

Devotionals from God's Daily Word Ministries

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Hold Me

7-2-07

In the message "Step Toward Jesus" we were encouraged to examine the motivation for the things we do, and exhorted to do ALL things for the love of being closer to Jesus. This is the essence of our relationship with our Father - simple, but absolute love.

When a young child wants to be held, they simply reach up their arms and say: "Hold me!" Children may be hurt, scared, or tired; they may not even know why they want to be held, but they know that spending time in arms of love seems to make everything better.

And as a parent looks down at their child, they rarely evaluate them to determine if they deserve to be held, or send them away to earn affection. Rather, they simply pick up the child and hold them with no words even being required. In truth, moments like this bring parents some of their greatest joy!

Matthew 18:3

"I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

Our Heavenly Father loves us very much! He wants us to come to Him with outstretched arms. He wants to pick us up and hold us tight. In truth, moments like this bring His greatest joy! And yet, we spend most of our days avoiding our Father's loving arms. We seek other forms of comfort and work to earn our Father's affection. We pour our heart into projects thinking they are vitally important to God's work; "Daddy, look what I made for You!" But our best efforts are as grade school pencil holders and disfigured flower pots. Our Father smiles at these simple gifts but wishes we would understand.

There's much work to do for the Kingdom of God, but none more important than loving and being loved by the One who has loved us since the beginning of time; "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).

This can be a difficult concept for many who have not grown up with the unconditional love and acceptance of an earthly father - but our Father in Heaven is like none we've ever known. He created us for a relationship of love and "gave His one and only Son" (John 3:16) so we could be restored to the relationship which sin stole away. Let there be no doubt of His love and His promise; "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5).

He longs for us to return! Yes, we must clean our room, take out the trash, and treat others nice on the playground - but at the end of the day, His greatest desire is that we reach up with empty arms and say: I love You Daddy...hold me!

Have A Great Day!

Remain Like a Child

7-3-07

In the message "Hold Me" we saw how our Heavenly Father desires for us to reach up to Him with outstretched arms and how this is perhaps His greatest joy. We considered the example of a child reaching up to be held by their parent. This is where our relationship with God begins and, in many ways, it's where we must remain.

When the disciples asked Jesus, "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?" (Matthew 18:1), He responded with a harsh rebuke; "Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 18:3). The disciples were arguing about their eternal "greatness" and Jesus said unless they changed they would not even enter Heaven! Obviously, following Jesus, listening to His teachings, and having a general belief is not enough.

Salvation, or as Jesus said, "enter{ing} the Kingdom of Heaven," involves a submission which understands our inability to save ourselves. We can do nothing but present the "filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6) of our life and receive the mercy and forgiveness of a loving Father. Salvation is not something we rise up and achieve; rather, it's a gift for which we must submit and receive. When we understand this gift, we will be filled with such thankfulness that our only desire will be to love Him and do ALL to bring Him glory and honor.

Matthew 18:4

"Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven."

Becoming like a little child, humbly dependent on Christ, is necessary for entering the Kingdom; but walking in humility as we grow is God's desire for our entire life. We are to be "conformed to the likeness of His Son" (Romans 8:29). But it was His Son "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing...He humbled Himself and became obedient to death" (Philippians 2:6-8). We are being conformed to His humility.

The great temptation of Spiritual "growth" is in thinking we have all the answers and thus desiring to establish our own path with its own set of rules - we become like the know-it-all teenager. When this occurs, we must immediately, and with great determination, humble ourselves and put to death the rebellious pride which leads us astray. We must "trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5). We must daily remember the children we really are...and the children we need to continually become.

We must continue to grow and mature. We must learn more of our Heavenly Father and His desire for our life, walk in faith and be obedient to all He has commanded. But we must also remember that as we grow, we are to walk in humility and always remain like a child.

Have A Great Day!

Sacrifice of Weakness

7-5-07

In the message "Remain Like a Child" we considered our need to come to our Heavenly Father with an understanding that we have no ability to save ourselves. We then saw our call to continually approach God like a little child approaching a loving Father; "whoever humbles himself like this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 18:4).

But, we say, surely God doesn't want us to remain as a child. Doesn't He want us to grow? Absolutely! Paul addressed the Corinthian church as worldly rather than spiritual because they were "mere infants in Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:1). The church was experiencing many trials because they had failed to grow: "I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready" (1 Corinthians 3:2).

God's Word never calls us to maintain the faith or spiritual understanding of a child. These simple qualities are important, but we must continually grow and send down the deep roots which will weather the storm. What we are called to maintain is the simple humility of a child. We must learn to be secure in our Father's hand and to "approach the throne of grace with confidence" (Hebrews 4:16), but we must never let our confidence and security lead to an ungrateful assumption of His grace. We initially came to God weak and helpless; and no matter how much we grow - no matter how deep our roots - we remain weak and unable to add a single grain to the grace which He has poured over us.

But our weakness is good! In fact, an understanding of our weakness apart from Christ and our continued walk of weakness is one of the few offerings we can give to our Lord.

2 Corinthians 12:9,10

"My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.' ...That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

God has chosen to unfold His plan through the lives of His children. We are to reflect the light of Christ into a dark and lifeless world; "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us" (2 Corinthians 5:20). And the world will best see Christ as we remove our own perceived strength and allow the power of God to freely work through us: His power is made perfect as I get my "self" out of the way and walk with a humble weakness.

It's interesting that one of the greatest things we can give to God is an understanding of what we do not have. Let's strip away our pride and once again approach Him with empty hands. Let's offer our lives as a living sacrifice, as a humble sacrifice of weakness.

Have A Great Day!

John 9:18-25 - Lesson #97
7-6-07

The Pharisees lived their life trying to honor God and obey His commands. The problem was that the system they created to honor God was full of interpretations which were wrong. They created hundreds of man made rules and then over time fell in love with their system rather than the One whom the system was designed to honor. The result was a failure to believe even when the evidence was clear.

John 9:18-25

"But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind and received his sight, until they called the parents of him who had received his sight. And they asked them, saying, 'Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?' His parents answered them and said, 'We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but by what means he now sees we do not know, or who opened his eyes we do not know. He is of age; ask him. He will speak for himself.' His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed that He was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, 'He is of age; ask him.' So they again called the man who was blind, and said to him, 'Give God the glory! We know that this Man is a sinner.' He answered and said, 'Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know. One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see.'"

The Jews simply could not believe a man who did not fit into their religious system - and Jesus did not fit. Their system would not allow this type of healing on the Sabbath so they were determined to find another solution. They questioned the parents who confirmed their son was born blind and could now see, but they were too fearful to say how their son had been healed. The parents knew Jesus had healed their son - if they had not known they would not have been concerned about being put out of the synagogue - but they conformed to the system by shifting the responsibility of reporting the truth to their son.

With the parents confirming their son had been born blind and could now see, and the son stating that Jesus performed the healing, the only way to make this situation fit the religious system was for the son to change his story. The Jews had to accept the healing, but they commanded the one who was healed to remove any association to Jesus, the "sinner." The system would allow for an unexplainable act of God, but not for a man claiming to do the work of God who worked outside the system. Rather than enter into the religious debate, the man who received his sight simply stated what he knew to be true, "I was blind, now I see."

Today we have MANY religious systems called denominations. I have three challenges for those (including myself) who are part of one of these systems. First, do we understand why we believe what our system says we ought to believe? Second, do we feel pressure to conform to what we know is not true in order to remain within the system? And finally, do we have the kind of relationship with Jesus Christ which allows us to say: I may not have all the answers, but one thing I know...I was blind and now I see!

Have A Great Day!

Jars of Clay

7-9-07

In the message "Sacrifice of Weakness" we saw how one of our greatest gifts we can give our Heavenly Father is the recognition of how little we have to give. It's a wonderful mystery that the Almighty God can reach so far down and lift us up, through the gift of His Son and the power of the Holy Spirit, and elevate us to the position of "co-heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17).

Through faith in Jesus, we experience a new birth and are given the gift of eternal life. This is an incredible gift, almost more than we can imagine! Through faith in Jesus, the Creator of the Universe transforms our heart and makes His dwelling within us; "I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 36:26). This message of Salvation can change lives...and we have been called to take this message to the world!!

2 Corinthians 4:7

"But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us."

God has chosen to entrust this message of forgiveness, this "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18), this most valuable treasure, to us - common jars of clay! In Paul's day these jars were very ordinary vessels, easily chipped or broken, and often flawed. How beautifully appropriate!

Our flaws actually serve a purpose in God's plan, for our jars of clay show that the message which shines in and through our life is from God and not from us. When we truly place our faith and trust in Jesus, we are forever changed: we become "a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17). The new has come, and the new is different - but "the new" is definitely not perfect!!

Paul himself was far from perfect: "Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?" (2 Corinthians 11:29). But Paul had been clearly taught by Jesus that his weakness served the purpose of bringing the ultimate glory and honor to God: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

This doesn't mean we should make light of sin or give less than our very best, but we must begin to view our weaknesses as opportunities to depend more on God and to keep our focus more on Christ. As we trust Him more, His power will be made perfect in us.

This also means that the flaws which inevitably surface in those around us are also part of God's plan. These flaws afford us the opportunity to demonstrate grace, forgiveness, and love. One day when we are taken to be with Jesus we will be made perfect; but for now, we're ALL jars of clay.

Have A Great Day!

Dressed For Battle

7-10-07

The life of a soldier at war is difficult. They live under the constant threat of attack. Each day they must prepare for battle. Each day they must make sure they are properly dressed to face the enemy.

In a very real sense, we are ALL at war! Every child of God faces an enemy who is determined to engage us in battle each and every day. These battles will not look the same as those we see reported or those we see with our own eyes; "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6:12). But the enemy we face is just as real and the attacks are just as damaging. Many of us feel defenseless against such attacks - we feel defeated with no hope of victory - but Paul tells us how to get properly dressed and stand through the battles.

Ephesians 6:14-17

"Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God."

Yes, the attacks are going to come. But we cannot wait for the battle to begin before getting dressed and putting on our equipment. Each day (without fail!) - before the enemy has an opportunity to attack - we must "put on the full armor of God" (Ephesians 6:13).

The belt of truth protects us from the enemy's deceptive lies which pull us down the path of worldly priorities and temptation. The breastplate of righteousness protects our heart from feeling unworthy - we are made completely worthy through faith in Jesus (Romans 3:22). The gospel of peace on our feet prepares us to share the good news of Jesus and "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). This is our mission as we go into the world.

We hold up the shield of faith - which is "of greater worth than gold" (1 Peter 1:7) - to remind us of God's faithfulness in previous battles and protect us from the constant arrows of fear. The helmet of Salvation protects our mind from debilitating doubts - "so that we may know we have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). Finally, we pick up the sword of the Spirit - the Word of God - and directly engage the enemy when necessary.

The enemy is determined to steal our joy and cause us to be ineffective soldiers for God. Let's ruin his plan! Let's defeat the enemy before the attacks even begin by starting each and every day with getting fully dressed for battle.

Have A Great Day!

The Protection of His Armor

7-11-07

In the message "Dressed For Battle" we considered how we all face an enemy who seeks to engage us in battle each and every day. The attacks are deceptive but extremely methodical as the enemy tries to pull, push, and lure us off the path of following after Christ. We then saw how our best defense against such attacks is to get properly dressed by putting on the full armor of God; "so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand" (Ephesians 6:13).

The next natural question to ask is, "How do I put on the armor of God?" Though we may recognize the usefulness of God's armor, it will never do us any good unless we actually know how to put it on.

Psalm 27:8

"My heart says of You, 'Seek His face!' Your face, Lord, I will seek."

The armor of God is only available to those who diligently "Seek His face!"; to those who have given Him the totality of their life through a submissive faith in Jesus Christ. The armor of God is not a self-help formula to keep us protected and focused as we advance in the world's system. It's a covering of protection God provides as we enter into His presence and are reminded of His truth, faithfulness, and majesty.

Getting dressed for battle is therefore never a spiritual checklist or routine set of prayers. We receive His armor - in effect, He dresses us - as we humble ourselves and come before Him in prayer with a heart that desires to follow wherever He leads. Our Heavenly Father will never let us enter our daily battles without proper protection if we are diligent in seeking Him; "The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing" (Psalm 34:10).

How often should we seek Him? Well, how often do we wish to be naked when the enemy attacks? Getting dressed is not a one-time Salvation event nor even just a first thing in the morning event. We must put on His armor and keep it on throughout our day by developing the priority and habit of constant communion with God; "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). His protection against the enemy comes only as we enter and remain in His presence.

The attacks will surely come, but they need not be feared if we are properly dressed. Let's learn to walk and minister in this world without ever leaving the presence of the Lord. Let's seek Him in all we do and live each moment with the protection of His armor.

Have A Great Day!

Fight Bravely and Trust God

7-12-07

In the last two messages we've considered the protection available for our daily battles as we dress in the full armor of God. We also saw how getting properly dressed is actually a moment by moment process of coming into the presence of God and placing our life in His hands. It's worth noting that God never directs us to get undressed. We are to put on His armor and keep it on at all times. When the enemy attacks, His armor will protect; but we may also be called to fight with all the strength and ability God provides.

During the time of King David, a battle was about to occur between Israel and two neighboring kingdoms: "The Ammonites came out and drew up in battle formation at the entrance to their city gate, while the Arameans were by themselves in the open country" (2 Samuel 10:8). Joab, the commander of David's military, saw enemy troops in front and behind him so he divided his army - one group remained with him and the other group went with his brother.

2 Samuel 10:11-12

"Joab said, 'If the Arameans are too strong for me, then you are to come to my rescue; but if the Ammonites are too strong for you, then I will come to rescue you. Be strong and let us fight bravely for our people and the cities of our God. The Lord will do what is good in His sight.'"

Joab knew God was in complete control, but he never allowed his faith to be a reason for becoming complacent in preparation or passive in battle. Joab used all his intellect and past experience - all the tools God had provided - to devise a plan. He then encouraged those with him to fight bravely with all their ability. Joab knew he was accountable to use everything God had given, but he also knew the real battle belonged to God.

Notice Joab never said God would guarantee a victory in this particular battle. Trusting God with all our heart means knowing with certainty the final result will be good in the eyes of God - regardless of whether the immediate battle is won or lost.

Many times our Christian walk turns into a battle zone. We face spiritual battles of doubt, fear, and anxiety - many of us also face very painful physical and emotional battles. God has gifted us all in many ways; and, when He directs, we must not hesitate to bravely put His gifts to use. We must "fight" with all the perseverance we can muster - but we must also completely surrender the outcome to God.

True victory comes as we look past the success or failure as seen with our own eyes and trust God for the working of the good in all our battles. Let's stand against the enemy and trust God will do "what is good in His sight." As we enter the battle today, let's fight bravely and trust God.

Have A Great Day!

A Defeated Enemy

7-16-07

As we study God's Word, we should be reminded of how fortunate we are to have so many stories and testimonies upon which to build our faith. This is particularly true of the multitude of Old Testament stories; "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Romans 15:4). One of the great encouragements is shared through a prostitute named Rahab.

As Joshua led the Israelites out of the desert and into the promised land of Canaan, the first enemy they faced lived in the mighty walled city of Jericho. When spies were sent to Jericho to determine the enemy's strength, Rahab told the spies, "all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you" (Joshua 2:9). Rahab said the people of Jericho had heard how God parted the Red Sea and how He had been with the Israelites in previous battles.

Joshua 2:11

"When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below."

God caused the walls of Jericho to collapse and allowed the Israelites to take the city, but the first enemy in the promised land was conquered long before the Israelite army arrived. The people of Jericho knew of God's miraculous power and were already defeated. The only thing necessary for victory was for the Israelites to show they were willing to walk in the strength God provided.

God does not desire for us to remain in the desert. He has "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11). But in order to enter the promised land, we must be prepared to face our enemies and trust in the strength of our Heavenly Father.

The enemy "prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). This enemy is very real and ready to attack our areas of weakness. But the enemy is also well aware of God's power and will turn away any time we make a stand; "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). The enemy's fate has been sealed - his end has already been determined - but we must daily resist by getting dressed for battle and then trusting in the power of God for our strength.

Let's submit our lives into the loving hands our Heavenly Father and boldly enter the peace-filled land He has promised. The lion will continue to roar and try to bite, but we must never forget that Jesus has already assured complete victory. When we trust Him with all our heart and daily walk in His strength, we truly face a defeated enemy.

Have A Great Day!

Right Where He Wants Us

7-17-07

Joseph was the second youngest son of Jacob and greatly loved by his father. In fact, his brothers developed a jealous hatred for him because their father "loved Joseph more than any of his other sons" (Genesis 37:3). Their hatred for Joseph continued to grow until they "sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites who took him to Egypt" (Genesis 37:28). Joseph was then sold to Potiphar, the captain of the guard for Pharaoh, and was soon falsely accused by Potiphar's wife and thrown in jail.

At this point, Joseph could really have felt sorry for himself - things were definitely not going well! Only a short time before, Joseph's path had seemed well established; his father loved him, he knew where he was going, and his life was filled with joy. Now, locked up and in a foreign land, Joseph's life seemed to have taken a drastic turn for the worse.

Genesis 39:20-22

"But while Joseph was there in the prison, the Lord was with him; He showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there."

It's safe to say that all of us, at different times during our walk with the Lord, feel like we've been sent far away and locked up. We feel distanced from God and unable to change our circumstances. Others seem to be pushing all the buttons and we sink into a deep despair.

But is it possible God is much closer than we think? "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). Is it possible He is working (even now!) this terrible situation toward the good? "In all things God works for the good of those who love Him" (Romans 8:28). And is it possible that in the middle of our "prison" God has much work for us to do?

While in jail, Joseph interpreted dreams for Pharaoh's officials (Genesis 40) and was then called to interpret a dream for Pharaoh; "I've heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it" (Genesis 41:15). Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream and was placed in a position of great responsibility; "You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders" (Genesis 41:40). It was God's plan to place Joseph in control of the distribution of food, and therefore, to save many lives...including the lives of his father and brothers (Genesis 42-48).

No matter what this day brings - no matter how trapped we feel - we must keep looking for God's good and trusting that His plan is unfolding. He is using our circumstances to mold us and draw us close to His side; and He's using our testimony of faith to encourage others to love Him more. We must believe that, even in the middle of our prison, God is in control and we are right where He wants us!

Have A Great Day!

Such a Time As This

7-18-07

When the Persians overthrew the Babylonians and allowed the people of Israel to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple (538 BC), not all the Israelites chose to leave their new home. A whole generation had been born and raised under Babylonian captivity and many had become content with their life. The resulting Persian empire contained many Jewish communities.

When Xerxes was King of this vast empire he commanded the Queen to be displayed before all the visiting dignitaries at a banquet. But when the Queen refused, Xerxes removed her title and began to search for a replacement. The search resulted in a young Jewish girl named Esther being made Queen - not a normal position for a young Jew!

Meanwhile, a plot had developed to kill the Jews in all the provinces of Persia. Esther's cousin, Mordecai, knew of this plot and pleaded with Esther to approach the King for help, but Esther was understandably reluctant. She was being very well cared for and approaching the King without first being invited could lead to death. Mordecai encouraged Esther to view her life as being part of God's wonderful plan.

Esther 4:14

"For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?"

God allowed Esther to become Queen, not as a reward for being good, but "for such a time as this." God could have used other methods to save the Jews, but He chose to invite a beautiful young woman to play a part. Esther put her life at risk, persuaded the King, and saved her people from certain destruction.

The wisdom and truth of Mordecai's words resound through the ages: God's work WILL be accomplished, His plan WILL unfold, deliverance WILL arise! It's humbling, and often very freeing, to know that God really doesn't need us - He's perfectly capable without our help! But it's also very comforting to know that God is inviting us to join Him in His work and walk by His side to certain victory.

We may never be invited to a role as dramatic as Esther's, but we must join our Heavenly Father from right where we are today! We have come to our particular position - no matter how elevated, no matter how low - for the purpose of bringing Him glory and honor. Let's listen carefully for what He's asking us to do and understand we're right where we need to be and right where He wants us! He has created us for a purpose. He has brought us to our present situation for such a time as this.

Have A Great Day!

A Lifetime of Conviction

7-19-07

Daniel was one of the first captives taken by the Babylonians in 605 BC. Upon his arrival in Babylon, Daniel was selected to receive three years of specialized training (as well as special food and drink) to prepare him for service in the palace. This special treatment would have caused Daniel to violate the laws of God, so he "resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine" (Daniel 1:8).

His convictions had a profound impact on those around him - especially his three closest friends who were soon thrown into a fiery furnace for refusing to bow to a golden image; "We want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up" (Daniel 3:18).

Daniel served seventy years under the kings of Babylon and his convictions earned him a place as the most trusted advisor in all the land. When the Persians defeated the Babylonians, the new king even "planned to set {Daniel} over the whole kingdom" (Daniel 6:3). But when the other officials became jealous, they convinced the king to pass a law forbidding prayer to anyone except the king.

Though he knew he would be severely punished, Daniel held to his convictions and prayed to God three times a day. For this violation of the law, Daniel was thrown into a den of lions; but "God sent His angel, and He shut the mouths of the lions" (Daniel 6:22). When the king saw how God miraculously protected Daniel, he issued the following decree:

Daniel 6:26

"I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. For He is the living God and He endures forever."

There were many opportunities for Daniel to question his circumstances. He was taken into captivity at a young age, tempted with special treatment, despised by his peers, thrown to the lions, and served an entire lifetime under foreign rulers. But, without a single complaint, Daniel continued to trust God and serve Him without compromise. In the end, Daniel was used to encourage the Jews while in captivity and to draw an entire nation to a greater reverence of God. Shortly after the decree was issued 50,000 Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple.

Stories like this are scattered all through God's Word! We may not understand our circumstances or be able to see God's plan, but we KNOW which way He's calling us to walk. Let's continue to serve and trust with all our heart. Let's walk down His path without turning to the right or to the left. Regardless of our present circumstances, let's determine once and for all to give Him a lifetime of conviction.

Have A Great Day!

John 9:26-34 - Lesson #98
7-20-07

In a way, I kind of feel sorry for the religious leaders during the time of Jesus. I am often quite condemning as I read of their love for their religious system and their inability to see God in all Jesus did and said. I want to believe I would never be so foolish, but then I am reminded of the blinding power of tradition. The tradition of the Pharisees began with a desire to honor God and follow His commands; but in the end, their tradition kept them from seeing the One sent to be "the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person" (Hebrews 1:3). I try to guard against it, but I know my own traditions have a tendency to cloud my view of Jesus. Father, forgive me!

John 9:26-34

"Then they said to him again, 'What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?' He answered them, 'I told you already, and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become His disciples?' Then they reviled him and said, 'You are His disciple, but we are Moses' disciples. We know that God spoke to Moses; as for this fellow, we do not know where He is from.' The man answered and said to them, 'Why, this is a marvelous thing, that you do not know where He is from; yet He has opened my eyes! Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him. Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing.' They answered and said to him, 'You were completely born in sins, and are you teaching us?' And they cast him out."

The man had already explained how Jesus had healed his eyes, so when the Pharisees asked him again he became annoyed and sarcastic. The reply of the Pharisees revealed the nature of the problem.

By claiming to be disciples of Moses, the Pharisees were saying they were devote followers of the Law and the system of interpretations which surrounded the Law. This much was true. But what they had failed to see was that Jesus was and is the supreme exalted focus, even in the words of Moses; "if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me" (John 5:46). But to the man who, perhaps due to his physical blindness, was not attached to the religious system the identity of Jesus was clear.

When the man tried to explain the simple logic which ought to have led to belief in Jesus, the Pharisees raised the barrier of high education and training - How dare you try to teach us! The solution? Cast him out!

Our nature craves systems with lists of things to do and not do. We want to be able to somehow measure our relationship with God - measure our spiritual growth. But God's Word speaks only in terms of faith and trust, love and hope. These are impossible to quantify, but they are true! Let's remember that it always has been and always will be about Jesus Christ and Him crucified for the forgiveness of sin. If this is not our focus then our focus is being dimmed and will eventually fade to blindness.

Have A Great Day!

The Father's Will

7-23-07

We often consider how God uses all kinds of circumstances to draw us close to His side. The purpose of being drawn close is ultimately to be transformed to the image of His Son and to have intimate fellowship with Him for all eternity. But initially, the purpose of being drawn near is so we can be introduced to His Son.

The Kingdom of Heaven is open only to those who truly believe in Jesus. We may think this to be "intolerant," but if we profess to believe the Bible is true there can be no other conclusion: "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it" (Matthew 7:13-14). Our Father is drawing us near because the narrow gate is only open to those who are known to His Son.

Matthew 7:21-23

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only he who does the will of My Father who is in Heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from Me, you evildoers!'"

Clearly, being "good" does not ensure we are known by Jesus. Neither does going to church, reading our Bible, teaching Sunday School or even writing devotional messages! Jesus knows, and takes away the sin, of "only he who does the will of My Father."

Fortunately, Jesus also tells us exactly how to do His Father's will: "For My Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:40). The will of our Heavenly Father is to truly know and be known by His Son.

All the wonderful things we do in the name of Jesus count absolutely nothing toward granting us the gift of eternal life. True believers in a risen and glorified Lord will certainly desire to turn from a life of sin and obediently serve; "anyone who does not take his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:38). But entrance through the gate of eternal life is based ONLY on sincere belief, not on the results of belief.

We must spread this message throughout the world and, most importantly, we must receive this message into our own heart! All our "good" will be burned up and cast aside if done without first having placed the entirety of our life in His hands. He is drawing us near because belief in Jesus is both necessary and sufficient for our Salvation. He is drawing us near and inviting us to submit to the Father's will.

Have A Great Day!

A Belief That Saves

7-24-07

In the message "The Father's Will" we saw that not all who do great things for God will enter Heaven, but "only he who does the will of My Father" (Matthew 7:21). We further saw that the Father's will is "that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life" (John 6:40). We are given the gift of eternal life because of our belief in Jesus, not because of ANYTHING we do; "all our righteous acts are like filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6).

Salvation can never be earned, it is a gift to those who believe. However, we must understand what it means to believe and what changes will occur when we believe. "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that - and shudder" (James 2:19). A saving belief is much more than just acknowledging God's existence or even the existence of His Son - even the demons believe this!

Belief in Jesus is never simply an intellectual understanding. Belief implies a humble surrender. We will never "look to the Son" unless we first recognize our eternally lost condition due to sin; and we will never truly "believe in Him" until we accept our complete inability to save ourselves. A drowning man will never reach up for help until he first understands and accepts his need to be rescued.

To be rescued, we must believe so completely that we abandon all other "rescuers" and cling to the only One who can truly save; "any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:33). Giving up everything cannot save us, but true belief gives up all other sources of hope. It also reveals the trivial nature of our worldly attachments and creates an understanding that everything belongs to Him. We see our life as lived for Him and do ALL for His glory.

James 2:14,17

"What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? ... In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."

Belief must produce a change in our life or we know it is not a true belief - it is nothing more than dead intellectual understanding! At the moment we truly believe, we are "marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit" (Ephesians 1:13), and we become "a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Belief creates change through the work of the Holy Spirit!!

If we lack the evidence of a changed life, we must not focus on creating the change. This type of change becomes self-righteous "filthy rags." Rather, we must return to the cross and place ALL our trust in Jesus, believing He has paid the penalty for our sin and has granted us passage through the narrow gate to eternal life. As we completely turn over control to our Heavenly Father, fruit and good deeds will abound. Our life will be forever changed, but only when we begin with a belief that saves.

Have A Great Day!

Eternally Secure

7-25-07

In the last two messages we've considered how the gift of eternal life is given to "everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him" (John 6:40). But we also saw that belief is much more than a mere acknowledgement of existence; "Even the demons believe that - and shudder" (James 2:19). Eternal life is a gift given only to those who so intensely believe that Jesus is the only way to receive forgiveness that they stand before a living God and enter into an eternal covenant.

Covenants were first introduced by God to Noah after the flood; "I establish My covenant with you: Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood" (Genesis 9:11). Over the years, God made covenants with Abraham (Genesis 15), the nation of Israel through Moses (Exodus 19), and with David (2 Samuel 7). In each case, God initiated the covenant and clearly established the guidelines.

Through the prophet Jeremiah, God spoke about the new covenant He would make through Jesus; "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people" (Jeremiah 31:33). This new covenant was designed to be permanent and under God's complete protection: "I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear Me, so that they will never turn away from Me" (Jeremiah 32:40). Through the prophet Ezekiel, God gave further indication of how this would be accomplished:

Ezekiel 36:26-27

"I will give you a new heart and put a new Spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit in you and move you to follow My decrees and be careful to keep My laws."

When we truly believe in Jesus, we enter into a covenant and God transforms our heart by His Spirit; "a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance" (Ephesians 1:14). At that moment we are "sealed for the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30). And when we enter into His saving covenant, we are purchased with the blood of Jesus: "You are not your own; you were bought at a price" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

We are still called to continue in the faith, but God has promised we WILL continue; "He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:8). He is the giver and sustainer of eternal life; "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish" (John 10:28).

There is debate whether this covenant can ever be broken, whether it is eternal. But perhaps this only distracts from the greater truth. We are called to love God and continue to love Him with all our heart. This calling is clear! Let's remain within His arms of love, and trust that as we do, we are eternally secure.

Have A Great Day!

Godly Compassion

7-26-07

As we open our hearts to minister to those around us, we soon discover we live in an imperfect world full of sickness, heartache, and frustrations. Many of us (many more than we realize) are facing trials which are sometimes quite severe. When we are finally invited into someone's private world and allowed to hear of their pain, it can be difficult to know what to do or say.

As we grow in grace and knowledge of Jesus, we learn of His truths: "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). We understand and usually have some actual experience with God's loving plan and purpose; "in all things, God works for the good of those who love Him" (Romans 8:28). But there are times when this type of advice - even this type of truth - can be a little cold and fail to comfort or draw someone closer to God.

While it's absolutely true that God will use our pain and suffering for His glory, it may not be the first response someone needs to hear when they enter a difficult trial; "There is a time for everything...a time to be silent and a time to speak" (Ecclesiastes 3:1,7). We must learn to be more sensitive to the real need.

When Lazarus became very sick, Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus but He did not come until after Lazarus died. Mary fell at Jesus' feet and cried: "Lord if You had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:32). At that moment, Jesus did NOT begin preaching "Rejoice in the Lord always!" (Philippians 4:4). There would be other opportunities for sermons, other opportunities to speak about faith and trust, but this was a time for compassion.

John 11:33,35

"When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled...Jesus wept."

The Creator of the Universe wept! From the beginning of time, Jesus knew He was going to raise Lazarus from the dead; He knew many lives would soon be changed through this miracle. But "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus" (John 11:5). Though this pain and sorrow was necessary in the context of God's sovereign plan, these were real people who were grieving and Jesus took time to show He truly cared and understood their pain.

The world is in great need of the healing power of Jesus Christ. Sin has caused separation from God and left many lives in a mess. As we minister through encouragement and the truth of God's Word, we are called to do so while "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). But love does not exist outside of a relationship. And in a loving relationship we will often best demonstrate God's truth by listening and comforting with a Godly compassion.

Have A Great Day!

Eternal Healing

7-30-07

In the message "Godly Compassion" we saw how Mary and Martha watched Lazarus become increasingly sick. They knew the healing power of Jesus and had sent for His help, but by the time Jesus arrived Lazarus had died. The sisters were filled with sorrow and cried out; "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:21,32). At this, Jesus was troubled and compassionately wept with those who had gathered (John 11:35).

Jesus genuinely cared about the sorrow and pain of those who knew and loved Lazarus; but remember, Jesus had intentionally allowed Lazarus to die; "when He heard that Lazarus was sick, He stayed where He was two more days" (John 11:6). And if Jesus would have really wanted to heal Lazarus, He wouldn't have even needed to be near. When He had healed the royal official's son (who was in a bed twenty miles away), He did so by simply speaking a word: "You may go. Your son will live" (John 4:50).

Yes, Jesus allowed Lazarus to die. For in God's all-knowing plan, the need to strengthen the faith of those around Lazarus was more important than healing his illness.

John 11:40

"Then Jesus said, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?'"

God had prepared a miracle which would cause many others to believe and bring glory and honor to His name: "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me...I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that You sent Me" (John 11:41,42). Jesus then proceeded to raise Lazarus from the dead! "Lazarus, come out!" (John 11:43).

We've all been in bad situations which have caused us to cry out and wonder why God didn't just make things "right." Why didn't He remove the enemy, restore our finances, or take away the hurt? And how many times have we become burdened by the apparent injustice in the world; "I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked...surely in vain have I kept my heart pure" (Psalm 73:3,13).

God has the ability to "fix" every situation, but His plan is so much more. His plan is for us to know Him and His glory; to trust Him and grow while being strengthened through every trial; to continue to be "conformed to the likeness of His Son" (Romans 8:29). His plan is to prepare us for an eternity in His presence.

We must trust God to refine and strengthen our faith - even if by fire! No matter what trials we face, we must trust that "in all things God works for the good of those who love Him" (Romans 8:28). And we must continue to trust He is at work in our lives (even right now) to accomplish a true and eternal healing.

Have A Great Day!

Consistent Trust

7-31-07

In the message "Eternal Healing" we saw that God's plan will often allow trials for the purpose of bringing us to a greater understanding of His glory. God's desire is for us to turn our eyes from the things we can see and begin to trust the things which are unseen; "for what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18).

This lesson is obviously important as we face extreme hardship, but it's even more necessary as the trials begin to fade. The temporary things of this world (even the good wholesome things) will never satisfy the deep longing of our heart. We will always hunger for more until we place the entirety of our life firmly in the unseen hand of God - the same loving hand which holds all of creation.

Trusting in what we cannot see is the very essence of our faith; "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1). We will never find true contentment and peace until we completely "trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5). Our trust should be consistent and invade every area of our life.

If we say we trust that Jesus Christ, who "was with God in the beginning" (John 1:2), and who, "being in very nature God" (Philippians 2:6), came to die so we may live; "in Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Ephesians 1:7), then we must also completely trust that "God works for the good of those who love Him" (Romans 8:28). Saying we trust in Jesus for our eternity without trusting Him to guide and protect us during our daily walk is like trusting in the need for air while refusing to breathe. Both are a false trust and will ultimately lead to death.

Romans 8:32

"He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all - how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?"

God loves us so much that He gave us His absolute best; "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). This love assures us He will give exactly what we require to become sons and daughters who glorify His name. God will not give up on a project which cost Him the life of His Son; "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion" (Philippians 1:6).

When we give Him our life through faith in Jesus, we must also trust He will not allow the fire to get hotter than we can stand nor the load heavier than we can bear - He will never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). We must trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins and then focus on what is eternal as we give Him a lifetime of consistent trust.

Have A Great Day!