that you do not put too much trust in that man or woman.

“Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God,” (Psalm 146:5 ESV).

At the end of the day, politicians come and go. They always have and they always will. But whether good ones come or evil ones come; whether competent ones come or foolish ones come; there is one truth we should never forget:

We need to put our trust in the God of Jacob. He is our enduring hope. He is there when the wise and the fools pass on and off the stage of time.

So, go out and do what you wish this political season, whether actively

working for your man or staying home to bide your time. But whatever your choice, remember this when it is all over so that your pride or your despair does not overtake you:

“The LORD will reign forever, your God, O Zion, to all generations. Praise the LORD!” (Psalm 146:10 ESV).

Given a choice, do you choose to repent or ball your fist at God?

Let us be careful not to fall into the same condemnation of the Sadducees. One of their core beliefs was that they didn't believe in a resurrection. Perhaps it was some of these converts Paul addressed in 1 Corinthians 15 when he defended the resurrection and said:

“If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.” (1 Corinthians 15:19 ESV).

Now, I trust that we all believe in the resurrection. But I want us to be careful not to fall into the logic trap that they fell into which led them into believing that there is no resurrection. Perhaps we use the same flawed logic trap to arrive at conclusions that are equally in error.

In Matthew 22, the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection, tried to set up a trap for Jesus. They tell of 7 brothers. The first married a woman and when he died, the next brother married her. Each of the brothers died and married the woman. Their question to Jesus: In the resurrection, whose wife would she be since they all were married to her?

Do you see the logic trap that they used to arrive at their false conclusion? They created a scenario and made assumptions not supported in Scripture. Then they arrived at a doctrine based on fallacious assumptions. What a dangerous thing to equate the Law of God to our flawed assumptions.

Jesus explains their error in one verse and then corrects their assumptions. This is the verse we need to be careful to hear when we are tempted to equate our conclusions to God's Law:

“But Jesus answered them, “You are wrong, because you know neither

the Scriptures nor the power of God.” (Matthew 22:29 ESV).

There were two errors in their logic that Jesus calls out:

1. They did not know the Scriptures: He shows that the Scriptures indeed teach that people are still living after death.

2. They did not know the power of God: He shows them that God was powerful enough to create an afterlife that would be far superior than anything we have here.

We need to be careful that we arm ourselves with knowledge of the Scriptures as we formulate answers to our questions. Otherwise, we become tossed to and fro by all sorts of tales that capture the imagination rather than letting the truth in Scripture guide us.

We also need to recognize the power of God as we formulate our answers. If God said it, we don't have to worry ourselves about how He will do it. If we don't understand or can't figure out how something that the Word said will happen, we need to recognize the power of God as the answer.

We live in a world that demands explanations for everything. Sometimes the explanation is simply that God said it. If we discount that explanation and look for another, then we fall into the same trap that the Sadducees fell into.

Know the Scriptures. Know the power of God. These two things will help us all arrive at the truth we seek.

The Narrow Gate: Is God Fair?

As Jesus brings the Sermon on the Mount to an end, He presents two paths that we can take: The narrow and the broad way. This is what He says about the choices we are presented with:

“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.” (Matthew 7:13-14 ESV).

Our Lord presents two- and only two- options in life. And these options are mutually exclusive. What does that mean? Simply, Jesus presents two choices and we will choose one of the two. If we are not on the broad path,

we are on the narrow; and if we are not on the narrow path, we are on the broad. There is no other option. There is no standing still and looking at the gate. We all are walking through one or the other at this very moment.

And Jesus, in His wisdom, tells us that most will choose the broad path that leads to destruction. Why? Because the broad path is “easy”. It doesn’t require the commitment and sacrifice required on the narrow path. It’s broad enough to handle all of our desires and pleasures and we will have plenty of company to travel the path with us.

The narrow path is characterized as “hard”. It is narrow because its path is defined and directed by God and not by our own heart or desires. We cannot travel it our way. It requires commitment and sacrifice; self-denial and submission. And the end of this path leads to life- eternal life. And those who find this path and travel it to the end will be few.

In essence, Jesus is telling us that only a relatively few people will find the narrow path leading to life and most people will follow the broad path that will lead to their eternal destruction. The question many may have is, “Is God fair?” Is it fair to save so few people and send the majority away to an eternal hell and torment?

That question presupposes a couple of things about God and about the paths that I think are incorrect. It’s not a question about God’s fairness when you consider the nature of the paths and the nature of the ones traveling on the paths. For the Bible is clear that it is God’s will to save everyone and that He finds no pleasure in the destruction of anyone. Consider:

“Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?” (Ezekiel 18:23 ESV).

And

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16 ESV).

Verses like these make it clear that God would desire that all men everywhere would travel the path that leads to life. This isn’t about the fairness of God. God is fair in that He makes the path leading to life available to any and every man who wishes to travel it. The paths are about the few who choose Him and the many who reject Him.

There is also a misconception about the size of the path. Many believe that God made a path just big enough to handle a few people and it isn’t designed to handle heavy traffic. That’s just not true. It is true the gate which opens to this path is narrow, but the gate and the path is wide enough to handle every traveler who chooses to travel it. Its size has nothing to do with

capacity, but about everything one must submit to in order to travel it.

We live in a world where two masters are calling out for followers. Both God and Satan are entreating mankind to take up their cross and follow them. Satan paints a picture of pleasure and ease, lying about the reward that his way offers. But God is open and honest about what it means to travel the path leading to Him. And just as important, He is honest about the destination and promise of eternal life.

Is God fair because many will be lost by not traveling down the narrow path? God is more than fair. He made the path big enough to handle all who wish to travel it. He removed all the obstacles in the path when He sent His Son to die for our sins. And He promises to help and aid all along the path who choose to travel it. The path is not too hard for any to successfully finish its course.

The reality is that there are too many who are choosing to follow after Satan. Too many are reaching out their hand and opening the broad gate of ease. Too many are spurning the promised inheritance for a mess of pottage at the moment. But to show how fair God really is... no matter how far down the broad path you have traveled, you can step onto the narrow path this moment and He will be with you the rest of the way.

Today's Challenge:

Pray 3 times like Daniel

Make a covenant with your eyes not to look at anything inappropriate like Job

Extend hospitality like Abraham

Give to help someone in need like Barnabas

Make something good with your hands like Tabitha

Tell someone about Jesus like Andrew

The next time we do good deeds, we need to look inside and ask ourselves, "Why are we doing them?"

If we are not careful, even the most innocent good deed can end up causing us to stumble. Jesus warns of doing our good deeds for the wrong reason:

“Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.” (Matthew 6:2 ESV).

Instead, our King says:

“But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” (Matthew 6:3-4 ESV).

But He also says:

“In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16 ESV).

So, let’s go back to my first question that I said we should ask when we do our good deeds: “Why are we doing them?”

The temptation, even for the most noble-minded person, will be to enjoy the praise given by those who see our light. While it isn’t wrong for people to see our light, when we begin to crave the glory that belongs to God, we start to run the risk of being guilty of doing our good deeds for the wrong reason.

Yes, when we do that, we will have the extent of the reward due us. But when we can rejoice that God is glorified when people see our good deeds, then we are the humble stewards He seeks to employ.

Another question to ask ourselves: “Would I still do these good deeds if no one knew; if no one thanked me; if someone else got the credit?” Jesus says to do your good deeds in secret. If we can do that, and still rejoice because God gets the glory, then we have the heart Jesus wants us to have.

But if we need to be thanked, or recognized, or appreciated, for the good deeds we do, then we may have some soul-searching to do.

“Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!” (Psalm 115:1 ESV):

One good thing about reading through the Bible is that you can see things in a way not possible if you focus on various parts in disparate manners. We

call this context. Context allows us to draw conclusions that are difficult to draw otherwise.

One of the eye-opening contexts of the Gospel plan of salvation in reading the Bible through for me are these conclusions that are reshaping my view of the Father and His love:

1. God has always been concerned with all men. We see the special relationship He had with the Jews and we sometimes believe that He had nothing to do with the Gentile. But God consistently showed His love, care and concern for Gentiles at all times. They were His created children and He still remembered and loved them.

2. When Gentiles showed a heart inclined to Him and a willingness to acknowledge Him, God showed grace and compassion. Whether it was Melchizedek, Abimelech, Ruth, Rahab, the widow and her son during the famine or even Nebuchadnezzar, we see God extending His grace to these people.

3. The Jews indeed, had a special relationship with the Creator. He called them out of the world and gave them special blessings. Among these blessings, God gave them a theocracy with Him as their King. No other people had Him as their King. Through the Jews, God taught the importance of living in obedience to the Law of God. He taught the need for grace and sacrifice when that law was broken.

4. In the Jews, God taught what grace was. While He was patient with the Gentile to a point, when their iniquities were full, He brought judgment upon them. But when the Jews' iniquity was full, God did not destroy them, but preserved them. Not because of anything they had done to deserve it, but solely by His grace. He was fulfilling a promise to Abraham.

5. But when grace is rejected, then a God who longs to gather His children as a hen gathers her chicks under her wing, as a heartbroken Father, will let them reject His grace and incur the wrath that this rejection brings.

6. God never forgot the Gentiles and it was always His intent to create a theocracy that made room at the table for all men. There was never a time in history where God did not have the Gentiles on His mind. After teaching the world through the Jews what was needed for a theocracy, Jesus the King, came to gather all His children into His Kingdom.

7. The good news of the Gospel shows the great redemptive love that Jesus made available to all men, Jew and Gentile. This was always His plan. He loved all men from the beginning and throughout time. He set in place the things needed to learn the importance of law, grace and love. And when the time was right, our King came to earth and built His kingdom upon His own blood. The veil separating man from God was torn, as was the veil separating man from man, and He made one nation of all men without distinction.

We can't walk away with these conclusions without reading the whole

revealed Word of God. Context opens the eyes and the heart to those who seek to love the Lord. Let us all, Jews and Gentiles, drop to our knees and give thanks and praise to the God who made us all, loved us all, taught us all, and never forgot any of us. Our God never abandoned His creation to sin without giving us hope and paying the terrible cost for us all.

Today is the Lord's Day. Is there a better place to be than among His people to Worship Him and to remember His death on the cross in communion?

I just read the story about the Canaanite woman who begged Jesus to heal her daughter from demon possession. The reaction of Jesus and the disciples may make us feel a bit uncomfortable:

“But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, “Send her away, for she is crying out after us.” He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” (Matthew 15:23-24 ESV).

Listen to what this foreigner, this Gentile woman said to the Lord:

“She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.” (Matthew 15:27 ESV).

And Jesus had compassion and healed her daughter.

What an amazing example of persistent faith and matchless grace.

This woman knew that Jesus was her only hope. She could not go away from Him. Her daughter would remain tormented if she did. So, she didn't take “no” for an answer.

Today, we have a choice this Lord's Day. Do we spend it worshipping the Creator who shed His blood for us? Do we attend every service and Bible study scheduled?

It's not about attending at men's appointed times. It's all about the heart that says, “No, Lord, I will not choose to be somewhere other than with the people who are gathered to worship You.”

Ask yourself, “Where would God rather you be? At home or with His children in Worship to Him?”

The Canaanite woman would not be anywhere but in the presence of Jesus, even when she was urged to go away. Where will you choose to be when gently urged by your brothers and sisters to come be with them in

communal worship and glory given to God?

So, I just finished the book of Matthew in my daily Bible reading and this time through, I began to focus on Judas. We think of him as the most evil man in history because he betrayed the Lord, and I think that may not be too far from the truth. Listen to what Jesus says about him and his betrayal:

“The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.” (Matthew 26:24 ESV).

That’s pretty harsh. But did you know that there were people who believe that Judas was one of the most beloved apostles because of his act of betrayal? This is how sick and twisted we can get when we do not listen to the Word and seek to use our own intellect to reason what we want truth to be.

Their reasoning goes something like this: Judas’ betrayal of Jesus was foretold and set into motion the events needed for God’s eternal plan of redemption to be fulfilled. Since the betrayal was needed and prophesied, Judas dutifully played his role to ensure God’s plan would be carried out.

That is just sick and twisted. There is nothing redeeming about Judas’ betrayal of Jesus. And everything he did was of his own free will and volition. He walked with Jesus for years, listening to His teachings, performing miracles with the 12 and the 70, and witnessed powerful miracles from Jesus’ own hand. The Lord gave him every opportunity to be saved. And even in the betrayal, I am convinced that the Lord would have forgiven him had Judas repented and asked.

But this is what we know of this man, and I am sure that Jesus knew this about Judas when He chose him to be an apostle:

1. He was a thief from the beginning- John tells us that when the woman uses the expensive ointment on Jesus, Judas become furious:

“But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, “Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it.” (John 12:4-6 ESV).

2. Could this have been the event that caused him to betray Jesus? -

Matthew puts the betrayal immediately following the anointing of Jesus. Since John tells us that he had a habit of skimming off the top, perhaps he was indignant because he didn't get his cut from the ointment that they didn't sell. Thieves have a way of already claiming ownership in their minds of what they plan on stealing. Maybe Judas felt that he had lost what was his when the ointment was used on Jesus.

Matthew said that he immediately went to betray Jesus after this. How much did he agree to betray Jesus for? 30 pieces of silver- 10% of what he could have skimmed off the top if they had sold the ointment. I am not sure this is what happened, but from what we know of his character and the chronology of the betrayal, it makes you wonder. Could Judas have reasoned in his own heart that he was just claiming what was his by right?

So, my point in mentioning this is that when we think of Judas, we are dealing with a man who was a thief, and was always a thief. He had every opportunity to repent, but he did not give up his evil ways, though he experienced the awesome miracles of Jesus. This should be a strong warning of the evil influence that the love of money can have over each of us.

And finally, this is from the book of Tony- I have nothing concrete to pin this to- but I wonder if Judas was a paid infiltrator from the beginning. If so, certainly Jesus would have known it and it might explain how he could rob from the people he spent the years with. We know that this was the practice of religious leaders:

“So they watched him and sent spies, who pretended to be sincere, that they might catch him in something he said, so as to deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor.” (Luke 20:20 ESV).

Who knows- just a conjecture... But this is what we do know:

Judas was a thief from the beginning who was motivated by money.

Judas felt no guilt in stealing from his close friends or during the original act of betrayal.

Judas had every opportunity to repent.

But leaving his life of sin and the love of money was never something he did. There is a lesson for us. Though we may be convinced that we would never betray the Lord with a kiss, if there is a sin that we refuse to let go of, even when we know Jesus and what He has done for us, are we really that different from Judas when we cling to what we love and let Jesus die while refusing to repent? What is our 30 pieces of silver?

During His first coming, Jesus came to bring salvation to man. During His second coming, He will bring judgment. Which Jesus will you kneel before?

What Color Is God?

Our country is divided along many lines, including race. We are divided on politics, on religion, on gender, on economics, on education, and on popularity just to name a few. So, how does a child of God approach the differences which divide us?

First, I suggest we see things the way they are. Differences exist. Some are in our genetics and are beyond our control. Others are differences which divide us by choice. For example, the color of our skin is a physiological condition that comes from our DNA and our environment. But the political system we identify with is based on choice.

So, let's not pretend that differences do not exist. They most certainly do. And the physiological differences are the ones God has endowed us with. The color of our skin depends on our pigment. That pigment is influenced by a number of factors and can change over generations and through our environment.

Of all differences, perhaps skin color, or race, is something which divides us most deeply. We often attach value to the color of our skin. We make assumptions and stereotypes based on how dark or light someone is. And yet, Paul tells us:

“And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place,” (Acts 17:26 ESV).

The same God that made the dark man also made the light man. In fact, God made us all. And further, we are told man is made in the image or likeness of God Himself. And so, we learn that all men share common characteristics: we are eternal; we have free will; we have intellect which separates us from all other parts of creation.

Yes, we may look different on the outside. This is something we cannot deny. But what does this mean where it counts? Does the outside affect who we are on the inside? Sadly, many believe it does. But from the beginning,

“God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”
(Genesis 1:26a ESV).

I put this before you as a biblical perspective to consider.

First, I submit skin color is solely a physical trait. Nothing more. We are neither better nor worse as a person because of the color of our skin.

Second, I submit that inside, God made us all the same. We are all in His image. In heaven, when the physical is stripped away, all men everywhere will look the same. Not identical, but we will look like our Father who made us. Without pigment, I suspect by looking at us in the image of God, we will have no idea what the color of our skin was while we were alive on the earth. An outsider would tell a black man and a white man standing side-by-side in heaven that they must be brothers because the resemblance is uncanny. They both look a lot like their Father.

Third, I submit that we and God are the same color. While I have no idea what that color is, or even if color in the way we think of it will exist in heaven, I do think that all men everywhere will be in the image of God in a way that makes it markedly obvious that we are all His children.

If the biblical perspectives I present are accurate, then why should we see and judge our fellow man merely at skin level? Is our assessment of each other so shallow that it can be defined as skin deep? Doesn't our Father want us to see all of His children the way He sees us? When He looks at black, white, brown or yellow, doesn't the Creator see His image looking back at Him?

Unfortunately, we have devolved into siblings who seem to be more interested in dividing rather than uniting. That means we need to learn how to esteem others better than ourselves. We must learn to understand how the divisions mankind has thrust upon each other has affected us and shaped our perceptions and our realities. While I believe that skin color does not matter in the eyes of the Creator, and it shouldn't matter in the eyes of each other, we have made it matter in a way that I am convinced grieves the Father who made us all.

But in Christ, we can have a new heart created in us; a spiritual heart that causes us to see all men as children made in the image of the Almighty God. The blood of Christ will not make us colorblind per se, but it will allow us to see each other as we truly are seen in the eyes of God. And it is this heart created anew which will help us see the brothers and sisters we have from all the colors that God has created in man. And this heart will help us see how damaging our shallow divisions have been upon each other.

When I get to heaven, I suspect I will not be white. I'm not exactly sure what my body will look like, but I know it will look a lot like the God who made it. And I suspect that this will be true for everyone from all over the

world who are reading these words.

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:27 ESV).

Do you ever watch the news and think, “What is going on in this country?” We see people smash and grab what does not belong to them. I think to myself, “Don’t these people know that they will stand before the Lord to give account one day?”

We stand by and watch evil men and women steal, kill and maim. But we throw the book at the maskless child and peaceful protesters.

Well, I am reading Proverbs. Let me close by putting forth wisdom for our age as the wise man begins this collection proverbs:

“My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent.

If they say, “Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood; let us ambush the innocent without reason;

like Sheol let us swallow them alive, and whole, like those who go down to the pit;

we shall find all precious goods, we shall fill our houses with plunder; throw in your lot among us; we will all have one purse”--

my son, do not walk in the way with them; hold back your foot from their paths,

for their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood.

For in vain is a net spread in the sight of any bird,

but these men lie in wait for their own blood; they set an ambush for their own lives.

Such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain; it takes away the life of its possessors.” (Proverbs 1:10-19 ESV).

I just finished up the book of Proverbs in my daily Bible reading. This is a book you can read the rest of your life and spend a week focusing on each verse and still not glean all that is there.

But one I am focusing on today should sober everyone who reads it. It cuts through our folly and gives wisdom that will lead to life:

“If you say, “Behold, we did not know this,” does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it, and will he not repay man according to his work?” (Proverbs 24:12 ESV).

I always say we need to give grace to each other and part of that is to give people the benefit of the doubt. This means if we can interpret the motives of someone either positively or negatively, we opt to assume the best.

We almost always have the option to ascribe negative or positive to someone's words or actions. But since we cannot read the hearts of men, we give grace.

But God can read the hearts of men. There is no benefit of the doubt given by God because God knows absolutely what is and what is not. That's what this proverb reminds us.

We may be able to fool man; we may be able to take advantage of the one who is rich in extending grace; but God knows. He not only sees the actions we take, but He knows the heart behind the actions.

If we hurt someone while trying to do good to them, God knows. If we fool everyone else and hide a corrupt heart, God knows.

Everyone may condemn us, but God will uphold the right heart. Everyone may praise us, but God will perceive the evil we harbor in our heart.

Let us live and act each day knowing that it is not only our works that are seen, but also our hearts that will be weighed by God. He will always know the truth.

Most of us are familiar with the call of Moses on Sinai, in the presence of the burning bush. We read about God laying the mantle upon Moses as Moses gives excuse after excuse explaining why he cannot answer God's call to him. In patience, God provides remedy for each excuse that Moses gives.

This happens until Moses runs out of excuses,

“But he said, “Oh, my Lord, please send someone else.” (Exodus 4:13 ESV).

And God became angry. He had enough and Moses knew it. When Moses had run out of excuses and said, “No” to God, there was nothing left to argue. And when God rejected his “No”, Moses relented.

Just as Jonah, we may tell God “No”, but that doesn't mean God will

accept our “No” when we give it to Him. His call is still upon us, waiting for us to bring our will into alignment with His will. When Jonah was vomited up by the great fish, the call of the Lord was the same to Jonah.

Saying “No” to God does not remove our call to serve Him. Whether we act in the spirit of Moses or Jonah, we can say “No” to Him as long as we desire, but His call to us remains fixed. Our responsibility is not removed by our rejection of His call, neither is His expectation for us to obey Him.

Both Moses and Jonah relented when they realized they could not outrun God’s call to them. And when they did, God was able to glorify Himself through them. Fighting God does not bring peace into our hearts. It brings the opposite.

Not until we submit to the call of God will we find true peace. We were created to serve and to bring glory to God. Only when we submit and stop making excuses will we find the peace that surpasses all understanding.

We read about Stephen, the first martyr, and how the people who stoned him laid their garments at the feet of Saul. But there is so much that happened at the sermon and stoning of Stephen that causes us to know beyond doubt that Jesus is the Messiah. One thing that occurred is the influence that Stephen had on Saul, not just at his death, but long after.

Saul seemed to be more than just an approver of the stoning of Stephen, but perhaps even one of the instigators. Notice:

“Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen.” (Acts 6:9 ESV).

Among those who rose up to dispute with Stephen are “those from Cilicia.” Where is Paul from?

“Paul replied, “I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no obscure city. I beg you, permit me to speak to the people.” (Acts 21:39 ESV).

This seems to be the place where Paul takes a stand against the Christians and rises up against the Man whom he believes blasphemed God by claiming to be God in the flesh. And once he started down this road with zeal, nothing would get in his way:

“But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.” (Acts 8:3 ESV).

But Saul would learn the truth from the Messiah Himself. And since his faith was bound up in God, he repented when Jesus presented him with the truth. And what happens with the rest of his life mirrors much of what happened to Stephen, a man Paul himself in large part was responsible for killing. Consider just a few:

Of Stephen:

“But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.” (Acts 6:10 ESV).

Of Paul:

“But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.” (Acts 9:22 ESV).

Both has a vision of the Lord:

Stephen:

“And he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” (Acts 7:56 ESV).

Paul:

“And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' And I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.’” (Acts 26:14-15 ESV).

Both were seized and had false witnesses make accusations against them:

Stephen:

“And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council,

and they set up false witnesses who said, “This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law,” (Acts 6:12-13 ESV).

Paul:

“When the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, crying out, “Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place. Moreover, he even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.” (Acts 21:27-28 ESV).

Ultimately, both would give their life for the Messiah:

Stephen:

“Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.” (Acts 7:58 ESV).

Paul:

“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” (2 Timothy 4:6-7 ESV).

I think that the events in Acts 7 that made Saul a hero to many stayed with him the rest of his life. And many of the things that he consigned to Stephen were later the very things he himself had to endure for the name of Jesus.

God will use all of our experiences, good and bad, to glorify Himself if we let Him. What is it in our past that we can look back at and find a way to glorify God in? What lessons can we learn to draw us closer to God? Paul called himself a murderer, undoubtedly referring back, in part, to his participation in the stoning of Stephen. Do you suppose he was thinking of this first martyr that he helped kill as he himself lay in the street as people stoned him for his belief in the same Messiah?

And the sermon that Stephen preached was amazing- stuff for another post; but Saul heard it in full. Initially, he rejected it. But later, Paul would be making the same defense that Stephen made before his accusers.

When we mess up, we can give up, ignore our error or be humble and repent. If we choose to be humble and repent, let the Lord use our past experiences to glorify Himself and prepare us for how we can better serve

others because of our experiences.

Stephen's Defense

I am just a few hours away from starting my 7-day break from Social Media. It is Sunday evening and I was going to miss my first Tuesdays With Tony post for the first time since it started. Well, I am in the midst of studying the martyrdom of Stephen in Acts and I thought I'd share one more post to stand in for next Tuesday's post.

As I study Stephen's sermon, or his defense, I am learning that it is much more than a recital of Jewish history. It is a well-crafted answer to the charges laid before him designed not to acquit him but to prosecute the crime against the Jews for rejecting the Messiah, Yeshua, or Jesus.

The Charge:

“and they set up false witnesses who said, “This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law, for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us.” (Acts 6:13-14 ESV).

“And the high priest said, “Are these things so?” (Acts 7:1 ESV).

What proceeds is the longest sermon that Dr. Luke records in the book of Acts. And a thorough study of his defense shows how each word and example was brilliantly chosen to accomplish its purpose. I wish we had time to look at each item he included his sermon, but we will confine this post to a few big points that the Holy Spirit makes to convict the Jews.

From a broad defense, Stephen recounts the history of the Jews to show that it isn't him who speaks against the law or Moses. In doing so, he highlights 3 main characters.

Abraham (Acts 7:2-8)

Joseph (Acts 7:8-18)

Moses (Acts 7:19-44)

Abraham was the one to whom God gave the promises and the covenant. Once his seed is established, Stephen talks about Joseph. He makes the point that God sent Joseph to be a savior of His people, but Joseph's brothers were jealous of him and sold him into slavery:

“And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt; but God was with him” (Acts 7:9 ESV).

This savior was sent to Egypt where God was with him. And when the time came, Joseph saved his people rather than to bring judgment upon his brothers for the crime they committed against him:

“And Joseph sent and summoned Jacob his father and all his kindred, seventy-five persons in all.” (Acts 7:14 ESV).

Stephen goes on to say that the Lord was with His people and they multiplied. Over 400 years passed:

“until there arose over Egypt another king who did not know Joseph.” (Acts 7:18 ESV).

It was out of Egyptian bondage that God raised up for His people a servant, Moses, who would be their savior. But as they had initially rejected Joseph when they sold him into bondage, they also at first rejected Moses.

Stephen reminds them that Moses had killed an Egyptian who was mistreating one of his brothers:

“He supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not understand.” (Acts 7:25 ESV).

When Moses tried to break up a quarrel among his brethren, he too was rejected by his people:

“But the man who was wronging his neighbor thrust him aside, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?’” (Acts 7:27-28 ESV).

So, Moses fled, only to return later and become the savior for the people who had initially rejected him. There is so much we don’t have time to look at in his sermons, but the thrust of his defense when accused of speaking against the Law and against Moses is this:

It was you, the Jews, who always rejected the saviors God sent to them. And even when rejected, these saviors still came back to save them. And it was no different with Jesus, the Messiah. He too was sent to them and they rejected Him. It wasn’t Stephen who was going against the Law and Moses; it was them. And it culminates in this charge:

“You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?

And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.” (Acts 7:51-53 ESV).

Stephen didn’t make a defense of himself. He made a defense for Jesus. And in doing so, he acquitted himself of crimes against God and convicted the people who forced this mock trial upon him.

I wish there was time to draw out all the words and phrases that Stephen uses because his sermon truly leaves no doubt that these people had rejected their Savior just like their fathers before them had done.

The lesson for us: There is overwhelming evidence of what Jesus has done for us. Our option is simple; do we accept the Savior or do we reject Him? If we reject Him, we will be in the company of many, many people. But only by accepting Him as our Lord and King will we have the blessings that this Savior brings.

Forgive me, but I am briefly interrupting my break from social media this week for this one post. Rarely will we have the opportunity to glorify God in this manner and I will not let it pass.

Major war has broken out between Russia and Ukraine. There is a lot of uncertainty among people. But not among the people of God. We may not know how things will turn out, but we know our King is in control.

He will choose in His sovereignty how things will be allowed to unfold. He is still, and forever more, will be in control. My allegiance is to King Jesus, the only leader who will forever be victorious.

“The sentence is by the decree of the watchers, the decision by the word of the holy ones, to the end that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men.” (Daniel 4:17 ESV).

Amen.

Good morning. My break with Social Media is over, and guess what? Life still went on. Unplugging and taking breaks from time to time is something that I recommend everyone consider doing. Whether you are a preacher, teacher or social media group leader, I promise that life will continue in your absence and everything will be waiting for you when you return.

With that, I am ready to share some thoughts I had when reading the Word of God. Specifically, I'm in 2 Timothy 3. Paul writes about how bad it will be in "the last days."

"But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty." (2 Timothy 3:1 ESV).

To me, it seems that the last days are talking about the last dispensation—the Christian age. I am not sure that this is talking about the days just prior to the return of Christ. So, I do believe that we are living in the last days now. However, if we focus on when the last days are and miss all the terrible things that describe people in those days, then we are missing Paul's main point. This is where our focus should lie.

Listen to this and see if it describes our times today:

"For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy,
heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good,
treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,
having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people." (2 Timothy 3:2-5 ESV).

Scary, isn't it? Not that there are some pretty bad people in this list (I'm thinking of the treacherous, abusive, unholy, brutal, etc...), but it's scary that a part of each of us may be on that list as well.

Consider just these three: lovers of money; disobedient to parents; ungrateful.

How many of us have struggled with any of these things in our lives? Yet, these are listed right along with the "really bad" characteristics that people will display in the last days.

Lovers of Money: Our whole society worships the dollar. Jesus says that it's harder for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter heaven. The love of money will cause us to sacrifice what we should

sanctify and tempt us to pursue it to the neglect of spiritual things we should pursue.

Disobedient to Parents: This is one that hits right at the core of our respect for authority. It shows our willfulness to do what we want to do rather than having a spirit of submission. It feeds our “right” to do what we want to do with little thought of giving the respect and submission that our King requires of us all. If we are disobedient to our parents, there is little hope that we will learn to respect other authority that God will place over us. Being disobedience to parents demonstrates a reckless and defiant willfulness against authority in general.

Ungrateful: Ouch. Yeah, this one is in the list too. The ungrateful are not content with what they have, but they take the first opportunity to complain about what they do not have. The ungrateful are so focused on themselves that they do not have the capacity to keep perspective...

Rather than complain about the job we do not like, should we not be grateful for our job that millions of others are praying to have themselves?

Rather than complaining about the house we do not like, shouldn't we be grateful for the one we have while millions of others around the world are freezing at night under the stars?

Rather than complaining about how we don't get to do what we want to do, shouldn't we be grateful that we are not hiding in a subway with our children while an invading army is trying to kill us?

Perhaps being lovers of money leads to rebellion while causing us to live with an ungrateful spirit.

Yes, we are living in the last days and all the things that Paul writes about are things we need to guard against. Today, let us all go through this list and make sure that we are not getting drawn away from the Lord and being characterized as these godless people living in the last days.

Jesus Wept

It is known as the shortest verse in the Bible:

“Jesus wept.” (John 11:35 ESV).

We remember the circumstances that led to this passage, And when we read it, we celebrate the humanity of God's Son. He laughed and He cried.

He felt and experienced all that His creation experienced which makes Him the perfect High Priest and mediator between man and God.

John 11 starts off with the illness of Jesus' friend, Lazarus. We have already seen Jesus showing his power, so Lazarus' sisters send a message to Jesus to let Him know that His friend needed Him.

“So the sisters sent to him, saying, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” (John 11:3 ESV).

But Jesus delays. John tells us that He waited 2 days before He headed to His sick friend. He did it knowing that Lazarus would die and that the Son of God would be glorified through it. By the time Jesus makes it back, Lazarus had been dead and rotting in a cave for four days.

Can you imagine what the sisters of Lazarus thought? You sent word and begged the Master to come and help. You knew He had the time needed to get there. Yet, Jesus tarried. And while waiting for your hope to arrive, time wins out and death claims your brother. Sorrow was compounded with disappointment.

Let's not overlook chapter 10. Jesus had just finished angering the Jews so much that they took up stones to kill Him. And in order to go back to Lazarus, they would have to head back toward the people who were trying to kill him. It's no wonder that Thomas sighed in resignation:

“So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.” (John 11:16 ESV).

Is it possible that the sisters wondered if Jesus was more worried about His own skin than He was in saving their brother? Who knows, but in times of grief, we are often left wondering why with a lot of questions that we just don't find answers to.

What I want us to understand is that Jesus entered Bethany in an emotionally charged atmosphere. I point this out because I don't believe that Jesus wept because His friend had died. He was the only One who knew they'd be talking to Lazarus and sharing a meal with him four days after his death.

We grieve over death because it is so final and it separates us from the people we love. Death would not separate Lazarus from his friend and Jesus knew it. And yet, Jesus wept. Not just wept, but “he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled” (vs 33). But look at what caused Jesus to feel this great pain:

“Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would

not have died.” When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.” (John 11:32-33 ESV).

You see, it was when He witnessed the pain in Mary and all who mourned that caused Jesus to weep. He asks where they laid Lazarus and they took Him to the tomb. Everyone was broken hearted and it affected our God and King. John simply said, “Jesus wept” and this was what the people perceived:

“So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?” (John 11:36-37 ESV).

They had given up hope now that Lazarus was dead and it deeply hurt everyone at the tomb. And Jesus was not done hurting. Not because Lazarus was dead, but because His children were suffering. John again says:

“Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it.” (John 11:38 ESV).

He was deeply moved again. And we know the rest of the story. He is indeed glorified. In a loud voice, Jesus shows His supremacy over even death itself. “Lazarus, come out!”

And even death had no power to keep its claim from the One who gave this command. The Son was indeed glorified.

So, what is the wonderful lesson of “Jesus wept?” Simply, that our God loves us enough to grieve when we grieve. It hurts Jesus to see us hurting. He cries when we cry. Isn’t that amazing?

Seriously?

When our loved-ones pass away, Jesus knows the glory and power that is theirs. He knows the reward that they are experiencing when they die in Him. When our faithful family members die in Jesus, He does not weep over their death. But when He sees the sorrow that we experience because of their death, it causes Jesus to weep.

We have a King, God and Creator Who loves us so much that we cause Him to weep when we hurt. He weeps for us as He wept for Mary. And that is what makes Him the perfect mediator between us and the Father.

When Jesus wept, it wasn’t because He was hurting for a loss He suffered. He wept because it deeply troubled His spirit to see the ones He loved so much suffering. Shouldn’t this great love be enough to make sure we never leave or forsake Him? We will never find such perfect love except in Him.

Quick question... If someone came to you and said, "I have \$400,000 and I need you to help me invest it", what would you think?

Would you pull out a stock from the top of your head and say, "Buy this"?

Would you tell him, "I don't know" and walk away?

Or would you take the request seriously because of the value the man is entrusting to you?

\$400,000 is a lot of money and it is a big responsibility to be a steward of that kind of money.

Yet, when we read the parable of the talents, we often say the last man only received 1 talent. Not much. Only 1 talent...

But 1 talent was a great sum of money. In our day, it would be worth around \$400,000. That's nothing to sneeze at.

What God entrusts to us is worth more than we often want to acknowledge. "But God only gave me this much" should never pass the lips of a believer.

Rather, let's acknowledge the tremendous value we all have entrusted to us. Even our lone talent is a great responsibility in the Kingdom of Heaven.

He gave his colt.

We don't know anything else about the man. Perhaps he was rich. Maybe this colt was all he owned.

Maybe he was a well-known disciple. Maybe those sent for the colt only knew about him because Jesus explained who the man was.

There is a lot we don't know about him, but this we do know: after 2000 years, billions of people know about the simple act that he performed for the King,

"saying, "Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' you shall say this: 'The Lord has need of it.'" (Luke 19:30-31 ESV).

The road leading to the Messiah's death would begin on this colt so He could usher in the beginning of the end for sin and for death.

"So those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told

them. And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, “Why are you untying the colt?” And they said, “The Lord has need of it.” (Luke 19:32-34 ESV).

The man remains nameless, but we never cease to see the fruit of his contribution to the King and His kingdom.

We may never have our name remembered but our contribution to the King and the kingdom will be our testimony forever.

Let us all be willing to untie our colt and give it to the Lord when He requires it of us. And let the King be glorified through our act of service and contribution to His kingdom.

The last words from Satan’s mouth from the book of Job are these:

“Then Satan answered the LORD and said, “Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. But stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face.” (Job 2:4-5 ESV).

Satan had been allowed to take Job’s wealth and his children. Now he tells God that if his skin is harmed, Job will curse God to His face.

Satan has no love for man. We are a tool He uses to harm God. He will do whatever he can do to us in an attempt to gain advantage over God.

If that means he will harm our skin, he will do so with no regard to us.

If that means he will take away our wealth, he will not pity our misery.

If that means preserving our health to awaken vanity before God, then he will have no problem making us powerful, healthy and beautiful.

If that means showering us with riches to draw us away from God, he will not think twice about giving us great wealth.

What Satan does to us is never for our benefit. We are pawns in his twisted war on God.

Yet, we have a loving Father who knows us intimately. He knows each of our weaknesses and each of our limits. And just as with Job, our God will always draw a line with Satan and say to him, “You can do this much to my servant, but no more.”

And Satan has no choice but to obey.

While Satan sees us as pawns in his war against God, our Father sees us as children who He will zealously guard.

When we experience pain or loss, our Father hurts with us. But never forget that He has set a limit to what we will have to endure. We will never

be tested or tempted with anything beyond what we can endure. God will never give us fully over to Satan.

“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.” (1 Corinthians 10:13 ESV).

A Prayer To Glorify The Son

Father, we kneel before Your Son whom You have seated upon the throne at Your right hand.

We kiss the Son whom You love and sent to redeem the creation You also love.

He is our God, our King and our Lord.

We submit as stewards and servants to Your Son.

We confess Your Son before man.

Your Son is mighty, sovereign, and everlasting.

We acknowledge His Kingdom is enduring and encompasses all of creation.

We acknowledge all power, glory and honor belongs to Your beloved Son.

It is by His name we speak to You.

Amen.

A Prayer To Glorify The Spirit

Father, we come to you in praise of Your Spirit.

When we need help, Your Spirit provides what we need.

It is Your Spirit Who gives us boldness when we are afraid.

Your Spirit gives wisdom liberally when we ask.

Father, we praise You and the Son for not leaving man alone; for Your Spirit came as the Comforter to bring us all truth.

Your Spirit is the power and might in Your Word; Your Spirit convicts the world of sin.

We thank Your Spirit for interceding for us with groanings that cannot be uttered.

Tony Eldridge

We acknowledge Your Spirit as God, as Creator as Sovereign.
We acknowledge all power, glory and honor belongs to Your Spirit.
We praise Your Spirit in the name of Your Son,
Amen.

A Prayer To Glorify The Father

Father, we come to You in praise to You.
For You are the One who loves man who You created in Your image.
Your mighty power has been seen by man since the beginning of time.
Your creation testifies to Your glory and Your very existence.
It is by Your hand that we receive our daily sustenance.
You show us the way we should go and You direct our steps
Father, Your ways are higher than our ways and Your thoughts are greater
than our thoughts.
Father, we kiss Your Son and bow to Your Spirit.
We know that You can do all things and You reign supreme as the only
sovereign God over all that is. You are I AM.
We acknowledge You as God, as Creator as Sovereign.
We acknowledge all power, glory and honor belongs to You.
We praise You in the name of Your Son,
Amen.

May the Spirit give me boldness when I am afraid,
Strength when I am weak,
Wisdom when I am in the moment of decision,
Knowledge when I am searching for answers,
And help when I don't know how to pray.

So, I am reading through Job and I have noticed that the disposition of people in his ancient days is not different from the disposition of people in our day.

When Job had wealth, men revered him and sought his counsel. But when God allowed Satan to remove his wealth and strike his body, people's disposition toward Job changed. The youth no longer respected him, but teased him in his distress.

His servants no longer respected him or obeyed him, but ignored his commands. Even his family members look upon him in derision. And his friends no longer sought him out or came to him in his time of need.

And I asked myself why? I may be wrong, but this is what I perceive from the book of Job:

I don't believe that it is because people only respected and obeyed Job when they feared him and as soon as his trappings of power left him, they used the opportunity to rebel. For Job had been a provider and help to the fatherless, the widows and the poor. Yet these were among the very ones who turned on him:

“But now they laugh at me, men who are younger than I, whose fathers I would have disdained to set with the dogs of my flock.” (Job 30:1 ESV).

And

“Because God has loosed my cord and humbled me, they have cast off restraint in my presence.” (Job 30:11 ESV).

Evil men who once feared to lift their hand against him no longer feared him. Everyone turned on Job.

I believe they turned on him for the same reason we would turn on him today. It is rooted in our tightly held view of how God rewards and punishes. We honor the wealthy and powerful because, even though we know better, something deep inside us still believes that they prosper because they are favored by God.

That is why we can let the wealthy and powerful take advantage of us and still praise them. And this is why we can turn our eyes away from the poor, the weak and those who are struggling. We struggle, only to find contempt in our hearts for them because perhaps deep down we think that they suffer because God is withholding His favor from them.

So, we become guilty of the sins of Job's friends. If someone asked us plainly if we believe this or feel this way, we would likely argue with vehement words that this is not true for our intellect knows it is not this way.

Yet in our heart, I fear that we live and react as though it is true. So, we praise the evil and powerful as blessed and approved by God and we curse the weak, the poor, and the needy because we see them as rejected by God.

May the wisdom of God fall upon us all that we not fall into the trap and

equate the righteousness of a man based upon the blessings that the gracious Lord, in His goodness gives a man. And may we not impute evil to the ones who God withholds blessings from.

For the measure of a man's righteousness is not found in the riches that moth and rust destroy, but in the incorruptible riches that are laid up in heaven.

Wise is the one who can see the true riches that a man has by the hand of God!

Faith In Times Of Uncertainty

When the world doesn't make sense,
When we search but find no answers,
When we are afraid of what may happen,
Remember these rocks of hope as your anchors:
God is in control. He always has been and always will be.

When we are without understanding, take heart that God knows all things.

There is nothing beyond His knowledge, beyond His control, beyond His ability to complete His perfect will.

Just as he laughed at Edom for thinking they were invincible in their high mountain homes, so does God laugh at man who puts his trust in his military might.

Man makes nuclear weapons,
God makes the sun.

No man can do anything without God allowing it
Yet no man can stop God's sun from burning.

Let us not grow arrogant in thinking that we know the will of the sovereign God. For we do not and cannot know His will aside from His revelation to us.

Peace comes amid turbulent times when we trust in the Lord and have faith that He is indeed sovereign over all things.

Let us not worry over what we cannot control but rather commit our trust to Him who can do all things.

No matter how frightening the world may get, never forget that God is in control and man can never wrest the world away from God's mighty hand.

Have faith that He still controls and let us sleep well at night in that understanding,

For faith is sweetest when it is present in the midst of man's uncertainty.
God will always perform His will.

I am back in the book of Acts in my daily Bible reading. It is interesting that we see the Gospel unfold over 8-10 years to finally reach the Gentiles. And when it does, Peter and the Jews have to be convinced that this acceptance of Gentiles is from the Spirit.

Yet, from the beginning of the church, the Apostles preach the coming Gospel to the Gentiles. The Spirit inspired them to preach its coming to them from the day of Pentecost on, and even though they preached it, they didn't get it until the days of Cornelius.

Consider these foreshadowing verses that should bring comfort to we Gentiles who read about God's eternal plan to bring us all into His family:

“For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” (Acts 2:39 ESV).

We were those who were far off. Even on the day of Pentecost when the Jews were first let into the Kingdom of Christ, the Spirit said that Gentiles would be let in too.

And then, after Peter healed the lame man and was questioned by the rulers, he said this:

“You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.’” (Acts 3:25 ESV).

This harkens back to the original promise to Abraham, 2000 years prior to the Kingdom of Christ coming and 4000 years from our time. Even then, we see that God's plan was to bless all families of the earth, including Gentiles. Peter preached it but had yet to understand it.

And finally, when they were back before the council, Peter again foreshadows the coming of the Kingdom of Christ to Gentiles before he fully understood it:

“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12 ESV).

The name by which men should be saved was the name under heaven—not just for the Jews but for all under heaven.

What a wonderful God we serve. A God who always intended to bring the creation made in His image back to Him. I am a Gentile who serves a God Who never saw me as an afterthought or Who never forgot me. I was always part of His divine plan. And my Lord died for me, as He did for the Jews, on the cross for the sins of all mankind.

Praise and thanksgiving be given to our Lord and Savior for His unspeakable love He has for all mankind.

There was war yesterday. There is war today. There will be war tomorrow.

There was famine yesterday. There is famine today. There will be famine tomorrow.

There was disease yesterday. There is disease today. There will be disease tomorrow.

There was peace yesterday. There is peace today. There will be peace tomorrow.

There was plenty yesterday. There is plenty today. There will be plenty tomorrow.

There was healing yesterday. There is healing today. There will be healing tomorrow.

All over the world, war and peace, famine and plenty, disease and healing exist somewhere on the earth.

The world has good and evil. Some are blessed to live in areas of goodness while others suffer because they live in areas of trouble.

There go I but for the grace of God.

To those who suffer, there is no word but to put their trust in the Lord Jesus.

To those who rejoice, there is no word but to put their trust in the Lord Jesus.

Together, Jesus will be glorified when we submit to the Lord's rule in whatever state we will be called.

It is not for us to ask "why?"

It is for us to submit and serve the Lord.

We serve an almighty God who knows how to administer justice when justice is absent.

We serve an almighty God who knows how to administer mercy when mercy is absent.

There is nothing that man can make crooked that God cannot make straight.

God watches all that man does and says and He lays boundaries upon man's ability to act.

In the end, we serve an almighty God who truly is sovereign.

Fear not what man can do to you, but fear the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

For the same One Who can destroy both body and soul in hell is also the One Who can save both body and soul by His own power.

Put your trust in man and his power, and you will have the extent of your reward here upon earth.

Put your trust in the God of heaven, and you will enter eternity with treasures laid up in the Father's house. Treasures that no one can ever take away and will never be corrupted by time.

No matter how bad man makes things upon the earth, God will always shield His people with His mighty hand so that the things of man can never take away what God has entrusted to His children.

Praise the Lord and God of heaven, our refuge and our hope forever.

“Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.” (Hebrews 12:14 ESV).

Here is a chilling thought: We understand the importance of pursuing holiness. But do we understand the importance of pursuing peace?

Can we find holiness if we are not people of peace?

I must ask myself if I am a man who brings strife or a man who brings peace?

Must I argue and win or have I learned to defer to others, even if that means I suffer loss in the name of peace and holiness?

Do I value my rights over others? Must I impose what I want rather than yielding to others?

Arguing, fighting, name calling, humiliating others, sharing things about someone else that is better left unsaid... all of these things pursue strife and cannot be a part of someone pursuing holiness.

And here is the scary part we must see and remember:

“without which no one will see the Lord.”

If we are not people who pursue peace, we cannot pursue holiness, and that can cost us our opportunity to see our Lord.

There are a lot of people who read the words of Paul and John and struggle with the balance of faith/grace vs works. And I suspect that most of the people we talk with believe that we do not have to do any works (but to have faith) and we will be saved.

No baptism.

No charitable deeds.

No keeping ourselves personally clean from the world.

Because, they reason, salvation is a gift and if we say we must do anything, we are earning our salvation.

Well, I searched long and hard to find a commentator who could make this tension between grace/faith and works simple to understand, and I am glad to admit that I have found one. I'd like to share His thoughts with you on this misunderstood tension. Hopefully, after reading what He says, things will become much clearer.

“Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.” (John 14:21 ESV).

“Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.” (John 14:23-24 ESV).

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” (John 14:15 ESV).

“If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.” (John 15:10 ESV).

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the

floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.

And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.” (Matthew 7:24-27 ESV).

Jesus makes it very clear that we must obey Him. The question is not whether Jesus expects us to obey Him or not, the question really is do the works we do merit the grace He gives.

Paul, John and other writers tell us that the gift we get is so great in comparison to what Jesus expects us to do, that no person can walk away and say that this is a fair trade. We get a billion times the value as a reward for the obedience we give to Christ.

Yet, it is still the Lord’s expectation that we obey Him. Can we even call Him Lord if we refuse to obey His words?

So don’t let the comparison of the value of our works and the value of our reward confuse us into thinking that because we are saved by grace, there is no responsibility to obey the Lord.

Eternity is a long time for us to dwell on the fact that we should have listened to and obey the Lord King Jesus, especially when He was so clear in His expectations for us.

I just finished the book of Acts in my daily Bible reading today. Now, I’m no Paul, but I find comfort in seeing the work that he did in teaching the Gospel. He certainly planted many churches, and the sum work over his life was amazing.

But when you focus in on the specific theaters he engaged in, it was more often than not true that the vast majority of the people he preached to rejected his message. Very few walked away converted, and there were times when no one repented and turned to Jesus.

Why does that bring me comfort? Not that people did not repent, but that even if someone like Paul struggled to convert people, then I should not focus too much on the results of sharing the Gospel with others, but rather the effort I should put into sharing the Gospel.

In Acts 22, Paul testified about Jesus before the Jewish council. Guess how many people were converted from that testimony? None. Yet look at what the Lord says to Paul when he was through testifying:

“The following night the Lord stood by him and said, “Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.” (Acts 23:11 ESV).

That reminds me of what the prophet Isaiah says about God’s Word. He says that it will not return void but accomplish its purpose:

“so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:11 ESV).

Sometimes testifying about Jesus will return with a few who hear and believe. Other times, it returns by sharing the words that will give someone knowledge and leave them without excuse when they reject the Lord.

Either way, we need to focus on our efforts, like Paul did, and not on the results we hope for. If we’re not careful, we’ll begin to whittle on God’s end of the stick:

“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.” (1 Corinthians 3:6 ESV).

I Gave That Woman Jezebel Time To Repent

Today’s “Tuesdays With Tony” post comes courtesy of a comment that Bev Ralph Bing made on Benjamin Lee’s post on Sunday. His simple, but powerful post said:

There’s still TIME to REPENT!

Bev’s comment said this: “I’m always impressed that God says He gave the Jezebel in the church at Thyatira ‘time to repent’”. And then Bev quoted from Revelation 2:20-21, which I will do from the ESV that I almost always quote from:

“But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. I gave her

time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality.” (Revelation 2:20-21 ESV).

I had never thought about this phrase much until Bev focused on it. I’m not sure if her thoughts are the same ones I’ll share on these verses, but I thank her for putting a powerful passage before me to consider. So, here are the important things from these verses that I take away:

1. There are people in the church who are so sinful that the Lord Himself refers to as a “Jezebel”. Without rehashing Old Testament history, we remember the sinful Queen Jezebel who may have been the real muscle behind King Ahab’s throne. She was a murderous woman who demanded worship to the false god Baal.

In the case of the woman in Thyatira, we know she was a woman of influence who seduced Christians away from the Lord through sexual enticements and fellowship with idols. She fancied herself a prophetess and was active in promoting her sinful false teachings.

2. Jesus was patient and wanted her to repent. To me, this is the most amazing part of this message from Jesus to this church, and to us. Most of us would have no patience with sin this egregious. But Jesus says that He gave her time to repent. Isn’t that amazing? As bad as this woman was; as destructive as her sin was on the church, Jesus wanted her to repent.

The world thinks that only a few chosen will be saved. And they think that once they are saved, there is no chance for them to fall away. But this woman Jezebel, in a letter authored by the Lord Himself to the church she attended, says otherwise. The Lord delays judgment for the hope that we come to repentance. And even though she was a member of this church, that didn’t guarantee she would be forever saved. In fact, Jesus goes on to say,

“Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works.” (Revelation 2:22-23 ESV).

Which brings me to the third take away from these verses for me:

3. The end will either be repentance and salvation or rebellion and judgment. King Jesus is patient and longs for us to repent from our sins but if we continue to live in rebellion to Him, He will bring His judgment upon us in His time and in His way. The dangerous thing with the long-suffering of the Lord is that if we do not come to our senses, we tend to grow comfortable in our sins and our hearts starts to harden with a seared conscience.

So, my thanks to Bev for bringing this passage to my attention on Sunday and to Benjamin for writing a post that served as the catalyst for this

“Tuesdays With Tony” post. Let me end by asking us all to examine ourselves in light of this letter from King Jesus to the church at Thyatira. Do we have unrepented sins that we need to deal with? If so, do not let the longsuffering of the King harden our hearts into a false sense of security.

If we have breath, the Lord is showing patience to us. As Benjamin said, There’s still TIME to REPENT!

Satan will distract us in any way he can, to keep us from focusing on serving King Jesus Who sits on His throne at the right hand of His Father.

To some, he distracts with the thoughts of war and he puts despair of the future into our hearts.

To some, he distracts with changing economic conditions and puts despair of the future into our hearts.

To some, he distracts with political intrigue and he puts despair of the future of our nation into our hearts.

To some, he distracts with beds of ease and plenty and he takes away any concern for the future from our hearts.

To some, he distracts us with endless fighting among our brothers and puts strife and not peace into our hearts.

To some, he distracts us with self-centered thoughts of ourselves and he pulls a shade over our hearts to block the needs of others.

Yet, our King Jesus still reigns on His mighty throne. While we allow ourselves to be distracted, our King serves as the clarity we all need and seek.

Let us lift our eyes to Him in days of distraction and find the narrow way leading to His throne.

Let us bow before His throne in seasons of war.

Let us bow before His throne in seasons of economic turmoil.

Let us bow before His throne while the thrones of nations ever shift upon the earth.

Let us bow before His throne while He abundantly pours rivers of blessings upon us for a time.

Let us bow before His throne as our King unites all of us who submit our hearts under His blessed rule.

Let us bow before His throne as we sacrifice self to the Kingdom and seek out the needs of our fellow servants before we seek our own needs.

There are only distractions if we submit to Satan while on this wretched earth.

But there is clarity and purpose when we bow before King Jesus and submit to Him in every circumstance under heaven.

“Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:16 ESV).

In reading the New Testament, I've seen evidence that there is a possibility that Jesus may return sometime this week.
Just saying...

When the world gets crazy in our eyes, never forget that Jesus sits on His throne and reigns over the kingdoms of men.
Let us be careful in which throne we put our hope.
Thrones on earth shift.
His throne is established forever.
When we want to know what it means that Jesus is our rock, our immovable hope, just look at the transient nature of life under the sun.
We cannot put hope in things that man tries to control,
But the hope that we put in Jesus and His throne is sure.
What was yesterday on earth, what is today and what is tomorrow cannot be known by man.
But what was yesterday with King Jesus, what is today and what is tomorrow in Him is where we can set our anchor.
Only in Jesus will we have the certainty we seek.

“We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.” (Hebrews 6:19-20 ESV).

It is not that there is evil in the world that makes me the saddest; It is the fact that people have hearts that are inclined to evil and not inclined to the

Lord.

God created all people for a purpose and all people have eternity before them. When we choose evil, we are also choosing to reject God. It is in this rejection of God that tears my heart.

It is in the rejection of God that men play with fire and set their course on a path that will one day bring them immense terror and regret.

We all, men and women from all nations around the world, were created for a purpose. That purpose is to serve King Jesus with all of our hearts; to do good and not evil; to allow ourselves to be transformed into His image.

When we turn away from our divinely appointed purpose in life, we allow sin and rebellion against the One who created us for a singular purpose to separate us from becoming who we are meant to be.

When I see people committing acts of evil, it is not in the evil acts that I cry over most; it is in their hearts that are guiding their paths away from life and toward death. We were made for much more than that.

Today, I'm enjoying the important things in life that's easy to take for granted...

22 years and a day married to my best friend.

Watching my 5-year-old play his first T-ball game of Spring.

Having another son paying in a tennis tournament today.

Enjoying it all with my wife, parents and other son.

I'm living the memories I'll have when my life starts to come to an end on this earth.

The last words that Jesus spoke before He died should be words that we treasure every moment of our lives. These three simple words from the Creator as He died on the cross bore the culmination of every focal point in history:

“When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.” (John 19:30 ESV).

It is finished.

Perhaps a tough concept for a people who are known for starting things

and not finishing them. Yet, the moment that sin came into the world, it would take God Himself intervening for His creation to provide a remedy for the eternal damage man's sin and rebellion brought upon him.

The first 2000 years showed that left to himself, man would spiral away from God until there was no remedy, thus the flood.

The next 2000 years showed that man needed a relationship with God. God Himself would make a covenant with man that would teach us the importance of seeking Him out while having the promise of divine protection and providence.

The next 2000 years showed that even though God was faithful to His end of the covenant, man could not keep his end, and thus would fall into condemnation because of the sin that broke the covenant.

It is at the end of this period that God Himself stepped in and paid the awful cost that allowed man to be reconciled back to the Father. Not by anything man did himself, but through the sacrificial love of Jesus who took our punishment upon the cross for us.

Without His self-sacrifice for His people, we would be without hope. And because of His self-sacrifice, we have a way to the Father through Him and His blood. And it was only possible because Jesus could utter the three simple words:

It is finished.

Without those three words, we would be without hope. Let us tuck those words away in our hearts and bring them before the throne of King Jesus daily with an outpouring of appreciation and acknowledgment of what He did for us.

It is finished means that we can live in His grace now and forever.

“Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6 ESV).

Well, I suppose that Jesus would be canceled if He lived in our country today.

He's not very inclusive.

Many would say He's closed-minded.

I suppose that the media would have a field-day reporting on Him.

No corporation would hire or sponsor Him.

He wouldn't be welcome to give commencement addresses at most institutes of higher education.

And truthfully, He might even be a little too radical for many churches to

have Him as a guest speaker.

Yeah, I suppose if Jesus lived in the 21st century, we'd probably find a way to kill Him too, and feel good about it.

This is us:

“Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory,” (1 Peter 1:8 ESV).

One day we will see Him. One day our joy will be confirmed.

It must have been sweet for Peter to write these words. He was a man who reached out His hands to Jesus and walked on water with Him; who tasted water turned into wine from Jesus; who saw Him transfigured on the mountain, standing with Moses and Elijah; and who saw his mother-in-law healed;

And toward the end of his life, Peter sees an ocean of believers who had never seen Jesus, yet believed. And by faith, he knew that this faith would continue throughout the generations until the day King Jesus returns.

We believe, yet do not see. We have joy in King Jesus no matter what we walk through in this world. And it is in genuine joy and contentment that the aged apostle can say,

“Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory,” (1 Peter 1:8 ESV).

What was it about Solomon's request for wisdom that pleased God?

“Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?” (1 Kings 3:9 ESV).

He didn't ask for wealth, a long life, or victory over his enemies. And...

“It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this.” (1 Kings 3:10 ESV).

I submit that it wasn't the wisdom he asked for that pleased God, but that he asked for wisdom so he could govern God's people.

Even the lust for wisdom is a bad thing if we seek wisdom to bring glory and honor to ourselves; but when we ask anything for the glory of God or to serve others, I believe this is what pleases God.

I believe this is what pleased God about Solomon's request.

Do we ask for good things so that we can better glorify God?

Do we ask for good things so that we can better serve others?

Or do we ask for good things so that we can have more ourselves?

What a wonderful place to be spiritually when we can learn to be content with what God has provided for us while asking for good things to help us better glorify Him and serve others.

“You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.” (James 4:3 ESV).

Let us rise today to kiss the Son.

Our God reigns on His throne in heaven where all the earth is His footstool.

Let us not be wise in our own minds, but let us seek out His wisdom and His law.

Let us be conformed by Him and not in foolishness attempt to conform Him to us,

For our King is righteous and pure. He does not change, nor is there any defect in Him to be perfected.

Let us not give council to the King, but let us seek His counsel and search His words to transform us.

In sin we appear before the King and He washes us clean by His blood.

We do not cleanse ourselves but yield to His cleansing blood.

Our King freely cleanses all who kneel before His throne. And when we rise, we are able to stand in the presence of the Father with the Son at our side.

Today, let us do good, seek good, and glorify the Son.

For what He asks us to do He will give us the power to accomplish.

He will make us more than conquerors, not by our own strength and power, but through the strength and power He will supply to us.

And this is why I say,
Let us rise today to kiss the Son.

I love grace.

Grace is God's power to overcome sin as my good friend Edwin Crozier is fond of saying.

But it is just that- God's power to overcome sin, not His power for us to live in sin with no consequences.

Jesus equips us with the ability to carry out all the He, our Lord, expects us to do.

That's why the Lord says,

“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?” (Luke 6:46 ESV).

If He is our Lord, we will not live in rebellion and call it grace.

If He is our Lord, we will obey, knowing that He will equip us with all we need in order to obey.

King Jesus will not ask us to do anything that is impossible for us to do.

It is by His grace that we are given the ability to obey, the ability to overcome sin.

I love grace because it makes us more than conquerors.

Not because we are strong enough in ourselves to overcome apart from King Jesus,

But because King Jesus, by His grace, will give us everything we need to overcome sin.

That's why Paul says,

“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?” (Romans 6:1-2 ESV).

If we say that we are only human as an excuse to continue living in sin, we are not living in grace.

Grace does not excuse sin. Grace overcomes sin. Grace lifts us up when we fall and cleanses us as we continue our walk with King Jesus.

If we excuse sin so that we can continue to live in sin, that is not grace. That is rebellion.

Jesus will give us everything we need to follow His life-giving word. That's

why He plainly says to us:

“Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?” (Luke 6:46 ESV).

I have a challenge for all of us today.

Do not let the sun go down today without doing the following:

1. Pray a prayer of praise to God and another prayer of intercession for someone you know. Love God and love your neighbor in your prayers.
2. Find a way to glorify King Jesus in the eyes of someone today.
3. Devote 30 minutes to reading God's word or listening to it being read to you.
4. Use your talents: Choose one thing to do for someone in need.
5. Send an encouraging text, letter or message to someone.

I pray that when we accomplish these tasks, it will help us close our eyes in sleep, content that we had a good day in the service of our God.

Why Is The Way To Salvation So Narrow?

Jesus makes an observation that runs counter to a culture that says everyone is right and no one's truth is any more important than another's truth. The Lord says:

“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.” (Matthew 7:13-14 ESV).

There are some reasons we can eliminate right off the bat as to why few will find this path:

1. It's not because the Lord doesn't want many people to find the narrow path: 2 Peter 3:9 tells us that the Lord is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. John 3:16 says that God gave His Son

for the world that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

2. It's not because the path is too hard to find: God does desire that man seek after Him, but as Paul tells the Athenians, man may grope for God, but He is not far from us. Hebrews tells us that we must have faith to please God but God is a rewarder of all who diligently seek Him. Anyone who seeks after God can find Him.

3. It is not because the narrow way is too hard: This is not to say that the way is easy, but it is not so hard to travel that many people will not be able to travel it. God will equip everyone who chooses to travel the narrow path with the strength and grace to successfully travel it.

So, why will there be few who can find the narrow path? It doesn't have anything to do with man's ability or God's desire. It has to do with man's desires. The narrow path represents a way of life that is forged by God Himself. It is a way of life that forces man to lay down his life and take up the life of King Jesus.

The narrow way dictates our behaviors, our thoughts and our submission to God in everything. So, as man stands on the broad path leading to destruction, he must make a conscious decision to step off that path and step onto the narrow path. Yet, most men will continue on the broad path leading to destruction. Why?

1. Some men will not seek: It's as simple as that. In order to find the path leading to eternal life, we must be seeking it. If we are content with the broad path we are on, we will never find the path leading to life. Psalm 10:4 says:

“In the pride of his face the wicked does not seek him; all his thoughts are, “There is no God.”

2. Some seek Him, but choose not to walk the narrow path: It's one thing to seek the Lord but it's another thing to conform our lives when we see what must be done to travel the narrow path. This is what happened to the rich young ruler who was seeking eternal life. Jesus knew what was keeping him off the narrow path and when told, the young man made the choice to stay on the broad path:

“Jesus said to him, “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.” (Matthew 19:21-22 ESV).

3. Some start down the path, but quickly decide that they miss the broad path: The promise of eternal life is a powerful draw for men. Ecclesiastes says that God has put eternity in our hearts. It is something that we all yearn for to some degree. That yearning will often cause us to step onto the narrow path, but soon after, return to our life of sin, making shipwreck of our faith

as Paul says. Jesus, in the parable of the Sower, tells us that the rocky ground will cause people to return to the broad path after receiving the word with joy:

“And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away.” (Mark 4:16-17 ESV).

So, when Jesus says the narrow way is a path that has a few who find it, it's important for us to understand why it is so hard to find. It is not God's fault. He has made it findable, accessible, travelable, and wide enough to handle all who wish to travel it.

It is hard to find because:

1. We don't want to find it
2. We don't want to travel it, or
3. We choose to return to the broad path after we experience traveling on the narrow path.

In any case, few will find it because, and only because, our heart will reject it in one way or another.

But the narrow path is the path full of promise. It has a God who loves us and a God who walks the path with us. It has a God who traveled the path perfectly before us and has cleared all obstacles for us. It is a path where Jesus gives His grace so that we can overcome all the sin that would entice us to step off the narrow path and back on the broad path.

The narrow path is the path that all can, and will travel if it is what we seek. And our Lord has equipped all that is needed for the few who choose to travel it successfully to the end.

When we suffer, we are tempted to wonder why the Lord did not prevent our suffering.

When we fall, we are tempted to wonder why the Lord did not keep our steps steady.

When we are sick or when death visits, we wonder where the Lord is and why He allowed this to happen.

Like Job's friends, we often see a life that is good, a life of abundance, a life of ease and say, “See, the Lord is with me and blesses.”

Yes, all blessings flow from God. But some of the greatest blessings

cannot come unless there is first the struggle.

How can God lift up unless there is first a fall? Let us not lose faith in the fall, but rejoice in the lifting up.

How can God heal unless there is first pain and illness? Let us not question the Lord when sickness and pain come, but rejoice when healing is given by the Lord.

How can there be a resurrection unless there first be a death? Let us not lose heart when death visits, but be ready to rejoice when the Lord makes us victorious over death with a resurrected perfect body.

How can there be deliverance unless there is first an oppression? Let us not see our oppression as an abandonment of God, but rejoice in the deliverance given by the sovereign God.

How can there be providence of our needs unless there is first a lacking of our needs? Let us not lose faith when we lack, but rejoice when we receive from the hand of God.

In all things, it is not in self-sufficiency that we experience the might, the power, and the grace of God. It is in the deepest need, where there is nowhere else to turn, that we experience the fullness of God and His presence in our lives.

Some of you may know that I am working on writing a book on God's sovereignty. What I thought would be a relatively straight forward book has proven to be a rich, deep and challenging endeavor. I am thoroughly enjoying the studying I am doing and yet, I am taking on the biggest challenge of my life.

I was talking to my brother-in-law, Tom Pledger, last night and here are a couple of observations I discussed with him that I can share with you now:

1. The sovereignty of God presses against the limits of mortal man to comprehend. No matter how much we study, pray or reason, God is so far higher than us, that we may not ever be able to truly understand every aspect of His sovereignty.

2. There are fundamental truths that will help us circle back to solid foundations when our reason starts to spiral us away from truth, namely that God can do anything, God answers to no one, and God is perfect in all ways. There are certainly other truths to anchor in, but these help us stay grounded in our understanding of His sovereignty.

3. The book of Job doesn't focus on the problem of suffering as much as it squarely focuses on God's sovereignty. This may have been one of the biggest revelations that my study has yielded to me so far. I am excited to

share my thoughts with you on this lesson in my book.

So, my ask of you is to perhaps mention me in your prayers before the Father today that I might have wisdom and discernment to complete this work and present it in a way that is in line with truth and in a way that glorifies God and brings honor to His name.

My plan is to publish this book this year, but I will not let an arbitrary timeline dictate its publication. I will publish it when it is ready. Saying that, I have no reason to believe that I will not be able to publish it this year. This is the fourth book I will have published, so I do understand the realities that are before me.

Thanks to all who have encouraged me in this effort and for all who pray for me.

When the Lord brings judgment, He knows how to judge the guilty and protect His servants. Unlike armies that rain down missiles on the soldiers and the innocent, indiscriminately destroying all in their path, God knows how to rain down His judgment with precision.

Judgment was coming upon the people and Zephaniah the prophet warned the people what they needed to do to avoid judgment- keep themselves under the rule of their God.

“Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, who do his just commands; seek righteousness; seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the anger of the LORD.” (Zephaniah 2:3 ESV).

That didn't mean they would not be brought out of their land, but it meant that the Lord knows how to protect His people in the midst of His judgment.

We live in a world of uncertainty. A world of sin and violence. A world where people see what they want and take it by force from those who have. A world where life is not worth much and a world where people look to the strong and not to the righteous.

Yet in the midst of such a world, God calls us to be holy; to be faithful; to do good and not to do evil. Whether it is His judgment or the evils in the world, our God knows how to protect His people.

That doesn't mean that we will not experience the effects of the evil around us, but it means that when the evil may come upon us, God will be there that we may be able to endure. More importantly, if God brings judgment, He knows how to strike the wicked and protect His people in the midst of His judgment.

Let the words of Zephaniah comfort us that we serve a God who knows how to punish the guilty and protect His people in the midst of His wrath which He may pour out upon the evil people we live with.

When I study the sovereignty of God, I see that God is truly in control. As men, we ponder, “How can even God break the mighty?”

But God can exert His will in ways we cannot fathom.

He doesn’t need to raise up a stronger enemy.

He doesn’t need to bring a famine or pestilence.

He doesn’t need to send a storm to destroy.

Sometimes God can be creative in ways beyond us.

He has many arrows in His quiver and can use any one of them to accomplish His purpose.

Sometimes He just brings in stupid people who do not know how to handle the strength, wealth, and wisdom a people have built up to make themselves invincible.

Consider...

“therefore, behold, I will again do wonderful things with this people, with wonder upon wonder; and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hidden.” (Isaiah 29:14 ESV).

Or...

“and the spirit of the Egyptians within them will be emptied out, and I will confound their counsel; and they will inquire of the idols and the sorcerers, and the mediums and the necromancers;” (Isaiah 19:3 ESV).

The lesson: Never paint God into a corner as to how He can accomplish His purpose. He can do so in ways we can never fathom and no country on earth today is beyond His reach.

Not one.

In Matthew 9, we read about a decision Jesus makes that should be dear

to most of us. When we think of people like Abraham, Moses, Daniel, Paul and the great men of faith, it may be hard for us to see how someone like us can fit into this Kingdom.

We know the truth. We are sinners. Though we strive in our hearts, we are weak. We trip over the same sins day after day. Not that we are not trying to overcome, but in humility, we realize how weak we are. And then we look at these strong pillars of faith, and we ask, “Where do we fit in regarding the Kingdom? Is there a place for me?”

And then Jesus does something in Matthew 9 that amazes us. He calls Matthew (Levi) to follow Him. And not just to follow Him, but soon to be an Apostle:

“As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he rose and followed him.” (Matthew 9:9 ESV).

Here was a rich man whose riches brought him no honor. Matthew was a Jew who was despised by his people for working with the Romans. Yet as a Jew, he could never fully embrace the Gentiles who employed him. So, he lived in isolation between two peoples, a man who had no home or respect from anyone in his life.

The only ones who understood him were the other misfits like him. So, he gathered with other Jewish tax collectors, the only place where he could find acceptance... Until Jesus, the Son of God, crossed his path.

So, it is natural that when this famous Rabbi should not only look upon him, but also invite him into fellowship, Matthew would get up and leave his tax booth and follow. And immediately, he gathered all of the other misfits in his life to dine with him.

“And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples.” (Matthew 9:10 ESV).

Yes, this Rabbi would not only invite Matthew to follow him, but He would also dine with his friends. Perhaps this was the only time these hated men ever dined with someone other than another tax collector since choosing their profession.

To some, this may not be a big deal. But to those of us who have ever felt that we were misfits in some way or another, this is monumental. That Jesus does not overlook those whom men overlook. Yes, we have a place with the Messiah, the Creator of the universe, who pauses along the path just to look upon us and say, “Follow Me.”

We may not be a Paul, or Moses, or Abraham, but many of us can be a

Matthew. And the most powerful Being in the universe will actually come in and dine with us... of all people, with us.

What a wonderful savior we serve.

“And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.” (Hebrews 9:27-28 ESV).

I wonder how many have the wrong idea about what Judgment Day will be like. I wonder if some see it as a courtroom drama where we will be able to stand before Jesus and give a defense against any accusation that is brought against us and if we are persuasive enough, we can perhaps convince the King to find in our favor.

That’s not the way the final Judgment is portrayed in Scripture. There will be no witness stand, no defense to put on. By the time we make that appointment, we will be there for one reason: to hear the final eternal judgment laid upon us.

Sure, we may protest the sentence as we see in Matthew 25, but there will be no defense. The reality is that the trial is taking place as we speak. Two sides are putting forth their best case for your life: The god of this world will entice with a life of sin and self-indulgence, while the Lamb of God will present a life based upon His word and a life of holiness.

We will choose one or the other. Those are the only two options we have in this world. If we think that there is a third way to avoid these two options, then we are deceiving ourselves and choosing the way of the god of this world.

So, the trial is taking place now for each of us. Life is that trial. We are participants whether we want to be or not. Now is the time to convince through our submission and walk of life.

In the final Judgment, we are there for one reason: to receive our fate based upon the outcome of the trial of life. We all need to stand with the One true God who created all and Who will judge us by His words on that day.

So, I am in the book of Jeremiah for my daily Bible reading. What a tough work this prophet had. Not only did he have to prophesy doom to Judah, but God told him not to pray for the people or intercede for them.

Here are a few powerful words from Jeremiah that we will all do good to reflect and meditate on today.

(Refusing to let the loving chastisement of God do its good work):

“In vain have I struck your children; they took no correction; your own sword devoured your prophets like a ravening lion.” (Jeremiah 2:30 ESV).

(Let us approach God in humility and put our trust in Him, not in ourselves):

“Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches,

but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.” (Jeremiah 9:23-24 ESV).

(Let us give glory and honor to God, recognizing who He is):

“There is none like you, O LORD; you are great, and your name is great in might.” (Jeremiah 10:6 ESV).

(Trust that God knows best and that He will correct us in love, not anger):

“I know, O LORD, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps. Correct me, O LORD, but in justice; not in your anger, lest you bring me to nothing.” (Jeremiah 10:23-24 ESV).

And The Lord Heard It

One of the failings of humans is that we get so comfortable in hiding

things from others. We do so for a number of reasons. Perhaps we don't want other people to know our deep dark secrets; or maybe it's because we feel a sense of entitlement to do what we want to do without dealing with a judgmental attitude.

When we do what we know is wrong, we want to do it in secret. And sometimes, we just like our privacy because there is no responsibility to others if no one knows what we are doing. For whatever the reason, good or bad, we all can get really good at hiding things from others.

The truth is that many times we get away with hiding things from others. Some people go years with a secret before anyone ever finds out. And the longer we get by with hiding things from others, the more confident we get in believing we can get away with hiding forever.

This is bad enough when we do this with each other. Lives or trusts can be destroyed when we hide things we should not be hiding. Perhaps we are involved in a secret sexual sin or a substance abuse habit. Maybe we are gaining our livelihood in an ill-begotten manner or we are skating through school on the work of others. Maybe we're cheating the government on our taxes or misrepresenting the work we're doing to our employers.

Whatever the secret sin is, it may often start out small enough, but these sins have a way of ballooning up on us. And before we know it, we find ourselves embroiled in things we would have never had thought we'd be involved in. This is why secret sins can be so cancerous.

"It started out so small... I don't know how it grew to be this bad" is the refrain we can often hear when we start down the path of secret sins. And when we begin to test the secret waters with God, our destruction is close at hand.

"Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil." (Ecclesiastes 8:11 ESV).

When we first sin against God, we are often covered with guilt. But the more we do it, the harder our hearts become and the more comfortable we feel that our secret sin is hidden from even God. We feel that way in our heart even when we know in our intellect that this is not true.

But the more time that passes, the less our secret sins bother us. We need to always remember that God is not man. We may be successful at hiding things from our spouse, our boss, and even the government. But there is zero chance of God not seeing all that we do in secret.

"But if you will not do so, behold, you have sinned against the LORD, and be sure your sin will find you out." (Numbers 32:23 ESV).

Our sins will find us out. That should be a sobering thought. Adam and Eve tried to hide from God, but He saw them. Achan tried to hide his sin from God, but God called him out. And the same is true for every sin we try to hide from God. It's not that He will eventually find it out, but God sees it all along as we engage in the secret sin.

In Numbers 12, Moses' siblings, Aaron and Miriam spoke against Moses and elevated themselves equal to him in the eyes of God. This was brought about by a beef they had with their brother's choice of a wife.

“Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married, for he had married a Cushite woman.” (Numbers 12:1 ESV).

Having this against Moses, they tried to lower his esteem in the eyes of the people.

“And they said, “Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?” And the LORD heard it.” (Numbers 12:2 ESV).

What a chilling end to verse 2. “And the LORD heard it.”

As we struggle with secret sins or try to hide things from others, let us remember that nothing is ever really hidden.

God knows all.

God sees all.

God hears all.

If we can truly keep this in our minds at all times, then it will help us make better choices when Satan whispers in our ears, “Go ahead, no one will ever know...” This is perhaps the most destructive advice we can follow. Because even if we can pull the wool over each other's eyes, we cannot pull the wool over God's eyes.

Secret sins are only secret to mere mortal men. They are never secret to God. And the sooner we learn this and live by it, the better off we will be. When David committed his secret sin with Bathsheba, many people ended up dying as a result of his sins- Bathsheba's husband, their son, and all the men who died in his family because the sword would never depart from his house on account of this sin.

Yet there is always a way out. Nothing is ever too far gone that God is not strong enough to help- if we but seek His help. Read Psalm 51. It is written by a man who was given to secret sin but reached out to the Lord for help. It is in this passage that we find the beloved verse:

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within

me.” (Psalm 51:10 ESV).

Cleansing can be ours as soon as we come to fully understand that when we even speak things in secret, we remember...

“And the LORD heard it.”

“I spoke to you in your prosperity, but you said, 'I will not listen.' This has been your way from your youth, that you have not obeyed my voice.” (Jeremiah 22:21 ESV).

I fear that the wisdom of the age has settled into the hearts of many so firmly that we kick against the council of the Lord.

My life

My rights

My pleasures

My decisions

I fear that we have forgotten:

What it is to wholly submit

What it is to lose self

What it is to obey

What it is to fully trust and depend

I fear that many will only submit under our conditions

I fear that we will submit to the Lord only in the way that seems right to us as we disdain the notion that we lose our will to another's.

I fear, because I know what the Lord says about His great Day of Judgment.

Will it be the day we expect in our heart?

I fear not...

Blessed are the people who know how to kneel

Blessed are the people who know how to submit

Blessed are the people who know how to learn and to obey

Blessed are the people who know how to wholly trust in the Lord and fully depend each day upon Him alone

Blessed are the people who know how to turn their heart away from the wisdom of this age and listen to the Word of the Lamb of God.

“I spoke to you in your prosperity, but you said, 'I will not listen.' This has been your way from your youth, that you have not obeyed my voice.” (Jeremiah 22:21 ESV).

I am in the book of Jeremiah in my daily Bible reading. This prophet had perhaps one of the toughest jobs of all the prophets. He was prophesying God's judgment upon the king and on Judah as the judgment was happening.

This caused him to be beaten and imprisoned multiple times because the people did not like the words that he prophesied. False prophets were speaking peace and victory to counter the words of the Lord that came to Jeremiah.

Have you ever felt that way? You stand in the midst of a perverse and crooked generation as you speak the truths of Jesus only to listen to false teachers come behind you and preach a gospel of ease, prosperity and indulgence?

In Jeremiah's days, as the king listened to the words written by Baruch, Jeremiah's scribe, he would cut the scroll up in pieces and throw them into the fire as though that would destroy what was written on them:

“As Jehudi read three or four columns, the king would cut them off with a knife and throw them into the fire in the fire pot, until the entire scroll was consumed in the fire that was in the fire pot.

Yet neither the king nor any of his servants who heard all these words was afraid, nor did they tear their garments.” (Jeremiah 36:23-24 ESV).

Is that what is happening to people around you as you teach from your mouth God's word? Are people cutting the words into pieces and throwing them into the fire as though that will destroy the message you are bringing?

Worse, do we read the words of our Lord and King Jesus and because we do not like what He says, do we cut up what we do not like and throw them into the fire so we do not have to listen to Him?

Have we become so hardened to the message of Jesus that we can cavalierly throw away His message to us, and do so without tearing our garments and without being afraid?

We can burn the message all we want, but that will never destroy the words of King Jesus.

Let us be the ones who revere King Jesus' words and listen to His council in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. Let them be healing to us and a light to our heart.

Let us endure the judgments of those who hear and revile us for speaking the truth. For in the end, His word will endure and shall never be destroyed by man, and His words that we speak and live by will judge all men on that

great Day.

What does hope in Jesus look like?

How is His Way so different from anything that man can devise?

One way we can see a plan that could only come from the mind of Divinity is in these reunions:

The faithful spouse who dies with an unbelieving mate, but the unbelieving mate is later won over and in heaven, the reunion that only Jesus could make possible happens.

The evil man who lifts his hand against a child of God to murder him but later learns to fear God and when he is executed for his deeds embraces in the presence of Jesus the one whose life he had taken.

The parent who cries over the path that their child has taken and dies never seeing their beloved offspring submit to the Lord, but embracing their child in Paradise because their child later humbled himself to King Jesus.

I would love to have witnessed the reunion Paul had with Stephen, the martyr he had slain, when the executioner's ax ended Paul's life.

What other teachings make reunions like these possible?

Where can man find hope like the hope found in Jesus?

Where else can man find redemption for the irredeemable?

No mortal man could think of such wonderful things as the Lord has thought for us.

In weakness, we serve in power, for it is in His power that the impossible reunions are made possible.

This is the power of the Word of the Living God and King we serve.

In Matthew 3, John the Baptist comes preparing the way for the Messiah. As he preaches a message of repentance and the Kingdom, the Pharisees and Sadducees come to be baptized by him. But he knows their true motives.

“But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” (Matthew 3:7 ESV).

These men were the elite of society. They were more concerned about

being in the center of attention, and Jesus would soon condemn them by saying that these conceited men had the extent of their reward.

But John calls out their arrogance and lets them know that they were not as great as they thought they were in their own eyes. They felt smug in their ancestry:

“And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.” (Matthew 3:9 ESV).

What a statement! I would have loved to see the look on their face when this country preacher refused to cater to their pride. But what he said wasn't too far off. God really could raise from stones children of Abraham... How do I know?

Because He did something even greater. He raised up children of Abraham from Gentiles.

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.” (Galatians 3:28-29 ESV).

Isn't that wonderful? We are legitimate children of Abraham because God raised us up in Christ to be so! That means that we are legitimate heirs according to the promise He made to Abraham, the promise that even predates the Law of Moses.

There is a powerful lesson we should learn from nature.

When the Creator came to earth to live among us, nature bowed to its Creator's every command.

When He said, “Silence!”, The storms obeyed.

When He said, “Carry Me.”, the waters bore His weight as He walked upon it.

When He said, “Gather.”, the fish swam into the fishermen's' nets.

When He said, “Leave.”, the viruses and bacteria fled the sick He healed.

When He said, “Open.”, the deaf ears heard and the blind eyes saw.

When He said, “Live.”, the dead bodies received back their spirits.

Nature, and all of creation bowed to every word of their Creator without fail.

All but one.

When Jesus says, “Come unto Me.”, we say, “No.”

When Jesus says, “Obey My Words.”, we say, “I will do what I want to do.”

We would do well by looking at the wisdom that all nature displays when in the presence of its Creator and learn to obey His words.

This morning, I will be reading during worship service. The passage assigned to me is Mark 2:3-12. This passage dovetails nicely with the Gospel meeting that brother Ralph Walker brought to us on Fellowship, or Koinonia.

Here is a passage where the venue that Jesus is teaching is so full that it could be considered “standing room only”. But four men had a paralyzed friend who desperately needed to see Jesus. So, they brought their friend to Him in a pallet.

Koinonia. Fellowship. They were sharing in their friends' suffering.

And when they ran into roadblocks, they didn't give up on their friend. These friends would travel through every roadblock placed before them until travel became impossible and they exhausted every avenue for their friend.

So, they lifted their friend on the roof, cut a hole in it, and lowered him down to Jesus... right in the middle of His lesson! What wonderful koinonia! What wonderful fellowship! Sharing in the suffering of their friend and providing what they could for him.

We know the ending. Because of their koinonia, Jesus gave what they sought:

“I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.” (Mark 2:11 ESV).

When we have koinonia, we have something stronger than anything we could ever have alone.

To see the series on Ralph's lessons on Fellowship, check out the Facebook page for the Campbell Road Church of Christ.

<https://www.facebook.com/campbellroadcoc>

“You give them something to eat.”

I love this statement of Jesus. You remember the time when the disciples were with the 5000 who were in the desolate place and hungry- the disciples told Jesus that it was about time to send them away so they could get something to eat before they became faint from hunger.

“Now when it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves.” (Matthew 14:15 ESV).

And then He says it:

“But Jesus said, “They need not go away; you give them something to eat.” (Matthew 14:16 ESV).

We know the story. Jesus ends up taking a few fishes and loaves and creating a bounty that leaves everyone full. Now I know that this was a bonafide miracle, but I suspect that not many of us are expecting Jesus to do amazing things through us, are we?

Here’s my challenge for us today: The next time we see a need that looks impossible for us to fill, let’s remember the words of Jesus to the apostles in the feeding of the 5000. “You give them something to eat.”

Don’t focus on the enormity of the need or the impossibility of meeting it. Those are the situations where Jesus excels. These are the times when Jesus gets to amaze us.

When we see the need, let us pray, “Lord, here am I. Use me to glorify You if it is Your will.”

With all my heart, I believe that God can work through us today in ways that may amaze us if we are open to be used for His glory. With all my heart, I think Jesus can glorify His name by saying to us, “You feed them” and then provide the power to make it happen.

Let us wait on the Lord today to see if He wills to use us to glorify His name in ways we could never imagine. Let’s be open to the amazing ways that the Lord can use us today.

God
Man

Holy

Filthy rags

Truth

Lies

Selfless

Self-Centered

Light

Dark

CROSS

God

Jesus

Man

Holy

Jesus

Holy

Truth

Jesus

Truth

Selfless

Jesus

Selfless

Light

Jesus

Light

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” (2 Corinthians 5:17 ESV).

How could a good God sentence someone to eternal punishment in hell for the decisions made in a relatively short period of time? This is a question that has dogged men for ages and has led many to conclude that this is

impossible or that God is not good.

I wonder if our view of eternity, punishment, reward, God's goodness and severity are lacking due to our inability to truly understand the reality that exists? Does God use things we understand to try to explain things that are well beyond our ability to understand?

I know and acknowledge that there is a risk of trying to explain what may be beyond our comprehension to fully understand. Still, I wonder if we may be missing the true bliss and horror of what it means to be in heaven or hell.

One way that God explains this eternal reality is by calling it a judgment, punishment and reward. Hell is described as a place of pain from fire that never quenches. An eternity of this kind of pain seems unbearable because we know the intense pain of burning. But does fire as we know it exist in the spiritual realm? Perhaps... perhaps not... we do not know. But if it doesn't exist in the spiritual realm, then for something so painful that we understand to be used to describe something we may not be able to comprehend, tells us how bad it will be in hell.

Hell is also described as a place devoid of God's presence. At the same time, heaven is described as a place in the perpetual presence of God.

Heaven is a place where there will be zero pain, zero tears, and eternal joy and bliss. The presence of evil will be banished because we will be in the presence of God where evil cannot exist.

Can the presence or void of God be at the heart of the nature of heaven and hell? Can being in the presence of God be the fulfillment of everything that is pure, joy, and bliss because the Author of all good things is flowing His goodness unchecked?

Similarly, if we are shut off from the presence of all that is good and we are in a state where God's presence is void, would there be nothing for us except what is wretched, what is painful, what is evil?

Could it be that what makes heaven, heaven is the fact that we are in the presence of God and what makes hell, hell is that God's presence is not there? Even in our world where sin abounds, there is goodness because God still has a presence here. We receive good, even when we are evil, because God's presence is still here to some degree. Even our very breath is made possible by the presence of God.

When we experience the evil and pain here on earth, we also experience the joy we can have because of God's presence, and all blessings that flow from Him. It is in Him we live and move and have our very being, even in the presence of rebellion and evil.

I don't understand all that there is regarding the afterlife, but if the pain and punishment of hell is tied to us not being in His presence, and therefore, never receiving anything that is good which flows from Him, then all you have left is wretchedness and pain. Man will descend into his vilest nature with no God to embrace.

Perhaps it is not an uncaring God Who punishes out of anger and sentences someone to an eternal hell. Perhaps it is a loving God who knows just how bad an existence will be for those who refuse to live in His presence. Perhaps He is trying to get us to understand how painful, how utterly miserable an existence away from His presence will be; a presence where there will never again be any good flowing to us because we will never again be in the presence of the Source of all good things.

Could it be that only those who fully submit to God and accept Him according to His word will be the ones who spend eternity in heaven? Or those who accept a relationship with Him that says, “Yes, I submit fully to You and want to live eternally in Your presence.”

Could it be that those who will be sentenced to hell will be those who say, “No, I will not have You rule over me. I will live my way.” Could it be that when judgment happens, those who reject God are given what they want in their hearts- independence from the sustaining God?

I don’t know how all this really works but if Jesus is sounding the alarm of choosing an existence without Him, perhaps communicating how horrible it will be must be defined in the harshest of terms- pain, burning, eternity of darkness. If we choose to not be with God, then we have the vilest existence awaiting us.

If the nature of heaven and hell are best defined as the consequences of our relationship with or without Him, then we can see why a good God stands at the door and knocks; why He is longsuffering; why He gives His grace to overcome. But in the end, if we say that we still do not want to live under His rule, then He will allow us to make our decision to choose an existence without Him. If we reject the things that bring ourselves into subjection to Him, so that we can overcome sin through Him, then He will judge us by those things and give us what we truly want- freedom from Him and all that comes from Him, for all eternity.

Freedom from the One who sustains and upholds all things may be the ultimate definition of hell and torment.

King Jesus, 33 A.D.:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” (Matthew 28:19 ESV).

Man, 2022 A.D.:

“He didn't mean that...”

I am in the book of Ezekiel in my daily Bible reading. In the passage I am in, Ezekiel is telling of the impending judgment upon the sinful people of God. Yet, the mercies of the Lord are still seen in that God implores the people to repent. Listen to the earnest pleas from God, Who is about to bring judgment upon these people:

“Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord GOD. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin.” (Ezekiel 18:30 ESV).

Even in the pronounced judgment, God is still giving a way to life. This is God's way. Today, we live under the promise of Judgment. Peter says that the Lord will return as a thief comes at night- with no warning. Any moment, the Lord may come for final judgment and King Jesus is imploring us to repent lest iniquity be our ruin.

“Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel?” (Ezekiel 18:31 ESV).

David prayed that God would create in him a clean heart. Here, Ezekiel instructs the Israelites who face this judgment to prepare by making themselves a new heart and a new spirit. Do you know what this tells me? That no one is so far gone, that the power of God's Word cannot change them.

No one has a heart so hardened that he cannot turn a heart of stone into a heart of flesh if that is what he desires. It is never, “I cannot change.” It is always, “I will not change.” The choice is always there and God always stands ready to help us change our hearts.

“For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD; so turn, and live.” (Ezekiel 18:32 ESV).

Lest anyone put blame on God when judgment comes, this is the eternal truth. God never wants to see anyone die. He will equip men with everything they need to live. If we die, it is our choice not to bring ourselves into submission to God.

We have a choice today: To live unto ourselves and be under condemnation of the coming judgment or submit to King Jesus and live. The new, clean heart can be ours if we want it or we can keep the heart of stone that follows after iniquity and self-centered living.

In the end, whether we receive judgment or deliverance, it will be because of the choice we make and the path we choose to follow. Choose wisely and live.

Sometimes I wish God would send an angel and tell me plainly what decisions He wants me to make.

Sometimes I wish that God would dump into my head a perfect understanding of every passage I read in His Word.

Sometimes I wish that God would cause me to find favor in the eyes of everyone I interact with.

Alas, if only I had these things....

Hmm....

I wonder if God sent me an angel, would the message be one of God's disappointments in me because I am not making the decisions that His Word is able to train me to make.

I wonder if God has been eagerly waiting for me to spend time in His Word so He can add to me wisdom and discernment.

I wonder if the favor I seek in others come from a life of selfless service and not in people bowing before me to service me the way I want favor to be presented to me?

Perhaps God is ready to fulfill all that I am seeking, but in His way, and not the way I am seeking it.

Perhaps it's time for me to reexamine what I want and learn to align it with what God wants for me.

It's happening before our eyes. The utter disregard for God is becoming pervasive in our society. I fear that long gone are the days where we as a people have a respect and reverence for God in the public square.

I still believe that a large number of people have a healthy respect for God in that they will not deny He exists and will claim that He has an absolute right to rule over all. Am I being too optimistic? Perhaps. But something in

me still believes that there are more who at least profess God than who deny Him.

But that number is quickly dwindling. Those who outright deny God are becoming more and more emboldened to speak out against Him and all who profess a faith in Him, and they do so with the cover of powerful institutions who once would have never had been part of this blasphemy.

And it is going beyond speaking out against God. The enemies of Jesus are now impugning the goodness and fidelity to society anyone who claims to be a follower of Jesus, anyone who professes a faith in God. Guilt by association is becoming more common.

Now, it is merely an accusation where those who profess faith are verbally maligned. Where will it go tomorrow? I fear what our children will be forced to endure. Have we adequately prepared them for what they will face or have we grown up at ease by being around a vast majority who believed the way we believe? Have we assumed that our children, too, would be in the company of a majority who will give God His due in deference?

I fear we are a society in transition; not having totally abandoned a recognition of God, but raising up a generation who is more brazen in speaking out against Him and His existence. And as the old guard dies off, will this societal balance of respect for God lean heavily toward the ones who deny Him and His existence?

April 15, 2022, The New York Times published an essay by author Shalom Auslander titled, "In This Time of War, I Propose We Give Up God." In this essay, the author said that it's time that we pass over God, for He is an evil God who has been guilty of numerous atrocities, and thus, is not worthy of our emulation or obedience. The author claimed that if God was a mere mortal, He would be dragged before the Hague and convicted of war crimes against humanity.

And this essay was printed in one of the most venerated institutions in our country. In this post, it is not my intent to defend God against blasphemies like this. But I do want us to think about the fact that our world is changing. Lines are being redrawn. Long gone are the days where we could follow a *laissez-faire* approach to God and be carried along by the ebb-and-flow of society in our belief in God.

The days are here now where we will have to make a decision. Do we believe in a God who created everything or will we follow the ever-increasing chorus of voices in our society who say that God is dead, or that He deserves to be dead? Perhaps the time is here, or almost here, where we will have to start paying a personal price for our faith in God.

I don't know how this will all play out for us, but I caution that we need to be prepared to take our stand for or against the God of heaven. If the angry mob in society continues to get their way, they will not be content to let us have our private freedom to choose our personal beliefs in a God. We

will be urged, shamed, and even threatened to publicly renounce any ties with a God so evil that we would convict Him as a war criminal.

And there is the arrogance that I dread. When God no longer becomes the Judge in His perfect wisdom and justice; perfect grace and conviction. When we topple Him from His rightful place as Creator who is sovereign over all of His creation. When we outgrow our need for Him and evolve past Him.

Yes, our society has changed. But God has not. He is still sovereign and still able to accomplish all of His desires. And if history has taught us anything it is that God will turn man over to our desires when we no longer retain a knowledge of Him in our hearts. And that is when it gets scary for us. No matter how hard we try, we can never put God on trial. But He will put each of us on trial one day.

Let us be careful who we listen to as society seems to turn away from God. There will be a day of reckoning for them, and for us personally, for the choices we make.

If This Man Were A Prophet, He Would Have Known

Have you noticed how many times that the Scriptures say that Jesus knew what someone was thinking, or what someone was reasoning in their hearts? That amazes me, because only God can read the hearts of men, unless God gives that gift of discernment to someone. But with Jesus, it was because of who He was... God on earth. He could know what was in the hearts of men because He was God, the One who created the hearts.

This was a mark of the Messiah that the Jews were waiting for. Isaiah 11 says this of the Shoot from the stump of Jesse:

“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. 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 the fear of the LORD.”

“And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek

of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.” (Isaiah 11:1-4 ESV).

In Luke 7, this is put to the test. Jesus is invited to the home of a Pharisee to dine with him. From what I’m told, the custom during this time was when a Rabbi or teacher was invited to someone’s home as a guest, the host would open his home to anyone who wanted to listen to the guest of honor speak. As the man of the hour would dine with the host, many would slip in and stand behind the table to hear the teachings. This seems to be the setting in Simon the Pharisee’s home.

“One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee’s house and reclined at table.” (Luke 7:36 ESV).

Among those who entered the Pharisee’s home this day was a sinful woman who put on an uncomfortable display for the people who were reclining at the table:

“And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment.” (Luke 7:37-38 ESV).

A woman.

A sinner.

And this woman touches the Messiah and kisses His feet, washing them with her tears and drying them with her hair, and anointing them with an expensive oil. What an unexpected show this must have been for everyone; and the people in the house seemed to know exactly who this woman was. All eyes were on Jesus. Surely, this man, if He were the Messiah, would know what kind of a woman she was. Well, read for yourself:

“Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner.” (Luke 7:39 ESV).

Simon, as Jesus would refer to him, knew the Scriptures. He was well aware of passages like Isaiah 11. He knew that the coming Messiah would have a discernment that was far beyond the ability of a regular man. And so, Simon reasons to himself.

And Jesus hears this man's self-talk. And the most amazing thing happens. Jesus opened His mouth and proved to this Pharisee that He is the fulfillment of passages like Isaiah 11. Not by telling him and the others who this woman was. Not by calling her out as a sinner. He proved who He was by not only reading the heart of Simon, but also responding to his self-talk.

“And Jesus answering said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” And he answered, “Say it, Teacher.” (Luke 7:40 ESV).

Jesus goes on by teaching him through a parable. But the most amazing thing to me is not the parable that Jesus spoke. It wasn't even the lesson that Jesus taught on forgiveness. It was that He was able to read the heart of the Pharisee and judge him just like Isaiah and the prophets said he would be able to do.

In one quick story, Jesus showed Simon that He did, indeed, know the sort of people who were interacting with Him. But it wasn't the sinful woman who Jesus was focusing on at this dinner party; it was the host.

I wonder if Simon ever got the irony of what Jesus did at this dinner party he threw. Did he see that Jesus was confirming that He was the Messiah by reading his heart, and answering his own question, “If this man were a prophet, he would have known...”

Jesus knew. He always knew. And when people would later approach Him, He would read their heart and love them; He would read their thoughts and get angry; He would read their minds and be amazed.

He did all these things because He indeed was the Messiah that the Scriptures foretold and He is the one in Whom we can rest our hope in today.

And do you know what? He can still read our hearts and minds. That is either the most comforting or disconcerting thing about King Jesus today. When it comes to us, the same can be said about how intimately He knows us. “If this man were a prophet, he would have known...”

Indeed, He still does know our every thought and He hears the self-talk we engage in proving still He is the fulfillment of the promised Messiah.

Why did Paul, a man who was a spiritual giant to the Jews throw it all away to become poor, beaten and despised by converting to the enemy?

Why did James and Jude, the brothers of Jesus, go from believing their brother was crazy to calling themselves His bondservants and authoring 2 of the 27 books of the New Testament?

Why did thousands of Jews turn their back on everything they knew to

worship a man who died a criminal's death on a Roman cross?

Why did Gentile pagans turn from everything they knew to pray to and worship a condemned poor man from a country subjugated by Rome?

Why was the world turned upside down as a river of people flowed into a Kingdom of a dead King who never sat on an earthly throne?

Because we all believed He rose from the dead

And we believe He ascended into Heaven

And we believe His Father seated Him on a throne at His right hand

And we believe He has prepared an eternal home in Heaven for us in His Father's house

And we believe He gives His people strength, grace and hope that no one can ever take away

And we know through Him, and only Him, we are all more than conquerors.

Today, I am reading in Jude and the Gospel of John. Jude was the physical brother of Jesus. Can you imagine growing up with Jesus as your brother?

Well, Jude was not an earnest disciple of his Brother while Jesus was alive. But something happened to change the way he believed in Jesus. John said,

“For not even his brothers believed in him.” (John 7:5 ESV).

And Mark tells us:

“Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, “He is out of his mind.” (Mark 3:20-21 ESV).

Yep, our man Jude, Jesus’ younger brother, thought his big brother was crazy. At least until the resurrection. Think about that. Having seen your brother crucified for being crazy, what would the impact be on you to see your big brother risen from the dead?

And Acts indicates that Jude and his brothers, sisters and mother all saw the resurrected Jesus and watched Him ascend into heaven. After that, we see the change- as the disciples were gathered in Jerusalem to wait for the coming of the Spirit, who was with them?

“All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his

brothers.” (Acts 1:14 ESV).

By this time, Jude was all in. No longer did he think his Brother was crazy. In fact, He never thought of himself as the little brother of Jesus after that... at least in the way it really counted. Listen to the relationship he boasted of having with Jesus:

“Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, To those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ.” (Jude 1:1 ESV).

Yes, Jesus’ little brother wrote one of the 27 letters of the New Testament we have. And he didn’t start it off by saying, “I am the brother of the Lord.” Rather, he called himself the servant of Jesus. A lot has to happen for a man to call himself a servant of his brother.

And a lot did happen. Jude now saw Jesus for who He truly was. Listen for yourself how he refers to the Man he grew up playing with as a child:

“For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.” (Jude 1:4 ESV).

Our only Master and Lord...

“Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe.” (Jude 1:5 ESV).

Jesus was the One who saved the Jews out of Egypt. Do you get what he is saying? Jesus was the God that they feared and worshiped, the God that Moses wrote of. This is coming from the pen of a man who once thought Jesus was crazy.

Jude then goes on to explain why we should be faithful to his Brother and he writes of the judgments Jesus had passed on people in the Old Testament as their God. And then he closes the letter with these words, leaving no doubt where he stands in relation to the One he grew up calling brother:

“Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.” (Jude 1:24-25 ESV).

And Jude is another reason I believe that Jesus is the Son of God, my Savior and my King.

2000 years ago, Jesus was seated on His throne.
Generation after generation, man has tried to dethrone him.
In the end, man died but the King continued to reign.
Whether life was long or short, each man died and was held for the Day of Judgment.
Jesus continued to reign.
No one, no nation, no army has yet to dethrone King Jesus, though many have tried.
All around us today, people are convinced they are the ones who will be successful in dethroning King Jesus.
But they will live and die, like the others, and be held for the Day of Judgment.
Who will you listen to? The word of the arrogant creation who lifts themselves up in pride...
Or the word of King Jesus that continues to live, continues to transform, continues to save?
Here is the reality... you, me, and everyone will kneel before King Jesus.
We will either do so now, by choice, or later as a conquered enemy.
And until that day, He will never cease reigning.
And we will never cease dying.
Choose to kneel before Him today. That is the only choice that makes any sense.

Things do not change. Cancel culture existed in the days of Jesus.

“(His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.)” (John 9:22 ESV).

Are we really surprised that Christians will have to face a cancel culture today?

So, what will we do? Will we comply to avoid being canceled or will we stand for the Truth knowing we face being canceled?

Let us prepare our hearts to rejoice if we are canceled rather than fret or fear. If man cancels us for our words and actions which are rooted in the Words of Jesus, then we have something to glory in.

Let us trust in Him rather than trust in self when faced with being canceled.

“Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” He answered, “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.” He said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.” (John 9:35-38 ESV).

Interesting thought to ponder...

If I were called today to stand before Jesus in judgment, and He judged me according to the same standard I judged others today, how would that go for me?

Would my judgment be strict or gracious?

Computer scientists can do amazing things with ones and zeros.

Nuclear physicists can harness the power of the atom for tremendous destruction or limitless profitable energy.

The preeminent architects can build the most magnificent structures.

The top military minds can conquer the world with lightning speed and overpowering might.

The best rocket scientists can put man into space and on foreign heavenly bodies.

And if Jesus was in the room with them, He'd know more than them all combined about quantum computing, splitting atoms, building skyscrapers that reach into the heavens, conquering any enemy, or building interstellar faster-than-light spacecrafts.

We are quick to marvel at the amazing things that the creation can do and yet we are much quicker to ignore the Creator who knows all things.

“What is that to you?”

I just finished the Gospel of John and this is the question that Jesus asked Peter.

This happened in the last chapter, after the crucifixion, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus had revealed himself while the apostles were fishing. In a callback to the time three years ago, when He first called Peter, Jesus again sent a multitude of fish into their nets, after they had fished all night with no success.

Overjoyed, they meet with Jesus at daybreak for a breakfast of loaves and fishes. Jesus even had the fire going and breakfast started for them:

“When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.” (John 21:9-10 ESV).

Jesus then asks Peter three times if Peter loves Him. And then Jesus lets Peter know that his profession of love and his responsibility to feed His sheep would lead to his death:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.”

(This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, “Follow me.” (John 21:18-19 ESV).

Then Peter asks the question that prompts Jesus’ response, “What is that to you?”

“Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who also had leaned back against him during the supper and had said, “Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?”

When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, “Lord, what about this man?” (John 21:20-21 ESV).

Peter is a lot like you and me, isn’t he? Jesus tells him plainly what he needs to do, and immediately, Peter wants to know if the other person will be expected to sacrifice the same.

It’s only fair, we reason, if we have to bear some cross, that the other

person will also have to bear the cross as well.

Why should we have to go through trials while others seem to skate by with no sacrifice, right?

But Jesus is Lord. He is sovereign. And Jesus teaches Peter in that moment the lesson of Who is the master and who is the servant.

Peter learned from Jesus' answer that no one can question the purpose of Jesus. We simply must be willing to be led where Jesus leads us, whether He leads us alone or with others.

“Jesus said to him, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!” (John 21:22 ESV).

Sometimes it is hard to lead the life of a Christian when we experience pain or trials, especially when it seems that others are allowed to serve having never to experience what we must bear.

It can be tempting to ask Jesus, “What about this person?”

But I suppose that the King's response to us would be much the same as it was for Peter: “What does it matter to you what I decide to do with this person? You focus on you.”

And the truth is that it is in this intimate, one-on-one relationship with the Creator that we get to draw closer to Him. It is often in our sorrows, trials and troubles that we get to experience Jesus in His fullness.

That was the gift that the Savior gave to Peter and that is the gift that He will offer us, if we can only learn not to worry about the next person, but focus on ourselves and the Savior alone.

What Would You Wish For?

What if you had a wish? Anything was yours, all you had to do was ask.

Would you wish for life-changing riches so you and your family were taken care of and that you'd have plenty to help those around you?

Would you ask for a long and healthy life so you would never have to face the pain of a broken body?

Would you ask for success in work, in business, or talent in a skill or sport so you could be at the top of your field?

Solomon was given a wish. This wish was from God Himself when he first became king as a young man.

His father David had just died a powerful, successful and beloved king and leader of God's people. Now, Solomon found himself in the shoes of his great father while those around him coveted his position. You remember...

“At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, “Ask what I shall give you.” (1 Kings 3:5 ESV).

This was his one wish. He was a man full of worry, doubt and steeped with feelings of inadequacies. And so, he asks...

“Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?” (1 Kings 3:9 ESV).

He could have asked for a long life, riches or to be set above his enemies. But he asks for wisdom. And his request to this wish warmed the Creator's heart:

“It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this.” (1 Kings 3:10 ESV).

What was it that pleased the Lord about his wish? I suspect that it is the same thing that warms His heart when we ask Him things today.

We ask the Lord for many things, which we are encouraged by God to do. Some of those things are for us. But at the heart of Solomon's request was for a gift that benefited others. He wanted wisdom, not for his own glory, but to serve the people of God.

When we go to the Lord in prayer for our wish, do we ask that we might consume our ask upon our own desires or do we ask for the benefit of others and for the glory of God?

We all have been invited to bring our wishes to God. Will we have the heart of Solomon and ask for things that please the Lord or will we ask for things that benefit ourselves?

Never underestimate the power of God and never underestimate that which pleases Him.

I was reading the book of Obadiah this morning. It is a book of judgment against the people of Edom for their sins against Israel in the time of need and distress.

God says that His judgment against the people of Edom would be utter and complete. Unlike Israel who would have a remnant preserved, Edom would be destroyed so that there would not even be gleanings of the grapes left after the gatherers came.

This is a poetic way of saying that God would wipe Edom off the face of the earth because of their sins. And that is what happened. The Herods who ruled over Israel were the last of the lineage of the Edomites and once they faded from history, the Edomites as a people were lost to history. The prophecy of Obadiah was fulfilled.

But here is the chilling warning to those of us who live in America. Edom was a proud nation because they lived in the mountains making it nearly impossible for any enemy to attack and conquer them. This made Edom prideful and arrogant.

“The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rock, in your lofty dwelling, who say in your heart, “Who will bring me down to the ground?” (Obadiah 1:3 ESV).

Today, we are separated by two oceans from the world and we dwell in a land where our military might make us a fortress unlike any nation that ever existed. But God would show Edom that they were never so safe that God could not touch them.

“Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, from there I will bring you down, declares the LORD.” (Obadiah 1:4 ESV).

God performed His will upon Edom, even in their arrogance and pride. No prophet has spoken against America, but let us not fall into the pride and arrogance that condemned the people of Edom by putting our faith and trust in the fortress we have built up for ourselves. For nothing can escape the might and power of our King who is Lord of Lords and King of Kings.

“The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!” (Luke 10:17 ESV).

Have you ever had that feeling? Maybe not having demons subject to you in the name of Jesus, but getting excited when you realize what you are able to do as a follower of Jesus?

Things that without Him, you'd say, "There is NO way I could do that!"
There is No way I could break this sinful habit!
There is NO way I could step in to serve others so unselfishly!
There is NO way I could proclaim the Gospel to anyone and watch it take root in them!

But then you overcome the habit that had enslaved you for years,
Or you found yourself in a position to be the one who brought comfort to someone suffering just when they needed help,

Or you mentioned Jesus to someone and why He is Lord of your life, and someone is pricked in the heart and makes Jesus their Lord and King too.

And all you can do is feel like the 72 who said with unbridled excitement, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" as though you are experiencing the most amazing thing in your life...

I know Jesus grins from ear to ear when we find that kind of amazing astonishment and realize what we are truly capable of accomplishing in His name,

And then He whispers in our ear as a proud father who is sharing in our joy,

"Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." (Luke 10:20 ESV).

What a Savior we serve Who equips us for every good work and writes our names in heaven because we never slip through the cracks in His sight.

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1 ESV).

Faith. That word means a lot of things to a lot of people.

To some, faith is a belief. "I believe that God is, therefore I have faith."

To some, faith is a belief that God will do for them what they want God to do. "I have faith God will give me this, or do this for me."

To some, faith is a belief system that they choose to live by. "This is the faith belonging to me and my family."

But whatever faith truly is, God tells us through His inspired writer that without it, it is impossible to please Him.

The rest of Hebrews 11 shows us what this God-pleasing faith is.

This faith is not merely a belief system, though the true belief system is the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

Faith is not merely the belief that God will do what you want Him to do, though we pray without wavering that God is able to do all things we bring before Him in prayer according to His will.

And faith is not merely a belief in God, for even the demons believe in God, and tremble in His presence.

The faith in Hebrews 11, the faith that is impossible to please God without having, is a faith that causes us to live in obedience because:

1. God gives us instructions for our lives.

2. We obey even when threatened and even when we have to suffer for choosing to live His way because we know God will be faithful in all He has promised.

The faith that pleases God says, “I will turn away from the evils of society and live a godly life because I know that God is, and He is a rewarder when I diligently seek Him.

The faith that pleases God says, “Even if I am the only one who will live for God, and obey Him, I will because I know He has a heavenly home in store for those who live under His rule.”

The faith that pleases God says, “I will steadfastly serve the Lord even when I must suffer for it because I know that the true victory is for the obedient who persevere.”

Faith that pleases God is a faith that says, “I will not let my present circumstances dictate my dedication to the Lord; rather, I will let my dedication to the Lord dictate my present circumstance.”

The faith that pleases the Lord is a faith that causes us to remain steadfast because we know in the end, God is faithful in all that He promises.

I pray that as our society turns on the children of God more and more, we continue to find the faith that pleases God.

How many times do we think the way that Job’s friends thought? They reasoned that if you are faithful to God, you will be rewarded by being given riches and good health. And if you suffer loss, or remain without possessions, you are being punished by God.

They reasoned that health was the reward of a good and righteous person and illness or death was the condemnation of the wicked. But look at this verse I read in my daily Bible reading this morning:

“He said, “I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left,

and they seek my life, to take it away.” (1 Kings 19:10 ESV).

Elijah is afraid of Queen Jezebel who has laid him under a death sentence. We read this passage and say, “You were not alone! God has kept alive 7000 faithful servants who have not bowed the knee to Baal.”

And while this is true, and worthy to mention, oftentimes we read right past the words, “and killed your prophets with the sword.”

There were, indeed, faithful people who were killed because of their faithfulness. What do we say of these people? Was God with them? They were slaughtered and their lives were not spared by God.

Their wives and their children had to endure the pain of their loss. Their family’s lives were upended and changed in a moment, yet they had to endure their loss for years and decades to come.

I don’t bring this out to paint a bleak picture of serving the Lord. On the contrary, I want us to see victory and power in this observation. If we measure our faithfulness by the way our lives reap reward or suffer loss, then we will undoubtedly miss the power of Jesus in our lives.

Glory and honor are given to Jesus, not in how much we are prospering, but in how faithful we serve, whether in riches or poverty, sickness or health. It is in the steadfastness of our faith that comes no matter what circumstance we find ourselves in.

And if we have to suffer the ultimate loss and lay down our life, we do so in victory and faithfulness in King Jesus.

Only then can we see the words littered throughout Scriptures that say something to the effect, “and killed your prophets with the sword” and not see defeat, but victory.

Whatever we face today, whatever we are called to endure, it is not the sum of our circumstances that define our status in the Kingdom of Jesus; rather, it’s the unwavering commitment to Him in all circumstances that gives us the power and victory that not even Satan himself can wrestle away from us.

A Light Thing In The Sight Of The Lord

In 2 Kings, we see a transition from Elijah to Elisha as the primary prophet of God. As God was about to take away Elijah by His horses and chariots of fire, Elijah invites Elisha to ask what he can do for him before he

is taken away.

“When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, “Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you.” And Elisha said, “Please let there be a double portion of your spirit on me.” (2 Kings 2:9 ESV).

Elijah acknowledged that his servant asked a hard thing, but says that if Elisha is allowed to see him taken away, it meant that God would grant this hard request. If he didn't see Elijah taken away, then it meant that he would not receive the double portion of the Spirit that rested on him.

Well, Elisha does see the awesome supernatural departure of his master and he takes up the mantle of Elijah. This was the beginning of Elisha's ministry, and it began with him learning that hard things are light in the sight of the Lord.

This lesson is learned again in chapter 3 of 2 Kings. A new king, Jehoram, becomes King in Israel. Upon the death of his father, the people of Moab rebelled from serving the new king of Israel and the new king sought help from the King of Judah and the King of Edom to bring Moab back into subjection.

But things get very difficult for them as they march their army toward the rebellious king:

“So the king of Israel went with the king of Judah and the king of Edom. And when they had made a circuitous march of seven days, there was no water for the army or for the animals that followed them.

Then the king of Israel said, “Alas! The LORD has called these three kings to give them into the hand of Moab.” (2 Kings 3:9-10 ESV).

And so, the King of Judah, who feared God, insisted on seeking word from a prophet of the true living God, so they met with Elijah. These three kings were faced with two impossible tasks and so they needed divine intervention.

First, there was no water. Without water, their army, including their soldiers and horses would quickly die. The situation was dire. Second, in their weakened position, they would be an easy target for the enemy they pursued. The hunter would indeed become the hunted.

But Elijah teaches them a lesson that rings true today, but a lesson that we are sometimes afraid to remember. God could not only help them out of this impossible situation, but the lesson: It is an easy thing for the true and living God to do the impossible:

“And he said, “Thus says the LORD, ‘I will make this dry streambed full of pools.’” (2 Kings 3:16 ESV).

And then the lesson that is true even for us today:

“This is a light thing in the sight of the LORD. He will also give the Moabites into your hand,” (2 Kings 3:18 ESV).

And the 3rd chapter of 2 Kings goes on to tell how the Lord easily accomplishes all that He said. He was easily able to deliver an entire army from certain death and deliver into their hands a great victory.

It is sad when I hear people who make excuses for why God will not deliver great victories for people today. We often find ourselves in impossible circumstances and rather than step out in faith and ask for deliverance, we make excuses for why the Lord will not deliver us.

I do understand and acknowledge that all we ask must be according to the will of God, but sometimes I think we use this as a crutch to hide a lack of faith. God was, and always is a God who can deliver us from any impossible situation. And even today, it is a light thing in His sight to do the impossible.

God is not a genie in the bottle waiting to serve at our beck and call. And in the end, we must have a humble heart that acknowledges God when He does not answer the way we want Him to deliver. And just like Elisha had to be ready not to see his request for a double portion of the Spirit to be upon Him, we need to stand ready to accept a “No” from the Lord.

But it is not faith when we refuse to acknowledge that anything we ask of God is a light thing to Him, and therefore, we refuse to ask something that the answer may be “no” to.

Let us ask when we need God and then wait on His answer. If we receive deliverance, then we see His power. If we do not, then we have the same spirit of the Lord in the Garden, when He was at peace with a “no” answer by being content with the will of God.

Let no one ever tell you that a hard thing is something you shouldn't bring before the Lord. He is a God who makes His glory known by doing the hard things for us. Indeed, anything we ask of Him is a light thing in His sight.

As I continue reading in the book of 2 Kings, I see that indeed, doing the impossible is a light thing to the Lord. Let me tell you about the impossible situation we find in chapters 6 and 7. Ben-hadad, king of Syria, laid siege to Samaria and a great famine came upon the people of Israel:

“And there was a great famine in Samaria, as they besieged it, until a donkey’s head was sold for eighty shekels of silver, and the fourth part of a kab of dove’s dung for five shekels of silver.” (2 Kings 6:25 ESV).

As the king was passing by the wall, a woman cried out to him for help. In frustration, he snapped back, “If the LORD will not help you, how shall I help you?” (2 Kings 6:27). Then, taking a deep breath, he asked her what she wanted. What came out of her mouth sickened him just as it sickens us to read it:

“And the king asked her, “What is your trouble?” She answered, “This woman said to me, ‘Give your son, that we may eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow.’ So we boiled my son and ate him. And on the next day I said to her, ‘Give your son, that we may eat him.’ But she has hidden her son.” (2 Kings 6:28-29 ESV).

What an impossible circumstance the people found themselves in. But Elisha stands up and tells the Captain of the king that God would do the impossible and everything would immediately get better in one day:

“But Elisha said, “Hear the word of the LORD: thus says the LORD, Tomorrow about this time a seah of fine flour shall be sold for a shekel, and two seahs of barley for a shekel, at the gate of Samaria.” (2 Kings 7:1 ESV).

The problem with the King’s Captain is that he thought the way we often think. We see the impossible and have trouble understanding how God can do what cannot be done. Listen to his words:

“Then the captain on whose hand the king leaned said to the man of God, “If the LORD himself should make windows in heaven, could this thing be?” But he said, “You shall see it with your own eyes, but you shall not eat of it.” (2 Kings 7:2 ESV).

Well, we know the story. If you don’t, then take time to read chapter 7. It shows again how doing the impossible is a light thing to the Lord. God caused the Syrian army to hear the sounds of chariots and horses coming after them and they were terrified. So terrified that they fled, leaving all their food, equipment, weapons and stores behind. They even shed their clothes as they fled. And what was left behind was a treasure trove of abundance for the suffering people of Israel.

It was a light thing for God to accomplish what was impossible in the eyes of man. Is that a lesson we will never understand? We serve a sovereign,

powerful, and mighty God. Our faith is never misplaced when we ascribe to Him the ability to do what is impossible.

How did it end for the people of Israel? Well, they went from a famine so bad that women were boiling and eating their children to this:

“Now the king had appointed the captain on whose hand he leaned to have charge of the gate. And the people trampled him in the gate, so that he died, as the man of God had said when the king came down to him.

For when the man of God had said to the king, “Two seahs of barley shall be sold for a shekel, and a seah of fine flour for a shekel, about this time tomorrow in the gate of Samaria,”

the captain had answered the man of God, “If the LORD himself should make windows in heaven, could such a thing be?” And he had said, “You shall see it with your own eyes, but you shall not eat of it.”

And so it happened to him, for the people trampled him in the gate and he died.” (2 Kings 7:17-20 ESV).

Let us always remember that anything is a light thing for our Creator to do.

Lord, lunatic or liar, right?

Jesus will fall into one of these categories. Listen to His claim:

“Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.” (John 8:58-59 ESV).

No way around it. Jesus claimed He was God. That’s a bold claim.

Think about it... how would you respond if your neighbor made this claim. Seriously.

Jesus was either a liar because He knew He wasn’t God, but made the claim anyway. That would put Him in the category of one of the most evil and corrupt men who ever lived.

Or

Jesus really believed He was God, but He was crazy. His family seemed to hold this view before His resurrection. Perhaps this is what you would think of your neighbor who claimed he was God.

Or

He is who He claimed to be. He is the Creator who came to earth and

lived as a man. That makes Him Lord, Master, King, and worthy of our honor, obedience and devotion.

But He could not be simply a good man, fully mortal but not God. A good man is not a liar; nor is a good man a lunatic. It is impossible for Jesus to be a good man if He is not God.

So, if He indeed made the claim to be God, your only legitimate choices in how you receive Him is that He must be a liar, a lunatic, or Lord.

I confess Him as Lord. As God. Jesus is King over all.

Who do you say He is?

Reality:

Jesus: "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."

Fantasy:

Me: "If You want to be my Savior, then You will not complain about the choices I make and You will thank me for accepting You."

By God's grace, we have another day to honor and worship Him before He calls us home to be with Him.

Let's not get distracted by everything that is distracting the world today. Let's be the light that helps them focus on what is important.

What Does It Mean That Jesus Is King?

If you read my posts much at all, you will hear me referring to King Jesus a lot. But what does it really mean, Jesus is king? And when you couple the fact that most of my readers come from a country that doesn't have a king, then it may be hard for us to truly understand the consequences of Jesus being king.

First, let's establish the fact that kingship is used to describe Him:

“So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” (John 18:33 ESV).

Pilate is not unambiguous about the royal claim he has heard about Jesus. And how does Jesus answer?

“Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.”

Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” (John 18:36-37 ESV).

But it’s not just a claim of royalty that makes Jesus a king worth submitting to. Here are some truths about the kingship of Jesus that makes Him worthy to serve and indeed, a king who we must wholly submit to.

1. He is not just a king, but Jesus is a King above all kings. He is the preeminent authority over all:

“to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will display at the proper time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords,” (1 Timothy 6:14-15 ESV).

2. He is not merely a strong man who ascended to a throne, He is God Who ascended to His throne. This makes Him King because He is the Creator of all the world and all that is in the world:

“He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.” (Hebrews 1:3-4 ESV).

3. He is King with all authority and His power is without limits. This means He rules over all His desires and no one can stand against Him. And the day will come when everyone will submit to His rule, either by choice or as a conquered enemy:

“Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:9-11 ESV).

4. Jesus is King because His word, and His word alone, will serve to judge all men. He does not rule by committee, nor does He have to revise His law over time.

“The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day.” (John 12:48 ESV).

So, let's put this all together. Jesus is my King because He is God and His word alone is law. There is no other power in all of creation that is able to stand in opposition to Him. He made all things and has the inherent right to rule over His creation, not to mention the absolute power to exercise His right.

And submitting to Jesus as King has its benefits. He promises eternal life and joy for those who wholly submit to Him. He promises the power and strength to overcome the world through Him if we serve Him faithfully. And He promises that no matter how strong evil seems to be, He has already won the war against sin and evil.

My prayer is that you submit to my King and make Him your King too; that you live under His rule according to His word; and that you lay hold of the power to overcome sin that He promises to all who submit to Him.

Today, this is your choice. But the day is coming when my King will remove that choice from you and if you are found to be an enemy to Him, He will compel you to kneel before Him and confess Him on the Day He will Judge you and all men.

Submit now by choice or submit later as a conquered enemy. That is the choice each of us face. And there is no power in heaven or on earth that can alter this final conclusion from happening.

What does it mean that Jesus is King? It means that He has the right, the power and the will to sit on a throne that is above all thrones.

When someone asks us to pray for them, they are telling us that they believe God hears our prayers.

Let's keep ourselves free from sin and repent when we fall so we can be another voice before the throne of God when someone needs our prayers.

The world is getting crazy, isn't it?
People killing, stealing and hating.
People watching all sorts of sins on the computer and on TV.
People lying and bearing false witness.
Children committing crimes once reserved for adults.
People openly challenging God and cursing His name publicly with no fear.
It's bad. But I suppose it's always been bad in some ways.
There really is nothing new under the sun.
But here is what I know.... When evil seems to be so prevalent that it swallows up God's goodness,
God looks to me and says,
“Don't worry. You stay faithful. I've got this.”

“Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,

because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.” (Romans 1:22-25 ESV).

I fear that we may have more idol worshippers today than we want to admit. And worse, I fear that many of us may be dangerously close to being idol worshippers than we may know.

An idol worshiper is someone who creates a god in his image and worships that creation. Thousands of years ago, skilled artisans would fashion images of wood, stone and gold to represent that creation so they could have something visible to bow down to.

But today, we skip the stage where we make a physical representation of

the god we create. We fashion a god after our heart and call him the God of the Bible. Just like the Israelites fashioned a golden calf to represent the one true God, we often create our own god and call him the one true God.

In the end, if we serve a god who we create in our hearts, and not the God of the Bible, then we are steeped in idol worship. I humbly ask that we think about these questions to help determine if we are idol worshippers.

1. Is my understanding of God based on the portrait that the Bible paints of God, or is it based on how I want God to be?

2. Have I said or thought, “If that’s the way God really is, then He is not a God who I want to worship?”

3. Are we open to learning more about God and His majesty or are we content to worship Him the way we know Him to be today?

4. Am I looking for ways to please Him and understand His will daily or am I looking for ways He can serve and please me today?

The one true God demands that we seek Him, serve Him and submit to Him. If we have created an image of god in our hearts that has him submitting and serving us, then we have created an idol without physical representation to serve instead of serving the one true God.

The Importance Of Jesus, Our Savior and High Priest

Jesus is called a lot of things in the Bible and He plays a lot of roles. And each of His titles has a very important meaning and a very important impact on each of us. The purpose of this post is not to detail all the wonderful names of Jesus in both Old Testament prophecy and names found in the New Testament. But I would like to focus on two specific titles, or roles, because they both have an impact on our salvation.

Almost all of Christendom believes the same when it comes to Jesus being our Savior. To some degree, we all believe that man is lost in sin, which separates us from God, and we need a Savior to redeem us and bring us back into a right relationship with God. Consider...

“And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:10-11

ESV).

And

“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,” (Romans 3:23-24 ESV).

And

“For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.” (Romans 5:10 ESV).

This is just a small sample that tells us about Jesus and His role as our Savior. Most of us believe that we are lost without Jesus and we need His saving blood and sacrifice to be an atonement for our sins. Most of us believe that He made the impossible possible by saving us and reuniting us back to God.

But many believe a dangerous and unbiblical teaching that says once we are saved by Jesus, there is no way we will ever be lost. Some call this the Perseverance of the Saints, or Once Saved, Always Saved. People confuse verses that teach God cannot lose anyone from His hands with the truth that we all have free will when it comes to staying in a relationship with Him.

I believe with all my heart that God is powerful enough to keep me in His presence and secure my salvation. But I believe God also gives me free will to decide whether I want to stay in that relationship or give it up. And as much as it grieves His Spirit when we walk away from Him, God will not force us to be in a relationship with Him that we don't want to remain in.

Can we lose our salvation after securing it? Consider...

“Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,” (1 Timothy 4:1 ESV).

And

“You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability.” (2 Peter 3:17 ESV).

And

“For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit,

and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come,

and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.” (Hebrews 6:4-6 ESV).

So, we have a problem then, don't we? If our sins force us to need a Savior and Christ died once for sins (1 Peter 3:18), and if we can sin after we are saved, then how do we have hope? Even John says,

“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” (1 John 1:8 ESV).

And that's what the whole book of Hebrews addresses, because not only is Jesus our Savior, He also serves as our High Priest.

“where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.” (Hebrews 6:20 ESV).

And

“For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.” (Hebrews 9:24 ESV).

And

“but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.” (Hebrews 7:24-25 ESV).

You see, Jesus in the role of High Priest is how we can continue in His grace after we are saved when we sin. As we come before Him in confession and repentance, our High Priest performs His duty to save us from our sins, something that even earthly high priests could not do.

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9 ESV).

But the choice to confess and repent is ours. The wonderful blessing we have is that Jesus is both our Savior and High Priest. If we refuse to let Him save us, we will be lost. And after we are saved, if we refuse to let Him be our High Priest by confessing and repenting, then we will be lost.

Think about this: If we are saved once and can never fall away, then all we would need is a Savior. There would be no need for a High Priest. But the Bible teaches that we need a Savior and a High Priest. Jesus is both to us. He is a Savior to redeem us from our sins and He is a faithful High Priest to forgive us once we sin as a citizen of His heavenly Kingdom.

And take comfort that we will only be lost if we refuse to call upon His name through baptism (Acts 22:16) or we choose to walk away from Him once we are children of God. We can be sure of our salvation when we continue to walk with the Lord because we have both a Savior and a High Priest in King Jesus.

I am in the book of Zechariah in my daily Bible reading. What a wonderful and powerful book. The prophet is preparing the people to return from exile and we see many messianic prophecies that we see later fulfilled in King Jesus.

But as Zechariah was preparing the people of God to return, he was contrasting the sinful ways that led their fathers into captivity and exile to the ways they were to behave. And instead of laying out 613 commands that they were to keep, his focus was on the heart:

“These are the things that you shall do: Speak the truth to one another; render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace; do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath, for all these things I hate, declares the LORD.” (Zechariah 8:16-17 ESV).

They were not to be like their fathers who were exiled from the land. Their fathers could keep the laws of worship and sacrifice while harboring evil in their hearts to one another. But Zechariah tells them to:

Tell the truth to each other.

Be just in their judgments.

Don't think of ways to take advantage of each other.

Don't lie under oath to claim what is rightfully someone else's.

Why? “For all these things I hate, declares the LORD.”

This reminds me of what Jesus teaches when someone asked Him which of the 613 commandments in the Old Testament was the greatest:

“And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

This is the great and first commandment.

And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”
(Matthew 22:37-40 ESV).

If we love God with all of our hearts and love each other like we love ourselves, then the other commandments of the Lord will be fulfilled. Perhaps, we may make serving God more difficult than it should be.

I’ve been thinking a lot about the need to confess and repent of my sins. I think I have confession down. Confession soothes my soul and eases my conscience.

But it is the repentance I need to be sure I am doing.

Repentance is turning away from the sin.

I am not talking about repenting and then falling again. Jesus says He will forgive me every time I do this. This is His mercy and grace.

I’m talking about confessing to ease my conscience until the next time I commit the sin again, with no purpose in my heart to change.

Yeah, I do well with confession.

But I need to ensure that my confession is truly coupled with authentic repentance.

We go to the doctor and pay a premium to let him fix our bodies.

We go to the mechanic and pay a premium to let him fix our car.

We hire an appliance repairman and pay a premium to make sure that our refrigerators and stoves are running properly.

We hire a handyman and pay a premium to make sure that our house does not fall into disrepair.

It seems that anything we value, we are willing to pay a premium to ensure it is in working order.

But what value do we place on our soul? What are we willing to do to ensure it gets the nourishment that it needs?

Are we feeding it with a proper spiritual diet daily?
Are we spending time with saints who can edify and build it up?
Are we redeeming the time and placing a premium on what we choose to do that best takes care of our soul?
The most valuable thing we possess is our eternal soul. When moth and rust destroy all other possessions, our soul will live on.
What are we going to do today to invest in our eternal soul?

“For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul?” (Mark 8:36-37 ESV).

Best practical advice I've gotten on prayer that I still use daily:
When someone asks me to pray for them, or if I tell someone I will pray for them,
I stop what I'm doing and pray immediately.
If not, chances are great that my good intentions will go unfulfilled as my mind fills up with new priorities throughout the day.
Thanks, Edwin Crozier.

Have you ever wondered why Satan hates us so much? Why is he set on our destruction? What is it that makes him want each of us to spend eternity in hell?

Well, I'm not convinced that we are the focus of his fury. I believe that he has a hatred of God Himself. I believe that he covets God's power and that he despises having to be in subjection to Him.

I believe that Satan knows he cannot defeat the power of God because we see how he always has to obey the restrictions that God puts upon Him. Never do we read that God has to obey the restrictions that Satan lays upon Him.

So, Satan cannot touch God. But he can touch what God loves... Us.

I don't think we merit much attention or respect from Satan at all. I think that he sees us as a pawn to be used in his cosmic battle with our Creator and God.

If he cannot touch God, then Satan will touch that which God loves. It is

the only way he can hurt his eternal enemy. It is the only leverage he has over King Jesus. If it could ever be said that God has a weak spot, it is in His great love for us. And Satan knows that.

He will exploit that weak spot to its fullest in order to bring pain to the God of creation. So, when we are promised the world through sin, the promise is not coming from someone who has any concern for us at all.

We are a calculation in the mind of Satan. We are merely someone he can use just to see God suffer.

Satan has zero love for us at all. But God's love is greater than we can ever imagine.

Today, before we make the choice to sin, remember that when we do, we are submitting to the one who could care less for us. He is eager for us to sin so he can see the pain it brings to God.

Let us draw near to God who loves us with a perfect love, the One who demonstrated His love for us that when we were His enemies, He died for us.

Do we want to live for someone who only wants to use us, or do we want to live for the One who loves us enough that He died for us?

“Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. And he stood on the sand of the sea.” (Revelation 12:17 ESV).

Is today the day we get to meet the Lord? One day, the answer will be yes. Are you ready?

Random thought... if Elon Musk is successful at planting a one-million-person colony on Mars, and Jesus returns, will He also appear in the Martian sky?

I guess Jonah would be the first to remind us that there will be no place in God's creation that we will be able to hide from His presence.

I don't know how it will all work out, but I have 100% confidence that nothing we can do will stump God.

“Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?” (Psalm 139:7 ESV).

When the world tempts and promises a body with perfect physique, I will wait for a body that God will provide unlike anything that the imagination of man could conjure.

When the world tempts and promises riches, I will wait for the mansion, crown and treasures that the Lord has laid up for me.

When the world tempts and promises delicacies from every corner of the world, I will wait for the fruit of the Tree of Life that the Lord will provide without restriction.

When the world tempts and promises all kinds of entertainment, I will wait for the worship and praise that my perfect voice will sing with the other children of God gathered around His throne in Heaven.

When the world tempts and promises ease and rest in retirement, I will wait for the rest that God will give me in my perfect, eternal home in heaven.

While God provides much good here on earth for us to enjoy, nothing here is the pinnacle of my achievements.

Everything that the world tempts and promises is a dim shadow of the riches and blessings that God will shower upon me if I remain faithful to Him.

Let us not grow nearsighted in striving after the temporary things of the world to the neglect of the eternal things God wants to give us in His time.

“But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9 ESV).

So, I'm reading 1 Chronicles in my daily Bible reading, and I am at the part where God turns the kingdom over to David. And I read something interesting that made me wonder about how God may help us today:

“And David became greater and greater, for the LORD of hosts was with him.

Now these are the chiefs of David's mighty men, who gave him strong

support in his kingdom, together with all Israel, to make him king, according to the word of the LORD concerning Israel.” (1 Chronicles 11:9-10 ESV).

It’s interesting how God blessed David through the men around him. David was great because God made his men great.

Could it be that many of the blessings of God for us are waiting for us through our brothers and sisters in the Lord?

Are we praying for a job, or for health? Perhaps God is ready to use our spiritual family to deliver our blessings in some way.

If this is true, then how many blessings do you suppose are going unfulfilled because we are not cultivating the relationships with the people of God?

I look back on my life and I can see wonderful blessings and answered prayers that were delivered by the hands of my brothers and sisters in Christ.

Perhaps we all need to spend more prayerful time examining our relationships with others.

Outdo One Another In Showing Honor

Jesus gives great care to ensure that citizens of His kingdom understand that we will be different from earthly kingdoms in many ways. Foremost, is how we treat and relate to one another. It pleases our King that we prefer one another and show humility to each other.

When Paul writes to the Romans, Christians who lived in the capital city, gentiles who grew up subjugating their foes under their feet, he writes this:

“Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.” (Romans 12:10 ESV).

Love one another. But look at that next phrase: “Outdo one another in showing honor.” What a concept, not only for the ancient Romans who subdued the world, but for rugged Americans who take sovereignty from kings and give it to the individual.

Can you imagine living in a world where everyone competed to show more honor than the next person? What would it be like when all men are trying to outdo each other in showing honor?

Well, we may never see it in the world. Satan has such a grasp over the hearts of men, that the men of the world will always strive to seek and demand honor from others. But in the kingdom that we are part of, we get a taste of what it must be like to live in a special, heavenly realm while living on the earth among evil men.

We can live the kingdom life that is different from the way that human nature plays out in the hearts of men. So, what does this honor that we compete to show look like?

“And he said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors.

But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves.” (Luke 22:25-26 ESV).

We can outdo each other in honor by finding ways to serve each other. When we seek honor, we seek the service of others. But when we seek to outdo each other in showing honor, we will seek ways to lay down our lives for each other.

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” (Philippians 2:3-4 ESV).

We compete to outdo one another in showing honor by looking out for the interest of each other. Boy, does this run counter to our “Me” culture where getting everything that I am entitled to is the norm. But citizens of Jesus’ kingdom will always be looking out for each other’s interests as well as our own.

“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:32 ESV).

To outdo one another in honor, we must be people who are defined by forgiveness. In what way can we better show honor than when we forgive each other? And forgiveness is given when someone wrongs us, when we are in the right and they are in the wrong. When we suffer loss unjustly at the hands of someone else.

True forgiveness is hard. It is more than overlooking a trespass that someone commits against us inadvertently or without malice. True

forgiveness comes when we look someone who wanted to hurt us in the eyes and say, “I forgive you and will not hold this against you anymore.” Can we compete with one another to show this kind of forgiving honor to each other? What peace would be ours if we all could do this.

The kingdom of Jesus should be full of people who are trying to compete to outdo each other in showing honor. If we are a people who strive to do this, the greater honor we show will be the honor to our King who wants His people to be this kind of citizen. More than just citizens, but brothers and sisters who love each other with a great and enduring love.

This love mirrors the love our Savior showed us and left as an example of how we are to honor each other.

In my daily Bible reading, I am in 1 Chronicles where David is making preparations for Solomon to build the Temple. He had just given a great sum for its construction and the people of Israel gave in abundance to the work as well.

This great outpouring of generosity to the project moved David and this is what he said:

“But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you.” (1 Chronicles 29:14 ESV).

When we realize that all we have is a gift from God, and that He owns everything, it becomes the first step in keeping our possessions in proper perspective.

Before you post your biblical views, ask yourself:

1. Is this truthful?
2. Will this edify or tear down?
3. Is this useful or will it provoke empty discourse?
4. Am I posting this for God's glory or for mine?

“Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.” (James

3:1 ESV).

In my daily Bible reading, I am in 2 Chronicles where Solomon is dedicating the newly built temple to the Lord. If you remember, his father, King David, wanted to build the temple but because he was a man of war, God said that his son would build the temple.

So, David donated tremendous wealth and materials, along with the temple plans, to be used by Solomon. Now, the temple construction is complete and King Solomon is giving the dedication to the temple. He harkens back to the time when David wished to build the temple. This is what he said:

“But the LORD said to David my father, ‘Whereas it was in your heart to build a house for my name, you did well that it was in your heart.’” (2 Chronicles 6:8 ESV).

What a powerful and comforting verse that tells us about the character of our God. How many times do we want to do something for God with all of our hearts, but circumstances dictate that it will not be so?

Perhaps we wish to give generously to help those who are spreading the Word, or to ease the affliction of our brethren, but the cash just never seems to be there?

How many times do we wish for the time to devote ourselves to the study of His word, only to have to work in the godly responsibilities of family and work that seem to leave less than we want for the kind of in-depth study we yearn for?

Whatever the good and holy things we purpose in our hearts to glorify God with, sometimes we find ourselves in a situation where we just cannot do what is in our hearts.

But our verse about David here in 2 Chronicles reminds us that our God is not only able to see what we do for Him, but He also knows our hearts. And Just like with David, our perfect and gracious God says to us, “You did well that it was in your heart.”

In my daily Bible reading, I came across a passage familiar with most of

us. And as I read this passage, I tried to find ways to make an application for myself. There are a couple of verses in the New Testament that encourage us not to overlook the lessons of the Old Testament, even though we do not live under the old covenant in any way.

“For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” (Romans 15:4 ESV).

And

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” (Hebrews 13:8 ESV).

What these passages tell us is that the character of God is eternally consistent. What He hated on the day of creation He hates now, and what He loved on the day of creation, He loves now. And just as He expected men to live by the law He had for them then, He expects men to live by the law He has for us now.

So, in my reading, I am at a passage where the good king of Judah, Jehoshaphat, has agreed with the evil king of Israel, Ahab, to go to war with him against his enemy... with one caveat:

“But Jehoshaphat said, “Is there not here another prophet of the LORD of whom we may inquire?” (2 Chronicles 18:6 ESV).

Ahab had asked the favor from the false prophets in the land, but the king who worshiped the true God wasn't about to do a thing without seeking counsel from his God. Here's where we can make an application:

There are many tough choices that we will face in life. Do we have the spirit of Ahab who sought the wisdom of the world, or do we have the spirit of Jehoshaphat who always turned to the Lord first? Not when things go bad and there is no place left to go, but do we turn to God in prayer from the beginning to seek His wisdom and favor?

Do we baptize ourselves in the Word to prepare our hearts with the wisdom it provides? Do we weigh the choices we need to make which will bring glory to our Master?

Advice from the world is a dime a dozen. You can find it in books, on YouTube, and even among people we know and trust. How judicious are we in seeking the Lord before we make our decisions or before we take an action?

Jehoshaphat reminds us that we must be people of the One true God who looks to Him to give us wisdom and comfort in all of the ways of our lives.

We remember Him when life is good and we remember Him when life is tough.

The Danger Of Growing Strong

When we are weak and have no place to turn, in humility we often turn to God. And this is pleasing to Him. God gives comfort to a humble and contrite heart. But as He delivers us, or strengthens us, we are often tempted to lose sight that the same power that strengthens us is from God. We are often tempted to lift up our hearts in pride because of our strength.

When we have the strength to do what we want, we often forget about the consequences of sin, which causes us to believe that we can do what we want to do. We need God when we need Him, but we can do what we want to do when we don't need Him.

This cycle of need, deliverance, pride and sin repeats itself over and over in the hearts of men. But the hearts of the godly who are truly devoted to the Lord learn to give praise to God and thanks to Him when the Lord strengthens them, realizing as Job knew:

“And he said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” (Job 1:21 ESV).

When we are strong, it is by God and He can remove that strength anytime He wishes. This is what happened to a godly king in Judah. When he was weak, the Lord was with him because he served the Lord. But when the Lord strengthened him, the King grew proud and began to sin against God just because he felt secure in his own strength. What a dangerous and sad place to be.

In 2 Chronicles 26, we read about King Uzziah. Listen to his fervent fear and obedience to the Lord and how the Lord strengthened him:

“He set himself to seek God in the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of God, and as long as he sought the LORD, God made him prosper.” (2 Chronicles 26:5 ESV).

And

“God helped him against the Philistines and against the Arabians who lived in Gurbaal and against the Meunites. The Ammonites paid tribute to Uzziah, and his fame spread even to the border of Egypt, for he became very strong.” (2 Chronicles 26:7-8 ESV).

So, the Lord made King Uzziah very strong. What a heritage! But unlike King David, who maintained his humility before the Lord, Uzziah let the strength go to his head as though he was strong on his own account and no longer needed the Lord. What a tragic place to be.

So, Uzziah, in his own strength, decided he no longer needed to listen to the Lord:

“But when he was strong, he grew proud, to his destruction. For he was unfaithful to the LORD his God and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense.” (2 Chronicles 26:16 ESV).

And everything that the Lord had done for him was lost in his heart. He had no place burning incense on the altar. That was for the priests of God alone to do. But he was the king! He was elevated and strong! Surely this man of fame and importance could do whatever he wished. God should be so lucky that someone as grand as he could burn his own incense on the altar.

But that is not the way that the priests of God saw it:

“But Azariah the priest went in after him, with eighty priests of the LORD who were men of valor,

and they withstood King Uzziah and said to him, “It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense. Go out of the sanctuary, for you have done wrong, and it will bring you no honor from the LORD God.” (2 Chronicles 26:17-18 ESV).

Now, at this point, I am inclined to believe that had Uzziah humbled his heart and repented, God may have allowed him to leave with his strength intact. But that is not what happened. Rather than humble his prideful heart before God, he became angry. Anger is often the reaction of a prideful heart toward correction, isn't it? It's not the reaction that saves and reconciles back to God, however.

“Then Uzziah was angry. Now he had a censer in his hand to burn incense, and when he became angry with the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead in the presence of the priests in the house of the LORD, by the altar of incense.” (2 Chronicles 26:19 ESV).

King Uzziah had to spend the rest of his life, humbled and living in a house by himself as a leper. When we are strong, how important is our pride to us? Will we let it scoff at God and cling to it, or will we be men and women who humble ourselves in our pride before the Lord?

Strength can be a great blessing from the Lord, but it can also be a devastating burden when we allow it to cause us to forget the Lord.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tony Eldridge has written 4 books and is working on his fifth book, *The Sovereignty of God*. He has been a full-time minister and has taught many Bible classes at various churches. He currently attends the Campbell Road Church of Christ in Garland, TX. He is married to his wife of 22 years, Emily, and he has 16-year-old twin boys, Connor and Landon, and a 6-year-old son, Ryder. Tony and his family live in Wylie, TX.