

Devotionals
from
God's Daily Word Ministries

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The Courts of God

5-1-07

The moment we enter through the Gate of Jesus Christ, by believing in Him for the forgiveness of our sins, we dramatically alter our eternity; "I am the gate; whoever enters through Me will be saved" (John 10:9). We were once blind and destined for eternal separation from God, but now we "see" and will spend eternity as His child in Heaven. After passing through the Gate, God begins to conform us "to the likeness of His Son" (Romans 8:29), until our sole desire is to bring Him glory, and praise His name forever.

At times, this process can be painful. It can hurt to strip away layers of pride and crawl from under the dominion of our old sinful nature - it can hurt to be conformed to the likeness of Jesus. But as we persevere and catch a glimpse of His glory, we will never again desire to be away from His presence.

Psalm 84:10

"Better is one day in Your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked."

A single day in the presence of God is better than a thousand days anywhere else - better than ANYTHING this world can offer. If we do not believe this truth, we have not yet been in His presence - we have not yet tasted the sweet fruit of His Spirit. And if we believe and have experienced the peaceful joy of His courts but are now consumed and burdened by the trials of this world, then perhaps we've simply forgotten how sweet and fulfilling His presence can be.

Let me paraphrase the second part of the above verse: "I would rather be the lowest and most insignificant servant in the house of God, so I could be near Him, than to live as a ruler in the greatest of mansions but apart from His presence." This passion to be in the presence of God is also recorded earlier: "My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God" (Psalm 84:2).

Our Heavenly Father longs for us to have this same passion in our life; "Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise" (Psalm 100:4). So if this passion has faded due to distractions and entanglements, know that He is calling for us to return. The courts of God's holy temple now reside within every believer; "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that His Spirit lives in you" (1 Corinthians 3:16). His presence is available to us right now! No matter how distant we may feel, He's really closer than we imagine.

Let's fill His temple with praise! Let's return to a life focused on passionate worship. Let's determine to spend every moment of every day rejoicing in the courts of God.

Have A Great Day!

Get Alone And Pray

5-2-07

In the message "The Courts of God" we saw how the presence of God is to be cherished above all else. We considered that not even a thousand days in an earthly paradise can compare to a single day in the presence of God. And yet, though we may understand the value of His presence, we seldom make the decisions or exercise the discipline required to enter.

Luke 5:15-16

"The news about Him spread all the more, so the crowds of people came to hear Him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed."

Jesus had a relationship with the Father which can only be described as absolute perfection; "If you really knew Me, you would know My Father as well. Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:7,9). We long for and desperately seek the presence of God, but Jesus Christ IS the very presence of God: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us" (John 1:1,14).

And though He had perfect union with the Father, created the entire Universe, and demonstrated complete control over the elements of nature as He "rebuked the wind and the raging waters" (Luke 8:24), Jesus still made time to be alone with the Father in prayer. Why?

Prior to the important decision of choosing His twelve apostles, Jesus "went out to a mountainside and spent the night praying" (Luke 6:12). On the night before He was crucified, Jesus was in such anguish that He prayed until "His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground" (Luke 22:44). Jesus, through His life and death, taught us how we ought to relate to God...and it's a lesson we must not ignore!

If Jesus, who is Perfection, demonstrated such need of prayer, how much more necessary is it for us who contain so many flaws and so easily drift away from God. We cannot wave our hand to calm the storm, we must pray for patience and the strength to endure, and relentlessly ask for His help. We are to live in such constant communion with God that we "pray continually" (1 Thessalonians 5:17), even as we drive in busy traffic, manage multiple assignments, or care for noisy children.

But each of us must also set aside time, which is "often" and regular, where we can withdraw to a quiet place. Yes, the presence of God can be found in the midst of our busyness, but we all need times of quiet where we can be refreshed and receive direction - times when we can simply lift our hearts to God and say "Thank You!" Let's develop and maintain the discipline of entering the courts of His presence. Let's regularly set aside times of quiet to get alone and pray.

Have A Great Day!

The Burning Bush

5-3-07

In the last two messages we've considered the high value placed on being in the courts of God where we are able to worship in His presence. We also saw the need for quiet times of prayer in order to strengthen our relationship with God and receive His direction. No walk of submission and obedience can be complete without actually spending time with God to hear where He is leading.

Moses was born a Hebrew slave under Egyptian rule, but circumstances allowed him to be raised as a prince in Pharaoh's court (Exodus 2:1-10). As a young man, Moses began to see the injustice toward the Hebrews. At one point he took matters into his own hands and killed an Egyptian for mistreating a Hebrew slave. This action caused Moses to be misunderstood by the Hebrews and hunted by the Egyptians, so he fled across the desert to the land of Midian where he settled as a shepherd.

Going from Egyptian prince to Midianite shepherd was quite a change. As a prince, Moses received the finest education as well as the most advanced military training; but it was as a simple shepherd that Moses received the training he most needed to accomplish God's work.

Moses was a peaceful shepherd for 40 years; but then... "The angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush" (Exodus 3:2). The bush was on fire but not actually being burned. This definitely got Moses' attention so he went to take a closer look.

Exodus 3:4

"When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, 'Moses! Moses!' And Moses said, 'Here I am.'"

Notice that God waited until Moses saw the bush, stopped what he was doing, and drew himself near. I wonder how long this bush had been burning before Moses noticed? During the last 40 years, how many "burning bushes" were placed in his path? "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10). How long had Moses needed to experience the "stillness" of tending the flock before he was ready to hear God?

God is at work all around us, and He's calling us to join Him today. The bushes are burning, but in the hurriedness of our daily lives we most often fail to notice - fail to stop and draw near. Is it any wonder we have a hard time hearing His call? I'm afraid it will be a sad day when God allows us to look back and see the life we might have lived if we would only have taken time to listen.

Let's not miss the opportunity to participate in God's wonderful plan. Let's create time to be very still and look intently for where God is working. Then, with great expectation, let's join Him and draw near to the burning bush.

Have A Great Day!

John 8:48-53 - Lesson #92
5-4-07

In a heated discussion with the Jews, Jesus made the accusation that these Jews were actually children of Satan; "you are of your father the devil" (John 8:44). They responded with the greatest insult they knew.

John 8:48-53

"Then the Jews answered and said to Him, 'Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?' Jesus answered, 'I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me. And I do not seek My own glory; there is One who seeks and judges. Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death.' Then the Jews said to Him, 'Now we know that You have a demon! Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and You say, "If anyone keeps My word he shall never taste death." Are You greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Who do You make Yourself out to be?'"

To call someone a Samaritan was to call them the lowest of all life. The Jews despised the Samaritans, avoided walking through their part of the country and considered themselves unclean if they even drank water from a Samaritan cup. But Jesus taught the worldwide nature of the gospel by taking His Jewish disciples to minister to a Samaritan woman (John 4:4-42). He also taught the universal need for compassion by telling a story of a Samaritan who gave assistance to a man in great need. Perhaps this is why Jesus did not respond to being called a Samaritan. It's not an insult to be identified with someone you love.

The other great insult was to associate someone with a demon. This was not the only time the Jews had accused Jesus of working with the devil; "By the ruler of the demons He casts out demons" (Mark 3:22). But Jesus was not working with the evil one, He came "that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). And in the process of complete victory over Satan, Jesus would bring glory to God in all He did.

One of the messages throughout the gospel of John is that there is power in the words of Christ. We see this with the very first verse; "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). Jesus affirms this power by saying that keeping His words would cause someone to never see nor taste death. By destroying the work of the devil, Jesus provided a way to truly live; "He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live" (John 11:25). With complete victory over death assured, whom now shall we fear!!

The Jews did not know what else to say. Jesus had just promised a way to avoid death, yet Abraham and all the prophets had died - Who was He claiming to be? The claims of Jesus are clear - and they will become clearer. He is the One true Son of God, sent by God to be the revelation of God and His plan to restore the relationship which Satan sought to destroy. Jesus Christ came to defeat the devil by becoming a sacrifice for our sin and calling ALL to believe, receive His forgiveness, and live.

Have A Great Day!

Standing on Holy Ground

5-7-07

In the message "The Burning Bush" we saw how God spoke to Moses in a miraculous way. And, although we don't know for sure, we considered that God may have placed several burning bushes along Moses' path and called him in a variety of ways during his time as a shepherd. After forty years of relative solitude, Moses was too ready to listen.

When Moses approached the bush and heard God call his name, he simply replied "Here I am" (Exodus 3:4). Moses had no idea how the next few moments would change his life. Initially, he didn't even know it was God who called. But God was at work, and Moses' answer signaled his availability.

However, though Moses drew near and was available, he was not yet prepared to hear God's call.

Exodus 3:5

"Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground."

Sandals were in constant contact with the ground. They were continually stepping in dirt, and "other messes" left from the animals. It was unthinkable to allow something so unclean to be in contact with the holy ground of God's presence. This act of reverence was expected - even demanded - by God.

Our relationship with Jesus Christ should produce great assurance; "In Him and through faith in Him we may approach God with freedom and confidence" (Ephesians 3:12). But as we approach the throne, we must always remember He is the King and the Creator of ALL things. He has invited us into an intimate relationship, but we must never attempt to enter into God's presence with a casual or assuming attitude.

If we desire to hear from God, we must first establish time which is free of distractions - we must be able to see where He is burning and listen for His call. Then we must have an available heart which daily cries out "Here I am!" Finally, we must draw near in reverent and humble submission.

The presence of God demands holiness, it creates holiness...it IS holiness! "For it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:16). Without the presence of God, our churches and homes are nothing but walls and a roof; and our lives are nothing but empty shells of flesh. But as we love and worship Him with all our heart, His presence resides within us and we can live with purpose and direction.

Through faith in Jesus we have become His living temple. Let's take off our sandals by confessing and repenting of ALL that is unclean in our life, all that has been soiled with worldly messes. Let's live every day and take every step to honor Him; for we are His, and we are standing on holy ground.

Have A Great Day!

It's All About Him

5-8-07

In the last two messages, we've considered Moses' encounter with God as He spoke through the burning bush. Moses heard the call of God and signaled his availability, "Here I am" (Exodus 3:4). But God had an assignment for Moses that required complete trust, and preparation began by establishing the holiness of the One who was calling; "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground" (Exodus 3:5).

God's chosen people had lived in Egyptian slavery for more than four hundred years. Now, God chose Moses to be His messenger and instrument of power; "I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring My people the Israelites out of Egypt" (Exodus 3:10). On one hand, God's call is always a great honor...on the other, it can be very frightening.

Moses gave every possible excuse to convince God He'd made a wrong choice: "Who am I to go to Pharaoh?" (3:11), "What if they do not believe me?" (4:1), "I am slow of speech and tongue" (4:10). God was patient with Moses, but finally He had enough.

Exodus 4:11-14

"The Lord said to him, 'Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.' But Moses said, 'O Lord, please send someone else to do it.' Then the Lord's anger burned against Moses."

Moses would later be described as "more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth" (Numbers 12:2). But as he stood before God and received his initial assignment for battle, his "humility" was nothing more than a self absorbed lack of faith. Moses looked at his own abilities and didn't see how success was possible. He failed to see the Creator of the Universe who promised to walk by His side.

Our Christian walk is ALL about God working through us. Of course our abilities will seem too small, of course the enemy will seem too big! The seemingly impossible steps are all part of His plan. Our Heavenly Father desires an intimate and passionate relationship built on absolute trust. Why would He lead us in a direction that did not require our complete dependence on Him? The assignment may seem impossible, but His call is our greatest assurance of victory; "If God be for us, who can be against us" (Romans 8:31).

When God is truly Lord of our life, it's false humility to believe we cannot follow where He leads. Let's allow His glory to so completely fill our vision that we can boldly follow because we KNOW...it's all about Him.

Have A Great Day!

Trust And Move On

5-9-07

Moses received clear instruction as God spoke to him from the burning bush; "I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring My people the Israelites out of Egypt" (Exodus 3:10). Moses debated with God regarding his assignment and pushed God to the limit of His patience: "The Lord's anger burned against Moses" (Exodus 4:14).

But once he began to follow, Moses maintained a close relationship with God and witnessed His mighty Hand in many different ways. God worked through Moses to bring plagues against the Egyptians and to miraculously bring the Israelites out of Egypt. As Pharaoh released the Israelites and they began their journey into the desert, Moses witnessed more of God's power; "By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light" (Exodus 13:21).

But as the Israelites approached the Red Sea, "Pharaoh and his officials changed their mind" (Exodus 14:5). Every chariot in Egypt was sent to bring the Israelites back. With no escape route in sight, and the Egyptian army closing in, the people cried out to God. Moses tried to calm the people, "The Lord will fight for you: you need only to be still" (Exodus 14:14), but being still was not in God's plan.

Exodus 14:15-16

"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Why are you crying out to Me? Tell the Israelites to move on. Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground.'"

God had been in close communion with Moses. He had given His direction and demonstrated His awesome power. Now at this moment of crisis, God expected Moses to know what to do: "Why are you crying out to Me...move on!"

We must diligently seek His will in stillness and prepare our life to follow where He leads; "be still and know that He is God" (Psalm 46:10). But we cannot allow our stillness to make us immobile: "Whoever watches the wind will not plant; whoever looks at the clouds will not reap" (Ecclesiastes 11:4). The conditions will never feel perfect nor will we ever feel fully prepared (beware of a never-ending mission analysis which paralyzes us from action). In the end we must remember: "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

There will always come a time when God expects us to demonstrate our faith in what He has provided. Let's prepare for that time by drawing near and learning to trust in HIS ability. Let's live with an active faith such that when we know His power, know His provision and know His direction, we are able to trust and move on.

Have A Great Day!

Hold Up Their Arms 5-10-07

A short while after Moses and the people of Israel miraculously passed through the Red Sea, "the Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites" (Exodus 17:8). The Israelites did not have the power to win this battle on their own, so Moses sent Joshua to the battlefield and then climbed to the top of a hill: "I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands" (Exodus 17:9).

God had previously demonstrated His power as Moses raised his staff to part the Red Sea (Exodus 14:16). He had also told Moses to use his staff to cause water to flow out of a rock (Exodus 17:5-6). Moses was now trusting God to demonstrate His power once again as he lifted this same staff in battle.

Exodus 17:11-13

"As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up - one on one side, one on the other - so that his hands remained steady till sunset. So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword."

Moses knew what he had to do, but he simply became worn out. Fortunately for the people of Israel, Moses had two trusted companions who stood by his side and were willing to hold up his arms until the battle was won.

Many people have committed their lives to fighting the battle for the Kingdom of God. These, who are daily on the front lines, feel greatly outnumbered and are prone to grow weary. They desperately need an Aaron and a Hur to come alongside with prayer and encouragement.

I feel very fortunate to have people all over the world praying for this ministry. Almost every day I receive notes saying "Thank you" and encouraging me to continue. This is a wonderful blessing and a confirmation that we are on the right path!

Our pastors, ministry leaders, missionaries, and those who continually look for ways to serve, need this same type of support; "Encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness" (Hebrews 3:13). Those who faithfully serve may appear strong and confident, but their arms are getting very tired and they need to be reassured. Our missionaries have stepped out with great faith, but they are also very lonely and need to know someone still cares.

Many of our Brothers and Sisters are on the front lines of battle today. Let's join them by becoming a continual "supply line" of encouragement and prayer. Let's be like Aaron and Hur, and hold up their arms!

Have A Great Day!

Watch For His Return 5-14-07

There will always be a fascination with the end times. There will be those who study every detail of scripture in an attempt to pinpoint a date and those who simply believe the end is near because of our current moral decay. Debates will continue about when Christ will return for His Church and exactly what signs will precede this wonderful event. Unfortunately, these debates often become heated and turn our attention away from the One who has promised to return.

Questions concerning the end times are not new. Two thousand years ago, the disciples asked Jesus: "What will be the signs of Your coming and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3). Jesus answered the question directly and in several parables, but His basic message was: "You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect Him" (Matthew 24:44).

There's nothing fundamentally wrong with discussing the end times. The return of Jesus Christ is our "blessed hope" (Titus 2:13). We are encouraged to live as those "who have longed for His appearing" (2 Timothy 4:8). But we should never allow our discussions to lead us into "foolish and stupid arguments" (2 Timothy 2:23). Though the scholars may not agree about all the details, one fact is unanimously proclaimed: "He's coming back!"

Mark 13:35-37

"Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back - whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'"

Are we ready for the Owner of the House to return? We can't afford to wait for that next promotion or for the kids to grow, we must wake up and be prepared today! We can't wait for our house to be built to our satisfaction before we dedicate it to the service of the Lord, we must give our all and serve the One who gave His life so we could live...today!!

If the end of our time on earth were to occur tomorrow, did our thoughts, words, and deeds for today bring glory and honor to our Heavenly Father? If the answer is no, we need to do some changing - we need to arise from our Spiritual slumber and clean house. For what is the purpose of our being allowed to walk this earth if not to bring Him glory?

The study and discussion of end times should cause us to praise God for His victory over evil. Our understanding of the end times should cause us to walk in reverent obedience and help us to fight the pulls of the world. Let's not be caught sleeping. Rather, let's look forward with great anticipation and commit to being prepared. Let's draw near to God in all we do and watch for His return.

Have A Great Day!

Set The Example

5-15-07

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, the gospel accounts of Jesus had not yet been written. Most believers didn't know many details of Jesus' life, so it was difficult to encourage by saying to live as Jesus would live. Instead, Paul led others to Jesus through the example he demonstrated in his own life.

1 Corinthians 11:1

"Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."

In setting the example, Paul certainly didn't claim to be perfect. He would be the first to stand up and say; "What a wretched man I am!" (Romans 7:24). Though Paul wrote and preached on how to live the Christian life, he still admitted his imperfections; "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that which Christ Jesus took hold of me" (Philippians 3:12).

And yet, Paul also knew he was a child of God and was willing to place his life in open view for others to examine and imitate; "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me - put it into practice" (Philippians 4:9).

When we claim to follow Jesus, the world takes notice - whether we like it or not. We may not feel we are witnessing, but for many people we're the only view of Jesus they will ever see and the only words of Jesus they will ever hear. We may not realize it, but the way we live cries out: "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."

Do we want others to put into practice what they see in us? Would our example cause others to be drawn closer to God or to drift further away? Do we follow Jesus' command to love one another so that, "By this all men will know you are My disciples" (John 13:35)? This is a huge responsibility and one we must not assume is only for the "Super-Christian."

A good friend of mine had an "I Love Jesus" sticker on his car. One day, as he sped in and out of traffic, he realized his driving was not setting a good Christian example. He solved this "problem" by removing the sticker. Rather than modify an area of his life, my friend removed his public identification with Jesus; this is very sad!

We cannot remove the "I Love Jesus" stickers from our life. The world is watching and we must be bold enough to stand and accept the accountability. We need men and women of strength and character - Brothers and Sisters who love one another and love the Lord with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength! I urge you to fall more in love with Jesus Christ and be among those who commit to live a life that brings glory and honor to God in ALL you do. Others are ready to follow. Let's be bold and direct them to Christ as we set the example.

Have A Great Day!

Looking At Our Heart 5-16-07

After Joshua died, the nation of Israel was ruled by judges for over 300 years. During this time, the people turned to God when life became difficult, but "did evil in the eyes of the Lord" (Judges 3:7) when the difficult times passed. Finally, they cried out for a king: "We want a king to rule us. Then we will be like the other nations" (1 Samuel 8:20). God gave them exactly what they wanted - He gave them Saul, "An impressive young man without equal among the Israelites" (1 Samuel 9:2).

Saul looked impressive and was loved by the people, but he failed to obey God's commands. After several years, God rejected Saul as king and sent Samuel to anoint a new king from among the sons of Jesse. When Samuel arrived at Jesse's home, he saw Eliab and thought for sure he was to be the next king (Eliab was probably tall and strong like Saul).

1 Samuel 16:7

"But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.'"

Samuel assumed the next king would fit the same "impressive" mold as Saul. But this king was to be chosen according to the criteria of God, not the criteria of man. God chose David, not because of his appearance or status, but because of his heart.

How often do we fall into the trap of evaluating others based on outward appearance? We drift toward the "normal" crowd and wrongly assume that, somehow, good looks and status produce wisdom. But God calls us to consider the heart of others and to strongly consider the condition of our own heart!

Much of our life is focused on being externally impressive. We desire the "right" looks, credentials, and possessions. We believe our outward condition makes us more acceptable, but God looks past the external and directly pierces into who we are on the inside. Our focus must forever be on how we are viewed in the eyes of God, not the eyes of man.

There are very few things with eternal value. And NOTHING outside the will of God can survive the flames of judgment. The priorities of our life become the treasures which mold our heart; "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). And our heart is NEVER hidden from the eyes of God!

Let's keep our treasure firmly in the Hands of God. Let's begin to consider the riches stored inside our Brothers and Sisters, and consider our true appearance as we stand before our holy Father. Everything external will one day fade away and we will stand bare and empty handed, with God looking at our heart.

Have A Great Day!

Carry Us To Completion

5-17-07

A great tragedy within the Christian faith is that many who believe they are on their way to Heaven will one day find they are sadly mistaken. They have been misled into believing that Church membership or good deeds will insure Salvation, but they will be cast aside on the day of judgment. This tragedy must be fought by speaking the truth about Salvation. We must teach of the need to trust in the saving grace offered through the sacrifice of Jesus for the forgiveness of sin. We must teach that faith in Jesus Christ - the Lord and Savior clearly presented in God's Word - is the ONLY way!

A second tragedy is that many who have truly trusted in Jesus for the forgiveness of sin, and desire to love Him and serve Him with all their heart, will live their days full of doubt and fear. They are on their way to Heaven but doubt when they don't feel "good enough" to deserve such a gift, and they fear a Holy God who couldn't possibly save such a wretched sinner. As they draw closer to the Light, their failures are revealed and they become discouraged or try to "work" harder to please God and gain His acceptance. We must also fight this tragedy by speaking the truth about Salvation.

The glorious truth is that none of us are good enough! "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Without God's grace, no one can ever hope to hit the mark of His perfect glory.

We don't enter Heaven based on what we've done, but only on whom we've placed our faith; "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith" (Ephesians 2:8). At the moment of Salvation, we become an eternal Child of God: "You are not your own; you were bought at a price" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). We were purchased with His blood and have become a "new creation: the old has gone, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). But a new creation does not continue down the same path.

We are "born again" when the Spirit of God transforms our heart; and as a new creation, we must learn to crawl, then walk, and one day run! We may stumble, but God promises we will continue to grow; for it's His plan that ALL His children become "conformed to the likeness of His Son" (Romans 8:29)...and being conformed is a lifetime process!

Philippians 1:6

"Being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

God has given us His Holy Spirit and "sealed {us} for the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30). Let's be confident in God's promise. We must continue to draw closer and give Him more of our heart, but we must also remember that we are His and He WILL finish the work He began. Our Heavenly Father has saved us AND promised to carry us to completion.

Have A Great Day!

John 8:54-59 - Lesson #93
5-18-07

The most important question we will ever face is, Who is Jesus Christ? Our answer to this question can affect the way we live for the rest of our life; but more importantly, our answer will determine our eternity.

A group of Jews were questioning Jesus about some of His bold claims. He claimed a higher authority than anything the Jews had ever known. He claimed to have the authority to grant freedom; "If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36). And He even claimed to have the authority to grant life; if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death" (John 8:51). The Jews then asked the all important question, "Who do You make Yourself out to be?" (John 8:53).

John 8:54-59

"Jesus answered, 'If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing. It is My Father who honors Me, of whom you say that He is your God. Yet you have not known Him, but I know Him. And if I say, "I do not know Him," I shall be a liar like you; but I do know Him and keep His word. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.' Then the Jews said to Him, 'You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?' Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.' Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by."

The claims Jesus made about Himself would only be mere words if they were made by His own authority. But His claims were made valid through a uniquely personal relationship with the Father. He claimed a divine authority which had been established before the beginning of time and seen by Abraham. When Abraham was taking Isaac up the mountain he saw the day when "God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering" (Genesis 22:8). He knew the day would come when, "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 22:18). Abraham believed the promises of God but could only see them from afar off (Hebrews 11:13). Though Abraham did not know the fullness of Jesus, he rejoiced in His appearing.

The Jews dismissed His claim by comparing His age to the more than two thousand years since Abraham. Jesus responded with a clear statement of identity, "I AM." He has always existed in the present, "I, the Lord, am the first; and with the last I am He" (Isaiah 41:4). But Jesus was also claiming the title reserved only for God; "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you'" (Exodus 3:14). The Jews understood His claim as blasphemy and sought to stone Him according to their law (Leviticus 24:16).

His claims are clear. He claimed to be more than a man, more than a prophet. He claimed a unique Sonship with authority over sin and death. And finally He claimed to be I AM. The Jews understood His claims and rejected. Now we are called to answer the question Jesus first asked of Peter: "Who do you say that I am?" (Matthew 16:15). Let's answer by believing His claims, living by His authority, and rejoicing to see His day.

Have A Great Day!

Their Field of Pigs

5-21-07

The parable of the prodigal son has had special meaning to our family over the last many years. We've witnessed nearly every aspect of this parable work itself out through the life of our daughter, from the pain of her rebellion to the joy of her return. I've also seen this as the most common problem faced by parents all over the world. No matter what country or culture, parents agonize over the one who has gone astray.

In this parable, we see a rebellious young man demanding what he felt was rightfully his: "Father, give me my share of the estate" (Luke 15:12). This disrespectful attitude grew until the son no longer desired to live under his father's roof. He "got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living" (Luke 15:13).

The reason this is such a universally common issue is that we are all born with the same sinful nature - a nature which holds us in tight control unless we are utterly transformed by the Spirit of God through faith in Jesus; "Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires" (Romans 8:5). At the heart of the sinful nature is a pride which continually demands what we believe we deserve - this is the root of all sin!

The prodigal son continued to live according to his sinful nature until he found himself in a field of pigs; "he longed to fill his stomach with the pods {they} were eating" (Luke 15:16). But God used this terrible situation to soften the heart of the prodigal son and bring him to a state of submitted repentance.

Luke 15:17-18

"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.'"

Before the son left home, I'm sure the father tried to provide wise counsel about the true priorities in life. I'm sure the father desperately tried every possible method of guiding the son along the straight and narrow path. I'm also pretty sure the father simply held his son close and wept. Unfortunately, the lessons the son needed to learn could only be taught through pigs.

There is nothing more painful than to watch someone you love walk down a path of obvious pain - nothing rips the heart like watching your child walk away from God and engage in various forms of "wild living." But it helps to remember that God loves the prodigal more than we can hope or imagine. He desires to live with them in an eternally restored relationship. Our Heavenly Father will never miss an opportunity to teach the prodigal and draw them near - even as they may drift and sink - even as they may wallow in their field of pigs.

Have A Great Day!

Love Enough To Let Go

5-22-07

In the message "Their Field of Pigs" we considered the parable of the prodigal son and were encouraged to remember that God will use every tool available (even pigs) to draw His children Home. Our highest desire for our children must be to see them secure in the arms of God. Notice that in this parable there's no mention of the father between the time the son left and when he returned home. The father appears to have watched his son leave and then simply waited for his return.

The father must have known of his son's condition while away; "this son of mine was dead and is alive again" (Luke 15:24). There must have been many reports of the son's activities which were openly discussed with the rest of the family: "The older brother became angry... 'this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home'" (Luke 15:28,30). And yet, while the son was away, the father never once stepped in to "rescue" him.

Was the father lazy and uncaring? Was this simply the product of a macho culture that didn't show much emotion? Or was this a father who knew how God's grace could work a difficult situation toward a wonderful good?

James 1:2-4

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

We often reference this passage during times of personal trial. These verses encourage us to understand the purpose of our difficult times and to trust God so fully that we actually rejoice because we know He is using our trials to make us complete.

Many of us understand and at least try to apply these verses in our own life. But it's an additional step of faith (a very big step) to trust and apply these verses in the life of others - especially those we dearly love. If we are to rejoice in our own trials because of the good being worked within us, there is also a sense in which we should rejoice in the trials of others.

As painful as it must have been, the father allowed God to complete His work - even though it meant his son would actually long to eat with the pigs! And yes, this father loved his son.

When someone we love goes astray, let's continue to lift them up in prayer; always let them know they are loved and continually speak a gentle message of truth. Let's NEVER give up hope, but let's allow God to finish the glorious work He's begun. Let's trust Him above ALL else and love enough to let go.

Have A Great Day!

A Long Way Off 5-23-07

In the last two messages, we've considered the parable of the prodigal son. We've seen how we must often "Love Enough to Let Go" and trust that God will continue to work in the life of our prodigal even as they walk through "Their Field of Pigs."

As the son was longing to eat the pig food, he decided to return home and began to rehearse what he would say; "I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son" (Luke 15:18-19).

The son returned home. But before he could give his speech - before he could tell his father about eating with the pigs...before he could "prove" his repentance or say ANYTHING - the father received him with joy.

Luke 15:20

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him."

When the father saw his son had returned, he was overjoyed and wanted to celebrate: "Bring the fatted calf...for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found" (Luke 15:23,24). This type of love and joy cannot be manufactured for a one-time event. It must be established in the relationship long before there is trouble, and maintained even when all else is falling apart.

The scripture isn't clear about what turmoil occurred when the prodigal son left home. We're never told of the father's pain - but I assure you it was there. It's not clear how long the son was away - but I KNOW the father spent many anxious moments worrying about his son. And yet, when the son returned, there was joy and forgiveness. Without condoning the poor choices the son had made, the father received the son and loved him without reservation.

When we turn to our Heavenly Father in faith, He accepts us without requiring that we earn His love or demonstrate our worth. We may have drifted far away and are unsure how to find our way back into His loving arms; but when we turn and seek Him, we find He is right there ready to receive us Home.

Jesus Christ submitted to a horrible death in order to provide a path of restoration. We who have been restored are now called to restore with others in this same manner; "Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (Colossians 3:13). We are called to be a catalyst of restoration, not a hedge of thorns which must be vaulted over. When our prodigal begins to return, let's believe the best, be filled with compassion, and receive them back with true forgiveness and joy - even while they are a long way off.

Have A Great Day!

The Other Son

5-24-07

The parable of the prodigal son contains so many practical lessons on relationships (particularly for parents) that we often forget Jesus spoke this parable in response to an accusation from the Pharisees; "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:2). The message of the prodigal son is really about our Heavenly Father who rejoices every time a "sinner" turns their heart to Him in repentance. But why did Jesus talk about TWO sons? What was the message of the son who remained at home?

He was the son who quietly watched his younger brother make disrespectful demands on his father; "Give me my share of the estate" (Luke 15:12). He was the son who stayed at home to work the fields while his brother "squandered his wealth in wild living" (Luke 15:13). And he was the son who became angry with his father and refused to celebrate his brother's return: "All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat" (Luke 15:29).

This was the son who walked the straight and narrow - walked the path of disciplined obedience - but he missed his opportunity to receive true blessings as he walked.

Luke 15:31

"My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.'"

The son had been "slaving" in the hope of a future blessing, but his heart was not joyfully serving. He missed the real blessing of walking with his father and having free access to everything his father owned.

As believers in the saving grace of Jesus Christ, we understand that people can be saved at any point in their life - regardless of past sins. The thief on the cross received his Salvation only moments before he died. But there is always part of us that cries "foul!" Somehow it doesn't seem fair when others have worked so hard for so long.

This attitude shows we also have missed the blessing of walking with our Lord. Heaven is never a reward for "obedient" living; it is a free gift to those who believe in Jesus. We should never feel we're "slaving" under the burden of His commands in order to earn His favor. Rather, we are to joyfully follow because we know that only in Him is there true peace, true contentment...true blessings!

Let's follow our Lord with a firm perspective of eternity; but let's never become so focused on the future that we miss the blessings given to us today - the blessings of the journey! Let's renew our joy at being allowed to walk every day with our Heavenly Father and rejoice whenever a repentant heart returns home. Let's never make the sad mistake of living the burdened life of the other son.

Have A Great Day!

John 9:1-5 - Lesson #94
5-25-07

The Feast of Tabernacles had come to an end and the debate between Jesus and the Jews was growing. As Jesus made His claims more clear, the opposition by the Jews became more fierce; "Then they took up stones to throw at Him" (John 8:59). But Jesus was on a mission of truth which would not be stopped.

John 9:1-5

"Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.'"

We are not told how the disciples knew this man was born blind, but notice how they turned this man and his suffering into a theological question. The pursuit of truth is a worthy endeavor, but not when it comes at the expense of the greater truths of compassion, kindness and love. I often think how Satan must rejoice over the majority of our theological debates today.

A common belief during the time of Jesus was that trials were a result of sin and prosperity was a reward for right living. Unfortunately, this is still a common teaching today. The fact that the man was blind from birth must have meant the parents had sinned or the man sinned before he was born - either while in the womb or in a preexistent state. This shows how bad assumptions can lead to absurd conclusions.

The truth is that all suffering is the result of sin, but not necessarily the sin of the individual. We live in a sinful world which has fallen far from the perfection of God's creation. My mom died from skin cancer when she was 43, and it had nothing to do with her sin. When sin first entered the world, ALL areas of the world were affected. And this means that bad things sometimes happen for reasons we cannot determine.

This man was born blind because of the world into which he was born. But in this particular case God chose to use the suffering of this man to declare His glory. Jesus would heal the man's eyes, giving him sight. The new light which the man received reminds us of the Spiritual light which only Jesus can provide: "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness" (John 8:12).

There was a growing sense of urgency in the ministry of Jesus. He knew His time was short. His appointment with the cross was only a few months away, so He set out to work the works of God while there was still light. Do we live with this same sense of urgency? I know that nothing depends on our strength or ability; and yet, the time is short. The time is now, while we have the light and see the opportunity. While it is still day, let's pursue the risen Christ and intentionally share His greater truths.

Have A Great Day!

Cut The Lifeboats

5-28-07

At the end of his third missionary journey, Paul was arrested in Jerusalem, transferred about 40 miles up the road to Caesarea, and sat in prison for over two years before being sent by boat to stand trial in Rome. During the journey to Rome, a storm blew the ship off course and threatened to kill everyone on board.

Acts 27:30-32

"In an attempt to escape from the ship, the sailors let the lifeboat down into the sea, pretending they were going to lower some anchors from the bow. Then Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, 'Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved.' So the soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it fall away."

Where is our true security? Most of us have lifeboats which we keep close to our side. Even after we've accepted the forgiveness and saving grace of Jesus, we tend to keep the lifeboats - just in case. We say we're trusting our future to God, but we still make sure every step of our life is planned for the next 30 years and fight any attempt to deviate from "the plan" - just in case.

We say we understand the concept of eternity and the idea that our life is "a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes" (James 4:14), but we still strive for titles and positions so our friends and family can remember us as "successful" - just in case. We say we want to live for Jesus and praise our Heavenly Father for all eternity, but we still don't want to miss the immediate pleasures of the world - just in case.

If we keep one foot in the ship and one foot in the lifeboat, we will never live as God desires. It makes absolutely no sense to say we believe and trust God with our eternity and yet fail to trust Him with the uncertainties of tomorrow or the storms of today. Cutting the lifeboats means we place ALL our trust in God, believe His Word as truth, and live accordingly: "Do not merely listen to the Word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says" (James 1:22).

We MUST stay with the ship! A saving relationship with Jesus implies we have recognized the eternal storm of sin which threatened to sink us to the pit of hell, but it also implies we are clinging to His forgiveness as the ONLY way to be saved; "for there is no other name under Heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Let's ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any area of our life which is not consistent with a life of unrestrained belief and trust. Then, let's ask for the strength and courage to, once and for all, give Him ALL of our heart and cut the lifeboats.

Have A Great Day!

The Father's View

5-29-07

In the message "Cut The Lifeboats" we were encouraged to cut away those areas of our life which still cling to the world's answers for fulfillment and security - those areas which keep our hearts from being fully devoted to God. But at the same time, we acknowledged this can be a difficult process. One reason for this difficulty is our extremely limited view of our life and the world around us.

Our flawed perception is not unlike a tiny ant. These small creatures seem to never stop working as they scurry about frantically moving little grains of sand from here to there in the hope of building a secure home. If we could ask an ant to describe his world, he might tell us about his hole in the ground, about the few thousand members of his family, and maybe something about the few surrounding meters where he gathers food. Obviously, the ant has a very limited view of the real world.

But as our Heavenly Father watches us build our homes of security - watches us frantically moving from here to there, trying to climb to the top of the hill - He also sees a creation with a VERY limited view of the real world; "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9).

As seen from God's perspective, we have almost no understanding of how the little corner of our life fits into His plan or how our current problems are leading us closer to Him. From God's perspective our view is as limited as the ant. But, though we may not fully see or understand, He is calling us to trust.

Proverbs 3:5-6

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight."

Many of us are facing difficult circumstances. We want to walk along God's path and live a life pleasing to Him, but we're not sure which direction to turn. Our indecision is often because we only trust in what we clearly understand - and we've begun to realize our understanding is not very clear. But God's promise is that as we love and trust Him with all our heart, the path directly in front of us will become straight - as we trust, the decisions will become clear and we will KNOW our next step!

We must truly believe that our Heavenly Father sees and hears ALL, and that He's infinitely complete in understanding. Where we are fortunate to see a few short steps down the path, He sees the entire journey - the journey leading us "to be conformed to the likeness of His Son" (Romans 8:29), and the destination of spending all eternity praising His name. We must keep stepping out in faith, but we must do so by leaning on Him, continually seeking His direction, and trusting the Father's view.

Have A Great Day!

Free Of Thorns 5-30-07

In the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:3-8), Jesus tells about a farmer who scatters seed on four different types of soil: packed, shallow, thorny, and fertile. In this parable, the seed refers to the Word of God and the soil refers to those who hear the Word.

Those of packed soil have hearts which are so hard that they immediately turn away. Those of shallow soil may quickly germinate and grow, but they also quickly lose interest and die. Most of us reading this type of message fall into one of the last two types of soil. We desire God's Word to grow on the fertile ground of our heart and produce a bountiful crop, but we seem to continually battle the thorns.

Matthew 13:22

"The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the Word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful."

We have more opportunity to receive God's Word today than any other time in history. We can hear good preaching in church, on radio, on tape, or even over the internet. We can read God's Word in a variety of translations and receive an abundance of help with interpretation. Our soil is definitely receiving seed. But the challenge is to keep our lives free of the distractions which hinder growth.

Here's a simple test of our soil. Jesus said the number one commandment is to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). When was the last time our heart overflowed with love for God? When was the last time we considered the sacrifice of Jesus and nearly bubbled over with "Thank You!"?

God desires for us to love Him. In fact, His entire Word is a message of calling us back to a loving relationship. If we have a hard time following His most basic desire, it's no wonder we're confused about where He's leading. We look for specific direction with where to live and work, yet we fail to give Him the entirety of our heart and simply worship at His feet.

When God's Word comes into our life, we should receive it and cherish it as a precious gift. We ought to immediately look for ways to apply His Word and make it grow, not process it through the distractions of deadlines, appointments, bills, and worldly relationships and ambitions.

Is the Word growing in our life, or is it being choked by unnecessary demands of the world? "The world and its desires pass away" (1 John 2:17), but the things of God are eternal. He is calling us to live a life fully dedicated to Him in ALL we do. Let's weed our garden and remove distractions so the seed of His Word can grow and bear fruit. Let's begin to develop fertile soil which is free of thorns.

Have A Great Day!

Always Rejoice 5-31-07

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul gives an exhortation to "Rejoice in the Lord always - and again I say, rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4). Paul had been arrested and sent to Rome to await trial. He spent his days and nights under house arrest chained to a Roman soldier, but was still able to say, rejoice...always!

When we begin to understand the life changing gift of forgiveness through faith in the sacrifice of Jesus - when we truly grasp the concept of eternity and, through faith, believe we will spend all eternity in the presence of God - we have more than enough reason to rejoice, no matter what our present circumstances might be.

If we are unable to rejoice, we have allowed our eyes to become too fixed on the present. Our attention has become focused on our earthly desires, goals and ambitions, and we have lost sight of the blessings of a life in Christ. Either that, or we don't really believe!

The verses which immediately follow Paul's call to rejoice list some real benefits of a life of rejoicing.

Philippians 4:5-7

"Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Gentleness and a lack of anxiety result from rejoicing in a risen Savior. If Jesus Christ can be raised from the dead and sit down "at the right hand of God" (Hebrews 10:12), then our Heavenly Father can certainly take care of problems with our job, health, kids, finances or relationships - so rejoice! When we rejoice and focus on an eternity in Heaven and a Savior who walks by our side, our anxiety fades - our present trials become "light and momentary" (2 Corinthians 4:17).

When we live a life filled with rejoicing, we are able to focus on the solutions we know God can provide. We develop a heart of thanksgiving - a heart which naturally presents everything to God in prayer and waits with grateful expectation for His reply. We begin to trust in God's plan for our life and His desire for us to be with Him forever. The result, which admittedly takes time and patience, is "the peace of God which transcends all understanding."

These words written by Paul are not the deluded ramblings of an old man in Roman confinement, they are the true promises of God! They represent a promised life we all can live. Our Father offers us a life of gentleness, contentment, and peace; a life free of anxiety and worry. But this life can only happen if we love and trust Him with all our heart, and if we are determined to always rejoice.

Have A Great Day!