

Devotionals from God's Daily Word Ministries

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Consider Him Who Endured

3-1-07

In the messages "Cords of Encouragement" and "Defeated Lions And Bears" we considered our role in the Body or Family of Christ. We saw that as we walk together down God's path, we must assume a certain level of responsibility for one another. We must encourage our Brothers and Sisters when they are down and remind one another that God is near, that our trials will soon fade; "Encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today!" (Hebrews 3:13).

But as we encourage, we must do so from a position of Biblical truth. We must continually direct each other toward Christ and the life He calls us to live. It is never true encouragement to simply lend our agreement and "comfort" to a complaining or selfish attitude. This actually keeps someone down and threatens to pull us down in the process.

We began this journey through faith in the sacrifice of Jesus; "whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Our Salvation, our eternal life, even our very existence, is based on a personal belief that Jesus died for the forgiveness of our sins so we could live with Him for all eternity. The faith of our parents cannot save us, nor can the doctrine of our church - WE must believe.

Jesus endured ridicule and humiliation from His accusers, and overwhelming pain on the cross, simply because He dearly loved us (Oh Lord, help me to better understand this love!). The joy of seeing our restored relationship with the Father allowed Him to persevere through unbelievable hardship. His sacrifice brought us Salvation - His perseverance should bring us strength and a renewed hope.

Hebrews 12:3

"Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

There are going to be days when the burden seems extra heavy - days when the attacks come fast and furious and feel like they will never end. It may bring temporary relief for someone to agree and confirm the difficulty of our situation, but the only way to truly ease the load is to focus our heart back to Christ and pray for His strength; "May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance" (2 Thessalonians 3:5). We must persevere...because He first persevered for us!

There is definitely a place within the Body for compassion and the sharing of one another's sorrows; but when our burdens become seemingly unbearable, we must also encourage one another to simply put one foot in front of the other and boldly continue down His path. His grace and His strength WILL be sufficient! We will not lose heart if we focus on His love. We will persevere and not grow weary if we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and consider Him who endured.

Have A Great Day!

John 8:12-18 - Lesson #84
3-2-07

During the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus had begun to speak boldly about His identity and the authority of His message; "He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him" (John 7:18). At the conclusion of the Feast, Jesus continued to proclaim His truth.

John 8:12-18

"Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, 'I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.' The Pharisees therefore said to Him, 'You bear witness of Yourself; Your witness is not true.' Jesus answered and said to them, 'Even if I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going; but you do not know where I come from and where I am going. You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one. And yet if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone, but I am with the Father who sent Me. It is also written in your law that the testimony of two men is true. I am One who bears witness of Myself, and the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me.'"

This was the second of seven "I am" statements in the gospel of John. Jesus was introduced as "the true Light which gives light to every man" (John 1:9), a specific reference to point to Jesus as God; "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). Isaiah prophesied about a future time when, "the Lord will be your everlasting light" (Isaiah 60:20), and David called God "my light and my Salvation" (Psalm 27:1).

The Pharisees did not accept Jesus' claim and said the testimony of a single individual was not valid; "by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established" (Deuteronomy 19:15). No one could establish truth on his own. Jesus had even acknowledged the validity of this law; "If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true" (John 5:31). But Jesus was never alone. He was one with the Father and when He spoke the Father also spoke. Not only was His word true because of the testimony of the Father, but His word was true because He was God; "it is impossible for God to lie" (Hebrews 6:18).

Once again, Jesus confronted the value system by which the Pharisees were judging; "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment" (John 7:24). The Pharisees had created a system of rules and self-affirming truth which had no place for Jesus. And while external actions for the glory of God definitely have their place, judgment is reserved for the condition of the heart; "man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

When Jesus walked this earth, He did not come to judge or condemn. However, the day will come when He WILL judge; "the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son" (John 5:22). And we can be certain that His judgment will be true. What is our established system of truth? When we one day stand before Him, there will be only one question: What is the condition of your heart?

Have A Great Day!

Into His Hands

3-5-07

A life lived by fully trusting God begins with a simple faith in the forgiveness offered through Jesus. But this faith will grow as we apply it to the varied and difficult circumstances which inevitably come our way. Not many of us begin with the faith of Peter; "Lord, if it's You, tell me to come to You on the water" (Matthew 14:28). Rather, we cautiously test the water by trusting God in small areas of our life. But as we see His promises hold true and witness the blessings of walking in obedience, we ought to begin to step with greater confidence and trust Him more and more.

Prior to crossing into the promised land, Moses told the people of Israel: "Do not be afraid, for the Lord goes with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you" (Deuteronomy 31:6). This is one of the many promises which remain with us today. As we walk with God into the land of promise - the land of contentment and peace - we must learn to truly apply these promises and consistently live by them. He is RIGHT THERE! And He wants us to live with the contentment of knowing He is in control.

But this can be difficult. Every day we are bombarded with things which attempt to pull us away from God and steal our joy. Though He is walking right beside us, and absolutely nothing catches Him by surprise, we seldom even think of Him during our day. This should not be! If we are truly His child, we must trust Him with ALL and allow Him to live in and through us - this is the life He desires us to live.

We must continually believe the truth of His Word and allow our faith to mature by taking steps which lead us closer to God - even if our steps of faith seem small. With each new step, we will more clearly see the truth of God's promises. We will begin to see past the visible garbage of this world and begin to gaze with wonder on "Him who is invisible" (Hebrews 11:27). The life of contentment and peace is the life of total commitment and surrender.

Psalm 31:5

"Into Your hands I commit my spirit; redeem me, O Lord, the God of truth."

What part of our life are we holding back from God? If we really believe He created the Universe and sent His Son to die for the forgiveness of our sin so we can spend eternity with Him in Heaven, isn't it foolish for us to think we can do a better job of controlling ANYTHING! If we trust Him for our eternal destiny, shouldn't we trust Him for the much more trivial matters of our daily life. Our God is VERY capable and He CAN be trusted!

Though it may not seem as dramatic a step as Peter's, we are all being called out of the boat today. We are being called to believe and trust with all our heart. Let's not allow another day to go by without fully committing our body, soul, mind and spirit, our absolute all and EVERY area of our life, into His hands.

Have A Great Day!

More Than Grasshoppers

3-6-07

After Moses led the Israelites out of Egyptian slavery, they were guided by God to the edge of Canaan - the land promised to Abraham. God instructed Moses to send twelve men to explore the land; "See what the land is like and whether the people who live there are strong or weak, few or many" (Numbers 13:18).

The twelve "spies" traveled through the entire length of Canaan and brought back their report. All twelve traveled the same path, but Joshua and Caleb saw the land and its inhabitants through the promises of God: "The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. If the Lord is pleased with us, He will lead us into that land" (Numbers 14:7-8). The other ten saw great danger and an enemy who was too big to be defeated.

Numbers 13:31-33

"We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are. The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them."

The promised land was truly a land flowing with milk and honey, but it was also a land with many enemies. Joshua and Caleb saw the same enemy as the other ten, but they had a much clearer view and understanding of God. They knew if God was on their side, the size and strength of the enemy didn't matter - God would provide the victory.

We often face the same fear as the other ten. God wants us to enter into His promised land, take possession, and reside there for the rest of our days; but there are often enemies which fill us with fear and make us feel small and insignificant. Enemies may come in the form of addictions, choices of entertainment, finances, or worldly priorities. We may even face more tangible enemies who threaten to cause us physical or emotional pain. All these enemies keep us out of the promised land, all appear to be undefeatable giants. But with God on our side, ALL can be overcome!

Without a clear understanding of who we are in Christ, every enemy appears to tower over us; "apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). But when we place our trust in God and allow Him to work through us, our posture before the enemy is greatly strengthened; "In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Romans 8:37).

God's land of promise - the contentment of His presence - is waiting for us to enter in and take possession. God did not create us to be fearful insects, but an image of the Most High! Let's know the One who gives us strength and victory in battle. Let's better understand that when God leads, we are much more than grasshoppers!

Have A Great Day!

Highly Valued Mist

3-7-07

In the message "More Than Grasshoppers" we considered the spies who were sent into the promised land to evaluate the enemy. We saw that without a proper understanding of God and how we fit into His plan, the enemies in our life will always appear as undefeatable giants.

This sense of walking among the giants causes many of us to struggle with insecurities, low self esteem, and general feelings of inadequacy. While it's true we are called to, "in humility consider others better than ourselves" (Philippians 2:3), we also must walk with a sense of identity, purpose, and worth. And while it's true that in the context of eternity we are "a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes" (James 4:14), this seemingly insignificant "mist" is dearly loved by the Creator of the Universe.

Our real sense of identity, purpose and worth, will only be realized as we understand that our value is never attained through the things of this world which all pass away; it only comes from our Heavenly Father who has adopted us as His child and made us an heir of His Kingdom!

Romans 8:15-17

"You received the Spirit of sonship. And by Him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs - heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ."

The eternal inheritance we receive through this adoption makes everything of the world seem extremely insignificant. We are a child of God! This is our identity. While we walk on this earth, we are being "conformed into the likeness of His Son" (Romans 8:29). This is our purpose. And in our adoption, we are made "co-heirs with Christ." This is our worth!

As this world tries to pull us down, let's remember our Father owns ALL; "Every animal of the forest is Mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills" (Psalm 50:10). He owns it all, created it all, and nothing is beyond His reach. As others try to continually show us our faults and put us down, let's remember that Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us - one day we will be made perfect and walk down streets of "pure gold, like transparent glass" (Revelation 21:21).

Let's pull these truths together into a victorious Christian life. Let's hold on very loosely to anything of the world which artificially determines our worth and passionately cling to our worth in Christ; "For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18). Let's live our life as a "vanishing mist" while remembering we are co-heirs with Jesus in the Kingdom of God - let's live as an honored, protected, and highly valued mist.

Have A Great Day!

Did God Really Say

3-8-07

The first two chapters of the Bible tell how, "In the beginning God created the Heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). God placed Adam in the Garden of Eden and created Eve as his companion and helper. Life in the garden was good, but it didn't take long for the deception of the devil to really mess things up.

God had given Adam and Eve the freedom to eat from any tree in the garden - any tree except one; "You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die" (Genesis 2:17). God's instructions were clear and His consequences for disobedience severe. But when the devil first confronted Eve, he began by slightly changing God's Word in order to cause doubt.

Genesis 3:1

"He said to the woman, 'Did God really say, "You must not eat from any tree in the garden"?"

This slight shift from a single tree to ANY tree put Eve immediately on the defensive: "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden'" (Genesis 3:2-3). The devil continued his attack by giving Eve a different interpretation of God's Word: "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God" (Genesis 3:4-5). Eve clearly knew the truth; but without a firm conviction to obey at all cost, she evaluated the merit of the devil's lie and, being unable to refute his reasoning, gave in to sin.

In the several thousand years since that first confrontation, the tactics of the devil are still pretty much the same. His attack always begins with getting us to shift from the absolute nature of God's Word, causing us to doubt and defend against his deception.

God's Word says: "Whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). But the devil says: "Did God really say there is only one way? Surely God wants everyone to go to heaven and will accept many beliefs as long as they are good and sincere." This deception pulls people from God's path every day. Jesus clearly said: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). The one and ONLY way is Jesus!

If we are not firm in our conviction that God's Word is true, we too will become vulnerable to the devil's attacks of doubt and will soon begin to believe his twisted lies. God's Word says our most important "duty" is to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30). Let's prepare by studying His Word, praying for wisdom to know His truth, and loving Him with our absolute ALL. Let's hold firmly to God's Word and not be even slightly shaken when the enemy asks: Did God really say?

Have A Great Day!

John 8:19-20 - Lesson #85
3-9-07

Jesus stated He was the light of the world and indicated He was the way to move from the darkness of death to the light of life. The Pharisees contended this claim by stating the word of a single individual was not valid, but "by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established" (Deuteronomy 19:15). Jesus responded by rightly saying that even if He were the only witness, His testimony was still true. But He then took an unexpected turn by saying there were, in fact, multiple witnesses giving testimony; "I am with the Father who sent Me" (John 8:16). Naturally, the Pharisees were surprised.

John 8:19-20

"Then they said to Him, 'Where is Your Father?' Jesus answered, 'You know neither Me nor My Father. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also.' These words Jesus spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and no one laid hands on Him, for His hour had not yet come."

It's interesting to see the different ways the gospel message is presented in John. To Nicodemus Jesus spoke about being born again, belief, and the gift of eternal life (John 3). To the woman at the well Jesus spoke about asking and receiving the gift of living water (John 4). But in this discussion with the Pharisees Jesus gave a more general view of why He walked the earth: "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (John 1:18). Jesus came to declare the Father - to make Him known!

How can an infinite God reveal Himself to finite man? There is so much about God we will never understand until we see Him "face to face" (1 Corinthians 13:12). And without God taking the initiative there is nothing we would EVER comprehend! But God has given us glimpses of Himself in creation and in the lives of many throughout history. He has moved through men to write His story, and at just the right time He sent Jesus, who came "in the likeness of {finite} men" (Philippians 2:7) to reveal the infinite Father.

Jesus revealed the Father through His teaching; but more importantly, He revealed the Father simply by living and being; "I and My Father are one" (John 10:30). This unique oneness means that to really see the character of Jesus is to see the character of the Father; "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Jesus shows us the character of God, which is the character by which we ought to live. But He also provides a way to know God for all eternity; "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God" (John 17:3). We know God only by the grace-filled forgiveness of sin through faith in Jesus.

Though these words were confrontational, no one was able to hinder Him because His time had not yet come. From beginning to end God is in complete control - His purposes will not be stopped. From His virgin birth in a manger to His painful death on a cross, to His victorious resurrection and ascension, each step was to reveal the love, mercy and justice of God. ALL will be accomplished for His glory, and in His time.

Have A Great Day!

Boundary Line of Truth

3-12-07

In the message "Did God Really Say" we saw how the devil began his deception by causing Eve to doubt what God said: "Did God really say, 'You must not eat...?'" (Genesis 3:1). He then said God had lied and was actually keeping her from something beneficial: "God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5).

The devil convinced Eve that disobeying God (in just this one instance) would be the right thing to do. After all, she would become more like God...and that **MUST** be the proper path to follow.

Genesis 3:6

"When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it."

Eve had seen the fruit before and already knew it looked good, but God had established a boundary line which until now she had not crossed. But when the devil presented his twisted version of the truth, this line began to shift. Eve became unsure about absolute right and wrong and saw the line as something she could control. She adjusted God's path to aligned with her own desires and, in the process, she violated God's command.

God has shown each of us the boundary line between right and wrong - we **KNOW** the truth. God's line is not subject to our control and we are not given the freedom to cross the line depending on our circumstances or perceived benefit.

But we are often deceived by simple justifications: "I know this is wrong, but my increased wisdom from this experience will eventually be used to help others." Or, "I know this is wrong, but what else can I do? God surely wants me to eat and pay my bills." Or the common sexual deception; "I know this is wrong, but we really love each other."

It's God's desire that we trust Him with all our heart and follow His path each and every day, without ANY shortcuts or deviations. As we follow His leading, we will face many decisions - many places where the path divides and we must decide which direction to turn. Fortunately, we can depend on God to **NEVER** direct us into sin. If a path contains sin, we can be sure it's **NOT** God's path - not the path we ought to follow!

Let's trust Him to absolutely direct our every step. Let's draw so close to our Heavenly Father that all deception is exposed. Let's walk His path without compromise and refuse to shift, or cross over, His boundary line of truth.

Have A Great Day!

Where Are You

3-13-07

All over the world, people are asking how to strengthen their relationship with God. Many have wandered from His path and become entangled in the weeds. We never plan to leave God's path and become entangled; rather, it seems we simply take a wrong turn and then drift through small steps of compromise. How does this happen? And once we've drifted, how do we return and guard against drifting once again?

Man first wandered from God's path in the Garden of Eden. The devil deceived Eve and caused her to disobey God's command; Eve ate fruit from the forbidden tree and gave some to her willing husband. As soon as they ate the fruit, they became aware they were naked and covered themselves with leaves.

Genesis 3:8-9

"Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, 'Where are you?'"

The very first sin caused the delusion that it was possible to hide from God. This delusion continues today! We sit among the weeds and think God doesn't notice - that He doesn't see us in the midst of our sin. But the all-knowing Creator of the Universe knew exactly where Adam was hiding. God wasn't searching through the bushes trying to find His lost creation. No, God was speaking directly to Adam: "Adam, why are you in this condition? Do you even know where you are and how far you have drifted?"

Adam's willful disobedience caused him to tremble as he answered: "I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid" (Genesis 3:10). Adam was lost. Somehow, even in their garden paradise, Adam and Eve had wandered in their relationship with God. The devil had found them alone - not walking with their Father - and began his great deception. Now, sin had caused shame, fear, and separation.

ALL sin has its beginning in our wandering from the presence of God. No one "falls" into sin by a momentary slip; rather, sin is the result of a long slow drift away from intimate fellowship with God. Drifting from His presence causes us to become more susceptible to sin, which continues the cycle of even further separation. Soon, we have become entangled and completely lose sight of His path.

The way back always begins with a humble and repentant heart. We must confess we have strayed, admit our straying as sin, and ask for the strength and guidance to return. God will immediately shine His light, strengthen our steps, and ask us to simply focus on loving Him with all our heart.

Let's return to the presence of God and be determined to never leave. Let's continually examine our life and make sure we're walking right by His side whenever God asks, "Where are you?"

Have A Great Day!

Opportunity To Praise

3-14-07

There are going to be days when we just don't feel like being thankful - we wake up and don't seem able to praise. We know we should "rejoice in the Lord always" (Philippians 4:4); we're trying to learn "the secret of being content in any and every situation" (Philippians 4:12); and we want to believe that "in all things God works for the good of those who love Him" (Romans 8:28), but sometimes it's just difficult.

There are many reasons for days like this. We sometimes lose the eternal perspective of our life and our surroundings. We may take our eyes off Jesus and begin to look at the gathering storm (Matthew 14:30). We may become entangled in the weeds and get choked by "the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth" (Matthew 13:22). Or we may simply become tired and weary.

Days like this are to be expected. Jesus said, "In this world you will have trouble" (John 16:33) - and our trouble will sometimes strain our relationship with God. But even in the midst of our trouble, we are all being "transformed into His image" (2 Corinthians 3:18). When we place our life in His hands, He begins the process of transformation - a process which WILL continue; "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion" (Philippians 1:6). Even though we may sometimes struggle and find ourselves in a dry desert, we are still progressing from what we once were to what we will yet become. God will use these difficult seasons to mold our heart if we will simply continue to trust, love, and praise.

We must NEVER forget that Jesus also said of our troubles; "But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). We must continue to grow in our relationship with God until He is so near that we can truly see how He has overcome and praise Him all day and every day. He desires our praise, and is, without a doubt, deserving of our praise!

Psalms 113:3

"From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets, the name of the Lord is to be praised."

The Psalm writer is stating a simple fact: The Lord IS to be praised! Jesus affirmed this truth when He was riding into Jerusalem and made it clear that He will receive praise with or without our participation. Crowds had begun to praise Him and some of the religious leaders told Jesus to make them stop. But Jesus responded; "I tell you, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out" (Luke 19:40). Either we offer up our praise to the Creator of the Universe, or the rocks will begin to sing!

No matter what our situation is today, let's remember He is worthy of our praise! He has picked us up, cleaned us off, and adopted us into His Family. It is sad and a terrible shame, but we often forget how many reasons we have for being thankful. Let's rise up and use this and every other moment of the day to rejoice with thanksgiving in our heart - let's not miss another opportunity to praise.

Have A Great Day!

The Resurrected Life

3-15-07

We often consider our need to be set free from the deceptive entanglements of the world. Whether this means the sinful temptations of the flesh, the misguided priorities of selfish ambition, or simply the vast number of trivial activities which consume our time, they all hinder our intimacy with God.

These "hindrances" of the world keep many unbelievers from knowing Jesus and coming to a saving faith in His sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin. They also keep many believers from walking closer with God and glorifying His name. It's no wonder Jesus says, in the strongest terms, that we must crucify the things of the flesh; "If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me" (Luke 9:23). Following Christ means to be "crucified with Christ" (Galatians 2:20) - a full and complete death of ALL which would pull us away!

But praise God this is not the end of the story. We are not simply called to the glum and dreary dead life so many Christians seem to be living - the life which has been successfully removed from the entanglements of the world but has also been removed from any and all form of joy. No, we have been called to much more; we have been called to a glorious new birth! We die so we can live in Christ and give Him full control to work in and through our life.

1 Peter 1:3

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

Jesus came for the single purpose of dying on a cross for the forgiveness of our sin. But Jesus was not just crucified and buried...He rose!! His resurrection was God's declaration to the world that Jesus was His Son (Romans 1:4); and it confirmed, with absolute assurance, the complete victory over sin and death. This life of crucifixion and victorious resurrection is the full life to which we have been invited.

We have unquestionably been called to take up our cross and follow Jesus up the hill to die. We must put to death our sinful desires, and even those desires which don't appear sinful, as well as all selfish dreams and ambitions. But we must never remain locked inside a dark and lonely tomb. Though it is often a painful process (Jesus experienced GREAT pain in His death) we must persevere through death to be resurrected into a living hope in Christ. We must truly be born again.

Let's begin to walk as a "new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17), and declare to the world through our joy and peace that we are a child of God. Let's arise with new desires and dreams - those formed in our heart by a loving and gracious Father - and live by the guiding power of His Spirit. Let's praise Him all of our days as we joyfully live the resurrected life.

Have A Great Day!

John 8:21-25 - Lesson #86
3-16-07

After making the bold claim that He was the light of the world, Jesus began a discussion with the Pharisees about why they did not understand who He was; "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also" (John 8:19). But the Pharisees did not know God, and they refused to know Him through His Son.

John 8:21-25

"Then Jesus said to them again, 'I am going away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin. Where I go you cannot come.' So the Jews said, 'Will He kill Himself, because He says, "Where I go you cannot come"?' And He said to them, 'You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.' Then they said to Him, 'Who are You?' And Jesus said to them, 'Just what I have been saying to you from the beginning.'"

In the last chapter, Jesus used similar words to those who would seek but not find Him (John 7:34), but here He adds both the reason for and the result of not finding Him; "you will die in your sins." Last time they thought Jesus was talking about going to a different region to teach the Greeks, here they thought He was planning to kill Himself. But the truth Jesus was teaching was that their (and our) eternal destiny is determined by the belief which resides in the heart.

Though Jesus was making a judgmental accusation, He was also patient with His explanation. Being from "beneath" corresponds with being "of the world," and both are directly related to not believing Jesus was who He claimed, therefore they would die in their sins. The Pharisees could not follow Jesus because of their failure to believe, but they failed to believe because they remained "of the world." Their values, self worth, and system of righteousness were all established by the world system - a system of worldly wisdom deeply influenced by evil; "the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one" (1 John 5:19).

The wisdom of the world attempts to invade every area of our life. It tries to define success and happiness. It rearranges values and priorities. And it is relentless in its pursuit of consuming every thought. But this wisdom can only lead to destruction; "Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" (1 Corinthians 1:20). And through we are to live and minister in the world by loving and pointing others to the truth, we must reject what the world calls wise; "Do not love the world or the things in the world" (1 John 2:15).

Jesus had been consistent about His identity "from the beginning." He did not mislead or confuse the truth, but came to show He was the only way; "there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). The world will always try to pull us away and we must diligently remain on our guard. But we can also take comfort in knowing; "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). Let's continue to live as a reflection of the true light and refuse to ever be of the world.

Have A Great Day!

The Pain of Separation

3-19-07

When we read the story of creation, we can clearly see how man was created for a blessed and intimate relationship with God. Man was made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) and given life with God's own breath (Genesis 2:7). From the very beginning God intended man to live under His blessing and in dominion over creation: "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Genesis 1:28).

Being in a perfect relationship with the Almighty God meant there were guidelines for living; "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Genesis 2:16-17). But this relationship also meant there was an unparalleled level of fellowship; "He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name" (Genesis 2:19).

Can you imagine such a relationship of love? Can you imagine being in such intimate fellowship that God actually talked with you about the names of animals? Now can you imagine the heartache when that relationship was shattered by sin? "When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it" (Genesis 3:6).

In this one act of disobedience, Adam and Eve said, "We do not believe!" For at the core of every sinful action is a heart which does not believe enough to trust that what God says is absolutely true. And the results can be devastating!

Genesis 3:23-24

"So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After He drove the man out, He placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life."

We completely miss what happened in the garden if our picture of God is that of a bearded man on a throne with a judgment calculator who says from a distance, "They didn't follow the rules, send them away." That's not the God of the Bible! God gave life, sustenance, blessings, direction, and fellowship; and yet, the receiver of His gifts trusted and followed a lie - and the consequences broke His heart.

Our Father still longs for His children to believe and return home. We've been away far too long and He desires for us to come back into His loving arms. And though we may not fully understand, there is a painful longing inside each of us that wants only to return and be held close. Let's not wait another moment. Let's begin right now to walk with a consistent belief and end the pain of separation.

Have A Great Day!

The Joy of Restoration

3-20-07

In the message "The Pain of Separation" we saw the original relationship between God and man. This is the perfect relationship for which we were created - a relationship where we understand our form, sustenance, blessings, and direction as coming from God and walk in His intimate fellowship every single moment of every day. We also saw the pain God must have felt when His beloved creation chose to walk away through disobedience - the sin of unbelief.

But praise God that He loves us so much that He immediately began to teach us how to return to His presence. From the faithful sacrifice of Abel to the protection of Noah and his family; from the calling of Abraham to the Law as given through Moses; from the message of repentance by the prophets to "the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord'" (John 1:23); and finally, from the teaching and sacrifice of Jesus to the exhortation of the apostles; all point to God calling His children back to the intimate relationship for which we were created.

This first sin carried a punishment which still remains; "just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12). We are all born with an unbelieving heart which must be made clean; "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). The tragedy of the first sin is not that Adam and Eve were separated from God; rather, that we are all born into a condition of Spiritual separation. But God wants us back, today!

Romans 5:8-10

"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by His blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through Him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life!"

All of scripture is written for the purpose of restoring the relationship which sin destroyed; "All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18). The message is clear: return to God! Believe He sent His Son Jesus to die as a sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin and begin to walk in an intimate fellowship of obedience which is consistent with that belief. God sent His Son to die so we could be restored. This is the heart of a loving Father, to call His children home.

The enemy will try to deceive us into believing this relationship is no longer possible, but this is a lie!! Jesus came to restore what the enemy destroyed, and His restoration is made complete by grace through faith. The pain of separation does not need to continue. Let's begin today to trust Him with all our heart and truly experience the joy of restoration.

Have A Great Day!

A New Name

3-21-07

Several of our last messages provided a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the gift of life we have in Jesus Christ. Jesus came to earth to be our necessary and absolutely sufficient sacrifice for sin. His death on the cross and resurrection from the tomb opens the door of grace for an eternally restored relationship with God for all who believe.

Prior to Salvation, the Holy Spirit draws us near by revealing truth to our heart. We are "born again" (John 3:5-7) when we place our trust in the sacrifice of Jesus for the forgiveness of sin. At the moment of our new birth, we are changed - made a "new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17) - by the power of the Holy Spirit. At that moment, we also become "co-heirs with Christ" in God's Eternal Kingdom (Romans 8:17).

As we begin our walk with Christ, we soon realize we are not who we once were; "the old has gone, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). The Spirit of God began a change in our heart that will continue all the rest of our days as we are "conformed to the likeness of His Son" (Romans 8:29). Some aspects of this change are immediate as the bondage to sin is broken; but other portions of change will take a lifetime to attain.

God has promised that our transformation will one day be complete; "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion" (Philippians 1:6). He will continue to shape and mold us - to chip off the rough edges - until we stand before Him and hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Matthew 25:21). On that day, God's glory will be fully revealed in us and we will understand our true identity in Him.

Revelation 2:17

"To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it."

God knows exactly who we are; "I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind" (Jeremiah 17:10). But He also knows exactly who we will become. When we stand before His throne, He will acknowledge our completed transformation by giving us a new name; but as we receive the name, we will also receive full understanding of who we are and how our life has fit into His perfect plan. We will see the purpose of every twist and turn in our path and see what it really means to live in Christ.

Until that day, we must trust Him with all our heart and allow every aspect of our life to bring Him glory and honor. We must seek a consistency with our new identity - with the life God desires us to live. We are not who we once were, nor who we will one day become. Let's live a transformed life with great expectations of the glory to be revealed when we stand in His presence and receive a new name.

Have A Great Day!

For The Love of God

3-22-07

[This message was originally distributed about three years ago, but it's still a good reminder.]

In an instant it was gone! One moment late Saturday night I was processing the last requests for devotional books on my laptop computer and the next moment I was staring at a blank screen. I'm supposed to be able to change the battery on my computer without losing any data, but something went wrong - the worst of all possible events - disaster struck! In that brief moment, I not only lost the file I was processing, I lost ALL the information on my hard drive.

Oh, I was sure I could recover the data - it HAD to be recovered! The last backup of my files was over a week old and I had invested over thirty hours on the book request file. But after several hours of desperate searching for solutions, and a call to the technical support department in Austin Texas, I had to accept the conclusion - it was gone, dead, forever lost.

Dear God, what lesson do you want me to learn? More frequent backups of data, yes; shut down before changing the battery, yes; but there must be a Spiritual lesson because I'm overly frustrated and discouraged. All those hours of work gone, as if they were never done. Lord, why? Time for bed.

Sunday morning I turned on the computer once more. Maybe God had performed a miracle during the night. Nothing but a blue screen. More prayer. Teach me Lord! Then His answer came. My many hours of work had been destroyed, but God reminded me that one day ALL my work would be destroyed! In an instant much shorter than the time required to crash a hard drive, everything would be gone.

Colossians 3:23-24

"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving."

In God's economy, our service performed in faith is the finished product: "The work of God is this: to believe in the one He has sent" (John 6:29). He is not concerned with what we produce, but that we love Him with all our heart regardless of what He's asking us to do. The true result of our work is in our heart, not in the product we can see. [Current note: I really struggle with this last sentence.] Our "disasters" do not take God by surprise, they are simply one of His ways of teaching and redirecting our effort.

It took about eight hours on Sunday to reconfigure my computer and I'll need to redo about thirty hours of work; but I sincerely appreciate the lesson. God does not need our effort, nor does He take greater pleasure in the end of a project than in the beginning. Rather, He has invited us to express our heart as we join in HIS work and rejoice in His accomplishments. Whether our tasks seem great or small, with purpose or without, let's listen for His direction and do ALL we do purely for the love of God.

Have A Great Day!

John 8:26-30 - Lesson #87
3-23-07

Jesus drew a sharp contrast between Himself and the Pharisees: "You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world" (John 8:23). After hearing these words, the Pharisees asked Jesus what has become the fundamental question of the Christian faith; "Who are You?" (John 8:25). Jesus replied in a way which continued to bring glory to God.

John 8:26-30

"I have many things to say and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I heard from Him.' They did not understand that He spoke to them of the Father. Then Jesus said to them, 'When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.' As He spoke these words, many believed in Him."

Jesus could have replied with words of condemnation, but this was not His purpose; "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17). Jesus came to reveal and glorify the Father. So He was quick to say that the words He spoke were from God; "He whom God has sent speaks the words of God" (John 3:34). This is a theme which runs all through the gospel of John; "I have given to them the words which You have given Me" (John 17:8). Jesus spoke the words of God, but the Pharisees did not understand.

The words of Jesus were difficult to understand and His claims even more difficult to accept. But Jesus said the truth would be made known when He was "lifted up." From the early discussion with Nicodemus (John 3:14), to His final week in Jerusalem, "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself" (John 12:32), Jesus spoke of being lifted up as "signifying by what death He would die" (John 12:33). And when Jesus was lifted up on the cross, when the Father received the final sacrifice for sin, the world had the opportunity to know that Jesus was the Promised One.

Jesus knew the Father was always with Him because His life was devoted to doing the will of God; "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me" (John 4:34). God has promised to "never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5) but one of the ways we receive the peaceful assurance that He is near is by doing His will. Jesus was unified with the Father, did only His will, and KNEW He was not alone.

There were those who believed what Jesus said. But we will soon be given reason to question what this belief really means (John 8:33-59). Have we fully accepted the claims of Jesus? Do we have the peace of knowing He is near? Have we committed our life to doing His will? All these questions begin with the same question of Jesus as asked by the Pharisees: Who are You? Let's make our understanding clear today!

Have A Great Day!

Go Fly a Kite

3-26-07

[This message was originally distributed in May 2003, but oh how I needed to read this today!]

Yesterday was a beautiful day! The temperature cooled down (just a little) and the wind was blowing steady but not too strong - the perfect conditions for God to teach me a very important lesson.

For the past three weeks my two youngest girls have been asking (begging) to fly a kite. They found an old kite in the back of a closet and have been taking turns running around the house and even occasionally "flying" in front of a big fan. They continued to ask but the conditions were never quite right. You understand, don't you? First we didn't have enough string; then it was either too hot or not enough wind...or dad was too busy doing more "important" things.

Well, for over an hour yesterday afternoon I finally stepped into God's classroom and I watched two little girls stare in awe as their kites sailed high and sometimes dove back toward the ground. Our six year old said that kite flying was even more fun than she imagined.

Matthew 6:19-20

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal."

One day we will close our eyes to this life and, if we have believed in Jesus, we will open them in the true presence of God. If we're allowed to look back, we will all be saddened to see how much we wasted on things with no eternal value. As I walked in that open field and saw the pure and unrestrained joy of two little girls, I was struck with a new understanding of what really lasts.

The physical will certainly pass away, and things like worry and anxiety about the future will have no place in Heaven. The only thing with eternal value is that which brings glory and honor to God; and my lesson for the day was that God was more glorified in that laughing, breeze-filled hour than in many of my quiet times of study. Our hour of kite flying had eternal value!

I never intend to diminish the importance of good quality study and prayer. But I believe we need to rethink and expand our idea of what glorifies God. Yesterday afternoon I believe God was glorified simply because I enjoyed the life He's given and praised Him for every precious moment.

If today you realize your priorities have become too focused on the temporary things of the world, or even if your strongest desire is to glorify God but you struggle with what this really means, then I suggest you continue to seek Him through times of quiet. But even more strongly I urge you to continually praise and make the time to go fly a kite.

Have A Great Day!

A Little More Patience

3-27-07

Is there anything more difficult than waiting? We are often encouraged to patiently wait for God's direction as well as for His rescue in the midst of our storms. We are reminded that God's timing is always perfect and always with a purpose, and that He is faithful to work in our life according to His perfect plan. But let's be honest, waiting is hard - even when "we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him" (Romans 8:28), it's still hard!

The issue for me is not a lack of trust but a short supply of patience. When I gave my life to Jesus, He transformed me and gave me His Spirit to dwell within me and produce fruit: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience..." (Galatians 5:22-23). I know I already have some patience, but I need more; I want more - and I want it RIGHT NOW!! As you can see, I'm still growing and maturing.

Our family has been in a season of seeking God's direction for the last many years. I left my job with a computer company in 1999 through what I believe was the clear call of God. I was called into full time ministry but I have never completely understood the extent of this call. We are prepared to follow but clear direction has definitely been lacking. The result has been a continual seeking after God. Our eyes and thoughts are daily focused on Jesus waiting to see if the cloud will move as it did with the Israelites. And through the process we are learning the importance of patience.

James 5:7-8

"Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near."

Notice that the farmer is waiting for things completely out of His control. He has done the work of plowing the ground and planting the seed; now He must wait for God to produce the crop.

No matter what your circumstances are today, if you have been saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, you can rest assured that He is at your side directing your steps. Sometimes God's direction comes by way of outward events and changes we can see with our eyes, but often His direction comes in the form of inward changes and growth - such as more trust, more love...and more patience. Our "work" is to take each step He reveals and then wait for God to produce the crop as we love Him with all our heart.

I believe God often withholds clear direction in order to keep us at His feet asking and seeking. We would appreciate your continued prayers for our family and this ministry. We know His plans are far better than anything we could imagine, and His timing is absolutely perfect - but sometimes it's still hard. Please pray for the clarity of God's direction and, as God brings us to your mind and heart, pray for a little more patience.

Have A Great Day!

Preparing God's People To Serve

3-28-07

Jesus' ministry on earth lasted only three short years, but His message continues to be preached today and has spread to nearly every country and language of the world. When Jesus began His ministry, He knew His time would quickly pass. Yet rather than trying to preach to the greatest number of people, Jesus focused the majority of His effort on a small group of twelve men.

Jesus taught His disciples about the Kingdom of God and how they must learn to truly love; "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35). He taught them about the forgiveness of sin through His sacrificial death, and about their true source of strength: "Remain in Me, and I will remain in you...apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:4,5).

Jesus intensely taught His twelve closest followers with one overriding purpose - He taught so they would be prepared to serve in the Kingdom of God: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). Jesus provided a model for effective ministry which we ought to follow today.

Ephesians 4:11-12

"It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up."

We are all called to be a disciple - a close and intimate follower of Jesus Christ. We are given different gifts and different ministry opportunities; but the focus of a disciple is always to serve as we build up the body of Christ and love Him with all our heart. We help others become His disciple as we teach them to follow Jesus and provide the necessary tools which prepare them to serve.

We have been blessed in so many ways. By His grace we have been granted the forgiveness of all sin and given a place to worship Him for all eternity. As we better grasp this wonderful truth, we will be filled with an unshakable contentment and peace while we walk in the presence of God. But this blessing must never be selfishly held - it must be shared; "Freely you have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8).

I pray that every day brings us closer in our relationship with God through the forgiveness and love of His Son Jesus. I pray we minister in our church, our work, our family, and among the friends God places in our path with love and uncompromising truth. And I pray that each of us looks for ways to build up the body of Christ by preparing God's people to serve.

Have A Great Day!

His Burden is Light

3-29-07

In the message "Preparing God's People to Serve" we saw how Jesus set the example for ministry by equipping others to serve in His Kingdom. We also saw that each of us have been called to minister as we love Him and build up the body of Christ. Our specific roles in ministry may differ, but we have all been called and asked to be a part of His plan. We are given the charge to tell others of the way to the Father through faith in Jesus. Paul calls this the ministry of reconciliation; "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us" (2 Corinthians 5:20).

But ministry (in any form) can be difficult. There is more work to be done in the field than we can possibly accomplish - our "job" is never complete. This has the potential for great stress (and what we call "burnout") if we don't maintain a sense of our true purpose and a sense of Who is really in charge.

Matthew 11:28-30

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

A yoke is a dual harness used to attach to oxen and plow the fields. Jesus said to take up His yoke and join Him in working His field. He's already pulling the load and wants us to attach ourselves to the other harness. As we do, we will discover a well-defined row in bad need of plowing - we will also find a load which is easy to bear.

But plowing can become tedious so we often try to increase the pace. We look for ways to accomplish more and begin to see the many weeds scattered in other rows and other fields. In an attempt to pull as many weeds as possible we begin to wander from our row and our load becomes increasingly heavy. We soon find we have unhitched from His yoke and are trying to pull the plow with our own strength.

More is not always better, and faster is not always the desired result. It's interesting that Jesus said our main task as we take up His yoke is to "learn from Him." It's as if walking by His side is really enough. The field will still get plowed, but in the process we will be blessed with a closer and deeper relationship with the Son of God.

If our burden has become heavy - if we're feeling weary and ready to quit - let's determine if we are properly "hitched" to His yoke and aligned to His row. A heavy burden requires some adjustments - maybe an adjustment in attitude, maybe an adjustment in priority. Let's ask our Heavenly Father for guidance and where to find rest for our soul. Let's take up His yoke and remember: His burden is light!

Have A Great Day!

John 8:31-36 - Lesson #88

3-30-07

Jesus had been speaking to the Jews about who He was (John 8:12), the consequences for unbelief (John 8:24), and by who's authority He spoke (John 8:28). And as Jesus continued the discussion, "many believed in Him" (John 8:30). But what did it mean for these Jews to believe in Jesus?

John 8:31-36

"Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.' They answered Him, 'We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, "You will be made free"?' Jesus answered them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.'"

We need to remember John's purpose in writing this gospel; "these things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31). John wrote every passage to show who Jesus is and what it means to really believe, so we may have true life! The discussion between Jesus and the "believing" Jews demonstrated a belief which does not lead to life.

Jesus said if those who "believed" would abide in His word they would be His disciple, know the truth and be made free. It's important to see all these results as connected to abiding in His word. Abiding is a term which means to be firmly rooted, to remain in, to live by and to draw life from. But this was offensive because Jesus implied they did not currently know the truth and, more importantly, that they were not currently free. Since their days of slavery in Egypt, the Jews knew the reality of physical bondage. But they believe they had spiritual freedom because they were descended from Abraham.

The Jews believed that being a Jew placed them in a right relationship with God. This belief kept them from a true belief in Jesus and from being set free. Jesus said that, though they were Jewish, they were still a slave to sin. And no matter how hard they tried, they could never earn the status of a son but would remain in eternal bondage; "he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart" (Romans 2:29).

The gospel message must begin with the sad reality that we are in bondage to sin. Even on our best days, if we strive in our own effort, we remain but a slave; "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). But the gospel then continues with the glorious reality that Jesus came to set us free and make us an eternal child of God: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). How does this happen? By allowing our life to flow out of the true life of His word. By receiving His forgiveness and living all our days in the peace and protection of His name. By understanding who Jesus is and from the innermost part of our heart, soul, mind and strength, believe!

Have A Great Day!