

Daily Devotional

May 2017



For the word of the Lord is
right and true;
he is faithful in all he does.

- Psalm 33:4

Foreword

During this month's devotions, we finish our study in Philippians and complete our review of Genesis. Next we return to the Missions and Disciplines of the Christian Life to pursue a study on worship.

The grand drama at the end of the book of Genesis is fascinating to me. It demonstrates how God can take some pretty *rough* raw material, in terms of people, and still accomplish His plans. That gives me confidence that He can do the same with you and me.

It is good for us spend some time studying the topic of worship. We just can't touch base with worship too often because we were made to worship the One who created, loves, and died for us!



In His grace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kevin Redig". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Kevin Redig

All Scripture quotes have been taken from either the NKJV (1992 edition) or the NIV (1984 edition).

Philippians Wrap Up

Monday, May 1: Read Ephesians 1 (Philippians 3:13-14)

What lies ahead? The upward call of God in Christ Jesus!

... forgetting those things which are behind. . . I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

What is this *upward call* to which Paul refers? Let me suggest that it is that which God wants you to become as you follow after Him. We can see this in Ephesians 4:1:

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called. . .

Both the greater context and the Greek words involved shed light on what Paul has in mind. The word worthy has a root meaning of being equivalent in weight. The calling in view is the need to live one's life consistent with the identity we have "in Christ" as described in Ephesians Chapter 1. So the admonition is for every Christian to live a life, moment-by-moment, that measures up to the incomparable identity we have in Christ. This upward call is both magnificent and a very high goal. Of course it is, for we see it again in Romans 8.

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son. Romans 8:29

Do you see that in living a life of "equal weight" to whom and what we are in Christ, we are going to be transformed, progressively transformed, to be more and more like our Savior? With such a high calling, perhaps you can see why it is so important to have the past dealt with and forgotten, so that we can give our full and undivided attention to pressing forward...

toward the goal of the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Philippians Wrap Up

Tuesday, May 2: Read James 3

(Philippians 3:17-19)

Philippians 3:20-21 are extremely precious and important verses for the child of God. However their import is multiplied if we connect them, first, with the flow of thought laid down in Verses 17-19. That will be our goal for today, before looking at the more well-known Philippians 3:20-21 tomorrow. Paul starts by exhorting us to:

Join with others in following my example, and take note of those who follow the pattern we gave you.

It is not that he is trying to elevate himself; on the contrary, he is trying to make sure that we readily recognize those who are *enemies of the cross!* He goes on to give us some helpful tips in recognizing such enemies:

...their god is their stomach, their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.

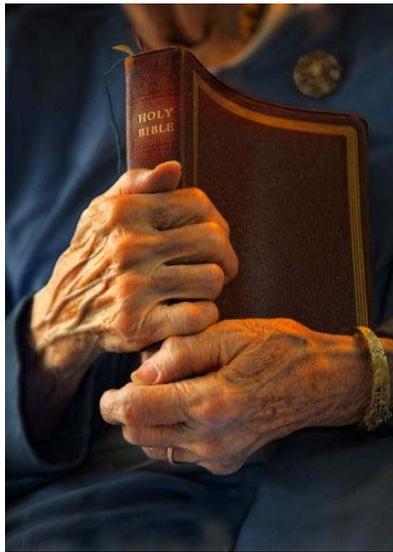
There is quite a debate whether these enemies are restricted to only unbelievers or perhaps individuals both inside and outside the Church. I think it can be both, but rather than focus on this issue, let me give you a couple of examples. The bestseller *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* was written by Christopher Hitchens, an avowed atheist. This book, and others like it, ridicule the Christian life and typically promote an alternative that is very aptly described as having one's appetites (stomach) as their god! And then there is William Young's bestseller *The Shack*. It's has been warmly praised within the Christian community, leading some to call it "*the best Christian book of all time!*"

Philippians Wrap Up

Tuesday, May 2: Read James 3

(Philippians 3:17-19) Continued

The author states he does not hold to a view of the atonement that has Jesus bearing the punishment of mankind's



sin at the cross? This fits nicely into *emerging church* theology which teaches that “*hell and the cross are false advertising for God.*” Although this is demonstrably false when held to the light of Scriptures, it is rampant in Christian circles in the day in which we live.

Could this be an example of what it means to “*have one’s mind on earthly things?*” The Lighthouse Book Review thinks so:

“The Shack is appealing to the carnal man and not the spiritual, and as the Bible warns, there is a wisdom that descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish” James 3:15

We need to pay very close attention to Paul in that we:

Join with others in following my (Paul’s) example, and take note of those who follow the pattern we gave you.

In other words, fellowship with those who hold to sound doctrine—and be on guard!

Philippians Wrap Up

**Wednesday, May 3: Read I Corinthians 15
(Philippians 3:20-21)**

You see how we have been set up for Philippians 3:20-21. In contrast to having one's appetites as their god and their minds set on earthly things, there are two things Christians need to have firmly settled in their thinking: heaven is our home and Jesus Christ is coming—from there, for us! For homeland and citizenship are both ways to translate the same word.

Do you see how problematic it is for the Christian to get tangled up in the things of this world, to have his or her mind on earthly things? For this world is not our home, and Hebrews 11:16 makes it clear this has always been the attitude of those used by God. If that is the case, then our minds should be set on things associated with our true homeland—the things of heaven. When Jesus does return, here is one of the things He is going to do for each one of His children, he is going to:

transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body. (Verse 21)

The phrase “glorious body” is a reference to His resurrection body, reinforcing the truth laid out in I Corinthians 15, that we are going to have a resurrection body just like our Lord's. It will be immortal, incorruptible, glorious, and without any stain or blemish from sin. To be an enemy of the cross is to be an enemy of the means by which we have such a future hope. For it is the cross of Christ that accomplishes the work necessary for those who believe to be reconciled to their Heavenly Father, and become numbered among those who are said to be the *many brethren* of the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29). To be a child of God, heir with Christ, is the only way to one day also have a body like His! There are many blessings associated with God's so-great salvation, are there not?

Finishing Genesis

Thursday, May 4: Read Genesis 42

On the surface, it would appear the great famine that struck Egypt and the surrounding areas was responsible for both Joseph's rise to prominence and his family's relocation to Egypt. More on this in the days to come. But, is there any doubt at all in your mind that God can reach into this world when He chooses, use any and every kind of event, and any and every kind of people to achieve His ends? There shouldn't be after coming this far in the book of Genesis.

Now to the fascinating narrative of this chapter. Here are a few observations for you:

- Why don't Joseph's brothers recognize him, when he recognizes them? First, they were all older than he was when he was sold into slavery, and adult men change less than children. For nearly 20 years have gone by since Joseph was sold into slavery, he was a boy and now he is a middle-aged man. Furthermore, he would be dressed as an Egyptian, have the grooming of an Egyptian, and fluently speak the language.
- Did you notice how quickly the guilt of the brothers comes to the surface (Verses 21-22). It is still right there even after 20 years! Continued on the next page.



Finishing Genesis

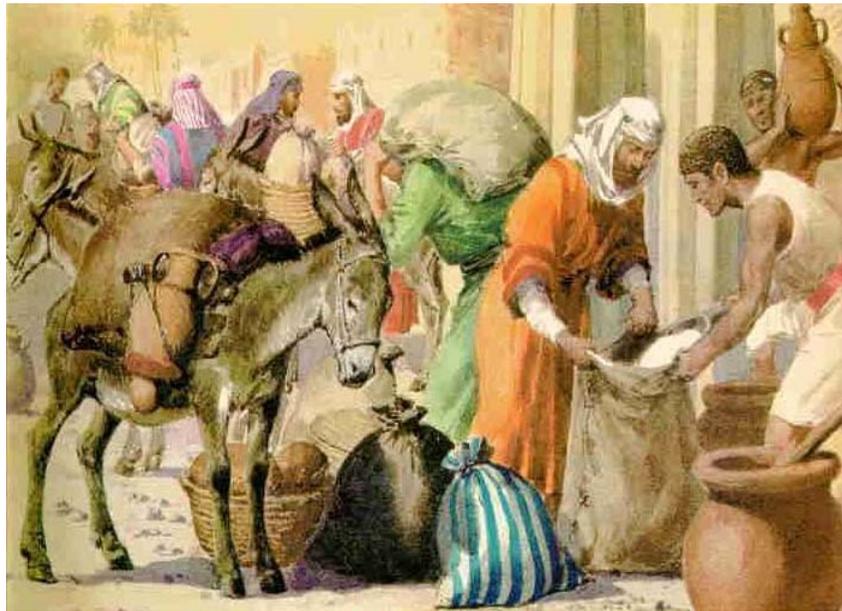
Thursday, May 4: Read Genesis 42 continued

- How about Joseph's behavior? His plan is a little strange, but do you see even a hint of revenge? I don't. It seems more like he wants to see his brothers again, and ultimately get the entire family into Egypt.

Following these three points, let me ask a question. Who really had the worst of things for the past 20 years? Here is a principle you might want to consider:

*It is better to be shaped by the hand of the Lord;
than to get ahead through scheming.*

In some ways, I think the brothers have been stuck in a rut for 20 years while Joseph has advanced greatly! The Lord can do that for those who trust in Him!



Finishing Genesis

Friday, May 5: Read Genesis 43

The lack of food in Canaan forces the drama to continue, as eventually Jacob (Israel) is forced to relent and allow his son Benjamin to accompany his brothers to Egypt. They get immediate access to Joseph, are reunited with Simeon, and invited to eat with Joseph, whom they still do not recognize. You can't help but wonder how much longer this can go on. The short answer is, for two more chapters. In the meantime, here are a few things to note:

- Did you notice the words of Joseph's servant?

Your God, the God of your father has given you treasure in your sack. . .

It is clear that Joseph's servants know that he worships a God other than that of the Egyptians. Apparently Joseph has not been paganized by his time in Egypt. I hope we would do as well.

- Do you think the brothers have any inkling of the truth? Imagine their surprise, when they are all seated in birth order at the table, and then Benjamin is given a portion five times everyone else's. Coincidence?
- Have you noticed that the interactions within Jacob's family all seem tense and full of conflict?

Jacob seems to still be playing favorites (Genesis 42:8), and their greatest concern seems to be finding their silver back in their sacks. Joseph, however, shows no sign of anger or extracting revenge on his brothers. You might ask, "Then why the elaborate charade?" Is it possible that after he realizes his brothers don't recognize him that he is simply gathering as much information about his family as he can? Taking the opportunity to observe his brothers, he can see if there has been any change among them. In Verse 34 it sounds as if Joseph had ample opportunity:

So they feasted and drank freely with him.

Finishing Genesis

Monday, May 8: Read Genesis 44

Everything is going to come to a head in Chapter 44, and then Joseph reveals himself to his brothers in the first few verses of Chapter 45. Let's get the details that lead up to this momentous moment. Things start out well, each brother gets as much food as he can carry, plus his silver back. However, Joseph adds a personal article to Benjamin's sack, and then uses that to, in effect, arrest his brothers. Joseph is willing to let everyone go except for Benjamin. At this point, Judah makes an impassioned plea for his brother's release, even volunteering to remain in his place. This causes Joseph to break down and weep so loudly that even Pharaoh's household hears about it.

But that's a story for tomorrow. For today, why the deception on Joseph's part, in planting one of his possessions in Benjamin's sack? What is he aiming to accomplish? Again, the text doesn't tell us for sure, but there is no evidence that he is being petty, vindictive, or trying to extract revenge. It is almost as if he can't decide how to reveal himself. Consider this, Joseph would desperately like to be reunited with his family and be with them again. Furthermore, while the brothers are thinking in terms of food and short-term survival, Joseph sees things from a much broader perspective.

All of this will be born out in the next few chapters. In the meantime, I think the thing that tipped the scales for him was Judah's impassioned plea to spare their father grief at the loss of his youngest son and his offer to take Benjamin's place. This is not the same brother who sold him into slavery, and sat down to eat lunch while Joseph begged for his life. Things have changed, and Joseph is now ready to move forward by revealing himself!

Finishing Genesis

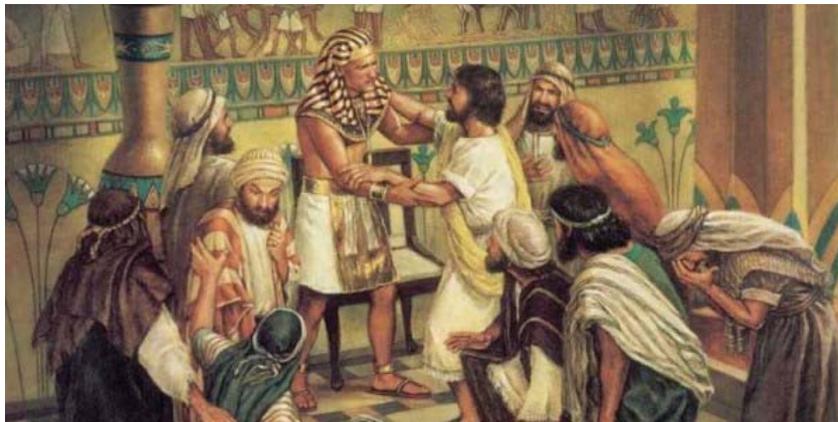
Tuesday, May 9: Read Genesis 45

Wow! After all the build-up, Chapter 45 is pretty dramatic:

- Joseph, in a moment of great emotion, reveals himself to his brothers.
- They were all speechless and terrified.
- Joseph calms their fears.
- Eventually even Pharaoh gets involved in paving the way for Israel, and the rest of the family, to come down to Egypt.

Coming to Egypt both delivers them from the famine, and also gets them out of the evil environment of Canaan. In the midst of all this, I would like you to consider what Joseph says in Verses 5 and 7:

And now do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. . . But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.



Continued on the next page

Finishing Genesis

Tuesday, May 9: Read Genesis 45 continued

Do you think the point of Joseph's statement is: don't worry about your sin, everything worked out for the best? I don't think so, for Joseph knew his brothers' intent was to do him harm. (Genesis 50:20)

So instead, perhaps he understands that, in spite of sin, God can work all things toward his desired ends? For we have already learned the brothers still carried guilt for their sin against their brother 20 years later. And Joseph still had to go through much by way of tribulation to eventually arrive at his elevated status.

So, if this were a Christian setting, my advice to the brothers would be to *confess your sin* and then be blessed by being reconciled to your brother. For isn't that what our heavenly Father allows us to do? We can regain fellowship with Him whenever we are willing to confess our sin and trust in the work of the cross to allow God to

*...forgive us our sin
and cleanse us
from all
unrighteousness.
1 John 1:9*



Finishing Genesis

Wednesday, May 10: Read Genesis 46

This chapter portrays the joyous reunion between the father and the son he thought he had lost forever. I refer, of course, to Jacob and Joseph. What a grand reunion it must have been. But don't let that overshadow a number of other very important revelations contained within this chapter. Let me list them for you.

- Jacob took everything he owned to Egypt and, most importantly, God approves. In fact, He promises to not only go with Jacob, but at some future time to bring his offspring back to the land of Canaan as a great nation.
- Jacob's entire family goes to Egypt, which at this point includes a total of 70 males. Contrast that with Exodus 12:37 which tells us approximately 600,000 men left Egypt 430 years later. This gives us clear evidence that our God is a promise-keeping God.
- To me the most remarkable aspect of God's plan is contained in Verse 34. Did you catch that the Israelites were going to have their own little enclave within Egypt? They are going to be able to keep their language, customs, and, most importantly, their God. So rather than be influenced by the pagan culture of Canaan, they are going to be able to maintain their own identity over the next 400 years until it is time for God to bring them back to the land that He has promised to give them and only then they will be able to occupy the land as a nation.

We often think of the famine as the driving force in this narrative. I see God as the prime-mover. First God sent Joseph ahead. Then He uses the famine to both elevate Joseph and cement his position. Finally, the famine prompts family contact and reconciliation. We close with the whole family intact and right where God wants them. Remember, God is just as able to orchestrate events in our day.

Finishing Genesis

Thursday, May 11: Read Genesis 47

On the surface, this chapter describes a remarkable outcome: this extended family of foreigners, in desperate need, shows up in Egypt and is given their own private area of land, a regular allotment of food, and the exalted status of taking care of Pharaoh's own livestock. When God blesses you, then you are good and truly blessed!

However if we look a little bit deeper we will find something even more remarkable. Did you notice the text is very specific to say in Verses 7 and 10 that "*Jacob blessed Pharaoh?*" Perhaps you are thinking, "What's so remarkable about that?" To grasp the significance of this, we have to understand that in the ancient world,

And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater. Heb 11:7 (Referring to an event in Genesis 14)

By the world's standards, Pharaoh was by far the greater. He was king of one of the mightiest nations on earth with immense resources at his disposal. Jacob, on the other hand, was the head of a little rag-tag family collection that wasn't even a minor player on the political scene, forced into Egypt to keep from starving to death, and with almost no resources at his disposal. How in the world could he be the greater? The answer is that he is greater in the plans and purposes of God. Greater in terms of receiving favor from the Lord.

I can prove it to you. Do you know the name of the Pharaoh whom Jacob blessed? Probably not, it was Sunusert III. But of course you do know Jacob's name because you know the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For to be associated with the one true God is to allow you and I to bestow a blessing upon anyone with whom we will share the good news that Jesus saves! For to be in the Kingdom of God is to also be "the greater" by virtue of association with the Lord Jesus Christ. What a mighty privilege!

Finishing Genesis

Friday, May 12: Read Genesis 48

This is the first time anywhere in the book of Genesis that I have the sense that Jacob is really in fellowship with the Lord. God has been faithful to Jacob, but Jacob has not been faithful to the Lord. But now as you read his recollection of how God has watched over him and blessed him, and the moving blessings he prays upon Joseph's sons, it is almost as if you are meeting a new man, a man that has come into his own for the first time. I think the reason for this actually lies in the closing verse of the last chapter:

... Israel worshipped as he leaned on the top of his staff. Genesis 47:31

I think Jacob had finally reached the point where he had given up *grasping* and was able to see the completely trustworthy nature of God. He then showed his submission to Him by a moment of wholehearted worship. How did I pull all of that out of the text of Verse 31? First of all, like you, I have been following the development of Jacob since Chapter 25. Second, I am familiar with that great eleventh chapter of the book of Hebrews which lists noteworthy moments of faith on the part of Old Testament saints. Here is what Hebrews 11:21 says about Jacob:

By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshipped as he leaned on the top of his staff.

God has selected the most noteworthy moment in the life of Jacob, from the standpoint of his faith, and named it to be the moments we have just covered in Chapters 47 and 48. I am greatly encouraged by this. For truly, Jacob was a stinker at times. Yet he kept developing and eventually became noteworthy for his faith. If we will keep growing in the Lord, is it not also possible that we will become noteworthy in God's sight for our dependent trust and obedient submission to Him? Praise God for His grace to all!

Finishing Genesis

Monday, May 15: Read Genesis 49

This chapter lays out Jacob's blessing upon his sons just before his death at the close of the chapter. The blessings read somewhat strangely to our ears, because they contain much that sounds more like cursing, or at least *telling it like it is*, rather than blessing. It will make more sense if we notice the phrase in Verse 1: "*the days to come.*" The translation of a single Hebrew word, this word always has prophetic connotations and typically refers to things that are going to happen to a group or nation towards the close of their history. This can be clearly seen in the prophecy regarding Judah. For the progeny of Judah are singled out as those who will:

...hold the scepter. . .and the ruler's staff.

Of course, both David and Solomon were in the line of Judah as were the lesser known kings who followed. However, note the caveat in Genesis 49:10:

The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until He comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is His.

Not only will future kings come from the line of Judah, but eventually the scepter will settle upon one king to whom the nations will all turn in obedience. This is a clear prophecy pointing ahead to the time when Jesus Christ will reign from an earthly Jerusalem as King of kings and Lord of Lords (Revelation 19:11-16, Psalm 2). This clearly connects with Genesis 12, where God changes from dealing with the entire human race as a whole and, instead, begins to do so with Abraham and his offspring. So it is not surprising that the promised Messiah is going to come through one of Jacob's sons. Furthermore, perhaps that is the reason that Jacob is adamant about being buried back in the Promised Land. For he knows and believes the promises made to Abraham, including that of land!

Finishing Genesis

Tuesday, May 16: Read Genesis 50

Joseph comes to the end of his life with a remarkable display of his trust in God. For I am sure you noticed that after Jacob was buried, the brothers became afraid. For they couldn't quite settle in their own minds that Joseph truly had forgiven them, and would not make use of his powerful position to extract his vengeance following the death of Jacob. They throw themselves at Joseph's feet, and here is how he responded Genesis 50:19-20:

Am I in the place of God? You intended me harm, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

What an example of placing all of the things in our lives, even the unfair or undeserved trials we may have to go through, into the hands of our sovereign God. Then trusting Him to use circumstances in order to accomplish His purposes. As if that is not enough, there is one more display of faith I would like you to note. As the time of Joseph's own death draws near, he extracts a promise:

God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place. Genesis 50:24

Although Joseph may not have known the full extent of the slavery that would eventually result, he did know that offspring of Jacob would spend 400 years in Egypt, eventually be enslaved, and then be brought out by God Himself (Genesis 15:13). Joseph so believed this promise that he wanted to make sure he went with them, and that's why he extracts that promise. He trusted God to fulfill a promise almost 400 years in the future, while we sometimes wonder if He can deal with tomorrow. Joseph is a great example of faith that forgives and faith that gives hope for the future. In which of God's promises for the future are you trusting? List them and be encouraged!

Finishing Genesis

Wednesday, May 17: Read Psalm 92

We have looked at Hebrews Chapter 11 a number of times. We often refer to it as the *Hall of Faith*, for it lists examples of times when many of the saints of the past demonstrated faith. It is fair to say that, from God's perspective, it lists those individuals finest moments, something noteworthy enough to be recorded in Scripture for our example and encouragement. We have read about two of the men listed in Hebrews 11, both of whom died in the closing chapters of Genesis—Jacob and Joseph. The facts to which I want to draw your attention are these:

- Jacob is described in Hebrews 11:21 as “*by faith*” worshipping as he leaned on his staff. See Genesis 47:31. Joseph is said to have given instructions “*about his bones*” (Hebrews 11:22 cp. Genesis 50:24-25).
- How old was Jacob when he made the *Hall of Faith*? Check the text and you will see he was 130. How about Joseph? He was 110!

As application, when are we too old to do something noteworthy in the estimation of God? Never! I am convinced of that, not just because of the example of Jacob and Joseph, but because of the general principles laid out in God's Word: the principle of power out of weakness, the grain of wheat falling to the ground and first dying, the simple and not the mighty chosen, meekness and humility over pride, and resurrection life out of death, For some of us, it takes a lifetime until we can come to trust God in the way He desires. But be sure of this, for those who do:

The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, “The Lord is upright; He is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in Him. Psalm 92:12-15

Finishing Genesis

Thursday, May 18: Read Psalm 63

The things we can learn from Joseph's life and faith are still on my mind. Sometimes I think life is like a river on which we are traveling. We love those idyllic days slowly meandering through the beautiful countryside. In fact, we try to produce them as often as possible. But what do we do when we hear the roar of rapids in the distance and the current starts to pick up? Why we paddle like mad for shore! Well Joseph not only went through the *rapids*, but over the falls as well! And yet, God protected his tiny craft through it all, and brought him safely to his destination. See if this quote helps explain what I am trying to say:

Faith is dependence upon God. And this God-dependence only begins when self-dependence ends. And self-dependence only comes to its end, with some of us, when sorrow, suffering, affliction, broken plans and hopes bring us to that place of self-helplessness and defeat. And only then do we find that we have learned the lesson of faith: to find our tiny craft of life rushing onward to a blessed victory of life and power and service undreamt of in the days of our fleshly strength and self-reliance. (James H. McConkey)

Think through the above carefully, and see if it applies to Joseph. Then reread Psalm 62. In Verse 3 David's enemies were comparing him to a wall that was about to collapse and a fence that was about to fall over. Yet look at the preceding and following verses. Outward appearances do not tell the tale for the man or woman of God. For God truly is a fortress that cannot be touched.

What then of the trials of this life? They are either that which will bring our faith to the point it rests upon Him alone, or that which will bring us home to Him! Either way, they are intended for our blessing and His glory!

The Christian Life

Friday, May 19: Read Psalm 95

We are back to our study of the Mission and Disciplines of the Christian Life. As a reminder, this study has caused us to think about the mission we have from the Lord to “Go and make disciples. . .”

Furthermore, there are also a number of disciplines associated with the Christian life including regular intake of the Word of God, regular prayer, and now we turn to the subject of worship.

The most important thing that I would like you to grasp from this study is the way that both our *Mission* and *Disciplines* are inseparably linked. If we try to isolate them, we do so at our own peril. I am not saying one aspect is more important than the other, I am saying that you are not really fulfilling the call to *make disciples* unless you are involved in Bible study, prayer, and now worship.

Take prayer for example. If you are not praying for the lost people to whom the Lord allows you the privilege of sharing the Gospel, and if you are not praying for those you are mentoring in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, then you are not fully engaged in disciple-making! Conversely, if you are not engaged in disciple-making, then you are not really engaged in worship.



The Christian Life

Friday, May 19: Read Psalm 95 continued

Perhaps you are thinking, "What does disciple-making have to do with worship? I worship regularly, I am just not gifted in the area of disciple-making." Here is the connection. Matthew 28:18-20, and many other passages, command the followers of Jesus to be involved in disciple-making.

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

How can we truly be engaged in worship, if we have chosen to ignore a clear command from our sovereign Lord? For that matter, wouldn't worship be compromised any time we are apathetic toward the Word of God or allow unbelief and worldly pressures to take hold. I hope you will come to see there is a harmony between our mission and the various disciplines of the Christian Life. Stated another way, if we respond as we are called to in the first verses of Psalm 95:

Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. . .

and we are truly engaged in worship, wouldn't this naturally spill over into our lives simply by telling others about the Rock of our salvation? Of course it would. Worship leads to a heart so full it naturally overflows with what has filled it!

The Christian Life

Monday, May 22: Read Revelation 4

I am going to try to promote your understanding of worship by using the breadth of Scripture. Consider the following:

- This fascinating passage in Genesis connects mankind to our Creator in a captivating way.

Let us make man in Our own image, according to Our likeness. . . So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female. . .
Genesis 1:26-27

- Man was placed in a perfect environment and interacted face to face with God on a regular basis (Genesis 3:8).
- Though a fallen creation, it is still possible for those who turn back to the Lord to undergo a transformation that glorifies God. Could it be that in the process we regain some of that original image that was lost in the fall?

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. II Corinthians 3:18

- And then from today's reading:
. . .for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created. Revelation 4:11 (KJV)

Before reading further, go back through and put the above four points together and see what you get!

I trust you discovered something like the following: In keeping with the purposes of God, and for His pleasure, He created mankind. He created man with the capacity for, and intent of, having fellowship, building relationship, and to reflecting His glory. In short, mankind was made for _____! When I fill in the blank, I come to the conclusion that the word worship is the best fit, what do you think? More to come in the next few days.

The Christian Life

Tuesday, May 23: Read Acts 17

Let me open with the verse that closed yesterday's lesson:

...for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created. Revelation 4:11 (KJV)

If it is true that God created mankind in order to have a relationship with Him, one that included man as both a reflector of God's glory and as a creature that would choose to worship his Creator, then all of a sudden a lot of things fall into place.



Some reject the notion of a loving personal God who cares about each person. But if we were created for worship and relationship, if this worship and relationship gives God pleasure, then it is no longer such a stretch to think that He would care about me and seek to restore me to relationship with Himself.

Now that I know what I was made for, it is no wonder that He knit me together in my mother's womb (Psalm 139:13).

Continued on the next page

The Christian Life

Tuesday, May 23: Read Acts 17 continued

It is no wonder that all the days for me were written in His book before one of them came to be (Psalm 139:16). It is no wonder that He has put eternity in my heart (Ecclesiastes 3:11) and deep calls to deep (Psalm 42:7).

In fact, this very issue of worship infuses history with meaning. What we call history is in reality a great redemptive story in which God has provided a means of reconciliation, is calling lost mankind back to Himself, and is restoring all things to the way He intended them to be. That's what the new Jerusalem of Revelation 21 is, in part, about. In the meantime, as A. W. Tozer has said, most of mankind is in a deep, deep fog regarding the reason for his existence. Mankind has a *spiritual amnesia* as to why he exists and his purpose in life.

This is so easy to prove. The ancient Greeks claimed the goal of life was to obtain the highest form of knowledge (Plato). The Epicureans claimed it was pleasure, while out of the enlightenment came reason and social order. The Nihilists claimed life is without objective order and it is absurd to search for any such thing. Existentialism dogmatically asserts that life's meaning isn't determined by some god, but each of us creates his or her own meaning. Then there is the Christian, who against all this worldly wisdom, calmly asserts:

God made me, He calls me to reconciliation through the work of His Son, to know Him, to bring glory to Him, to spend eternity with Him. He has given me a mission to engage in rescuing others as I have been rescued, and I have Christ within the hope of glory."

That's the testimony you will hear when the fog of amnesia lifts, and that's a Christian who understands his or her mission because he has spent time in worship.

The Christian Life

Wednesday, May 24: Read Revelation 5

Perhaps by this time you are thinking, “Can you tell me plainly, what is worship?” The English word carries the idea of “to place worth upon an object.” Both the Hebrew and Greek words focus on the position of the body, that is to kneel or to prostrate oneself (to lie on the ground before). You can see this concept in Revelation 4 and 5:

. . .the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and worship Him who lives forever and ever. Revelation 4:10

. . .the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Revelation 5:8

I think of worship as the outcome of *sorting out* priorities and then *aligning oneself* with them. In other words, determining what (or who) is most important, and then giving that object its due. See if you can see that occurring in both this famous definition of worship by Archbishop Temple and in the closing verses of Revelation 5.

Worship is the submission of all of our nature to God. It is the quickening of the conscience by His holiness; the nourishment of mind with His truth; the purifying of imagination by His beauty; the opening of the heart to His love; the surrender of will to His purpose—all this gathered up in adoration, the most selfless emotion of which our nature is capable. (Temple)

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!” The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshiped.”

We must sort out Who, and Who alone is worthy of worship, and then fall in delight before the Father and the Son!

The Christian Life

Thursday, May 25: Read Revelation 2

Today I would like to consider a few very practical aspects of worship. First, when we understand what worship really is, we should naturally begin to share our delight in the Lord with others. We've been rescued and brought back into the purpose for which we were created—how could we not want to help bring others back? Is there a human being on this planet for whom Christ did not die and for whom God does not desire to have fellowship? No, not even one! If this natural extension of worship is not part of our thinking, then our understanding of worship still has room to grow.

Second, worship reminds us that it is possible to be deeply involved in ministry and yet forsake our “first-love”. We can clearly see that in today's reading:

“I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who do evil. . . and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.” Revelation 2:2-4

One way of understanding this passage is to realize that it is possible to be busy with ministry and yet void of worship. In fact, sometimes it is ministry busyness that causes spiritual barrenness. We need to watch this tendency closely as we get involved in ministry.

Lastly, worship helps to keep us God-centered rather than man-centered. For it is possible to have a “form of godliness” without its power. (II Timothy 3:5) And that happens when we shift our gaze from the Lord to such things as gifts and personalities. I trust you can see how essential it is to properly understand and engage in worship as one of the disciplines of the Christian Life.

Return to Isaiah

Friday, May 26: Read Isaiah 25

We are back to work in the book of Isaiah. After pausing in Chapter 14, you might be wondering what happened to the intervening chapters. Many of them follow the same pattern of pronouncing judgment upon the nations that we observed beginning in Chapter 13, so I am going to take up our study in Chapter 25. You may want to fill in the gap by reading through Chapters 15-24 on your own.

These next few chapters in Isaiah are very prophetic in nature and it is very important to know that they are making specific promises about a future time in Israel's history that to this day have not yet been fulfilled. However, they also have much to say about the walk of faith for God's people, and that is where I am going to focus much of our attention as we head to the great historical happenings of Chapters 36-39.

The plans and purposes of God have been under attack since Satan tempted Eve in the garden! Both Jews and Christians have suffered terrible persecution at the hands of this world, and that is still going strong in our day. Chapter 25 is comforting, because it is a *big-picture* overview of where things are headed. Not only does it have application for the Jew, for it speaks of a literal future kingdom, but it also has much application for the Christian, because it tells us where God is taking history, and how faithful He is to preserve His own.



Continued on the next page

Return to Isaiah

Friday, May 26: Read Isaiah 25 continued

Isaiah starts out with a pattern we could follow each day:

*O Lord, You are my God; I will exalt You and praise
Your name, for in perfect holiness You have
done marvelous things. . .*

Then a good reminder of God's faithfulness to His own:

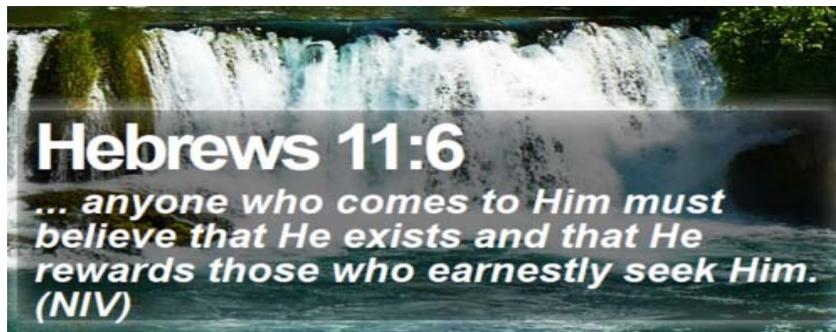
*You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the
needy in his distress, a shelter from the storm. . . .
The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all
faces; He will remove the disgrace of His people
from all the earth.*

So let's ask the question, "How are the people of God to respond to the faithfulness of God?" Verse 9 answers:

*In that day they will say, "Surely this is our God; we
trusted in Him, and He saved us. . . let us rejoice
and be glad in His salvation."*

In part, this chapter tells us how God will work all things to His purposes and how the Jewish people will one day rejoice in His salvation. But another part instructs us as Christians during the time of the Church that it is faith that pleases God (Hebrews 11:6). Israel's future is recorded in the Bible so that we could praise Him and declare:

*Surely this is our God; we trusted in Him,
and He saved us!"*



Return to Isaiah

Monday, May 29: Read Isaiah 26

As mentioned, this little grouping of chapters is talking about a future time when the literal nation of Israel will be preeminent and God will rule from Jerusalem. We can see hints of that throughout the chapter:

In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah (v.1)

He lays the lofty city low; He levels it to the ground. . . (v5)

When your judgments come upon the earth, the people of the world learn righteousness (v9)

See, the Lord is coming out of His dwelling to punish the people of the earth for their sins. (v21)

Now with that in mind, consider that Israel has a glorious future, but the promise of that future was made over 2500 years ago and they are still waiting. We too have many promises that are laid out for us in the Word of God that are also in the future. What are we to do in the meantime? How are we to handle the circumstances that come our way—especially when they seem to be in direct conflict with the promises of future blessing? Isaiah 26:3-4 provides marvelous guidance for both Jew and Christian:

You will keep in perfect peace Him whose mind is steadfast, because He trusts in You. Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord Himself, is the Rock eternal.

There is only one kind of person who is going to have peace in the midst of the trials of this life, the one who's mind steadfastly trusts in the Lord! Now why should we trust in the Lord? Of all the places where we can place our trust, why trust Him? The answer forces us to think carefully about the object of our trust. Is there anything else that is a *Rock eternal*, one that will never be moved, a rock that has always been and always will be? There is none other than the Lord—the maker of heaven and earth, the one who holds the future in His hands.

Return to Isaiah

Tuesday, May 30: Read Isaiah 27

Beginning with the call of Abraham in Genesis 12, God narrows His redemptive plan to the progeny of one man. From this man would come a nation (Israel) and the promised Messiah. However, the Jews rejected the Messiah as suffering servant, and are now suffering the consequences until the “full number of the Gentiles has come in.” This time of the Gentiles was hidden in the Old Testament, but revealed in the New Testament as the Church. But, God is not done with Israel. There is coming a time when the nation will turn to the One whom they crucified and He will come and reign as King of kings over all nations—a real king over a literal kingdom with Jerusalem as its center.

I am prompted to lay out this history for you, because you can see almost all of it in Isaiah 27. “*In that day. . .*” (v1) refers to a time yet to come. “*The Lord will punish with His sword*” refers to His return as depicted in Revelation 19:11-f. Much of the rest of the chapter talks about how the Lord will watch over Israel and care for it (v2); how He will discipline Israel, but not as He has destroyed those who have come against her (v7-8); and that Israel’s guilt will be atoned for when she turns from idols to the Lord. The chapter concludes with the following:

In that day the Lord will thresh from the flowing Euphrates to the Wadi of Egypt, and you, O Israelites, will be gathered up as one. And in that day a great trumpet will sound. Those who were perishing in Assyria and those who were exiled in Egypt will come and worship the Lord on the holy mountain in Egypt.

Has this ever happened? Has the entire nation ever returned as one? Have they been nurtured in a time of peace and prosperity? Biblically, it is declared to be every bit as certain as the home Jesus is preparing for those who believe! We need to see Israel’s future is no less certain than the eternal life we have in Jesus Christ.

Return to Isaiah

Wednesday, May 31: Read Isaiah 28-29

Isaiah 28 talks about the impending judgment on the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Ephraim) and Chapter 29 the judgment on the South (Judah). Religion was one of the reasons specifically given for this coming judgment, and religion has just as much potential to mislead today as it did during the time of Isaiah's prophecy. We can find instruction on religious practice in both chapters:

*For it is: do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule;
a little here, a little there. Isaiah 28:10*

*Their worship of Me is made up only of rules
taught by men. Isaiah 29:13b*

These two verses are an apt description of the religious code in place by the time of Jesus' first coming. Hundreds of rules that gave the Jews who kept them a false sense of righteousness before God. For that's what all religious practice is—the efforts of man to make himself acceptable to God. God tells us what he thinks of our efforts: "*made up of only rules taught by men.*" Chapter 29 gives a hint of the kind of worship that God is interested in:

*These people come near to Me with their mouth and honor Me
with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. Isaiah 29:13a*

The first part of the verse is once again God's indictment of religion, but consider the second part. God wants hearts that come near. From here it is a short step to John 4:23:

*...true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in
truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks.*

So, by way of application, do you see how careful we must be to make sure our worship does not consist of rules made by men? But rather, we must develop a heart finely tuned to our God and His revelation to us!

VISTOSO

Community Church

He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit...*John 15:5*

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