

Daily Devotional

August 2017

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock."

Matthew 7:24-25



Foreword

When you started reading the book of Isaiah, did you ever think you would finish it? We begin this month's devotions with more study of Isaiah. We will continue our study this month in the Gospel of John, which is a very nice companion to Isaiah. Toward the end of the month, we begin our final study in Isaiah which will actually end during the first days of September.



Well done for getting through it, and I think you will admit it covers a remarkable amount of content. May God bless your efforts to know Him more fully through His Word.

In His grace,

Kevin Redig

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

Return to Isaiah

Tuesday, August 1: Read Isaiah 52

The two advents of Jesus Christ are both on display in Isaiah Chapter 52. The first 13 verses of this chapter reveal a brief history of Israel from the standpoint of their tribulations and culminates in a time of glorious future deliverance. Let me show you. Verse 4 says,

"At first My people went down to Egypt to live; lately, Assyria has oppressed them. And now what do I have here?" declares the Lord.

"For My people have been taken away for nothing, and those who rule over them mock. . .all day long My name is constantly blasphemed."

In this short segment we have many centuries of Jewish history: Jacob and his family spending 400 years in Egypt, the northern kingdom going into exile at the hands of the Assyrians, and even a hint of ongoing struggles under the Babylonians, Romans, and so on.



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Return to Isaiah

Tuesday, August 1: Read Isaiah 52 Continued

But then comes the deliverer—the one who redeems:

Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem. . . the Lord will lay bare His holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God. Verses 9-10

Pay close attention to the two aspects of the servant of the Lord portrayed:

- As the deliverer in His Second Advent:

He will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. Verse 13

- But, at His First Advent, as the suffering servant:

. . . there were many who were appalled at Him—His appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and His form marred beyond human likeness. . . Verse 14



Verse 14 bears testimony to the horrific suffering Christ physically bore prior to and during the crucifixion. Are you starting to get a sense that God revealed so much about the promised Messiah that only hardness of heart could have caused the Jews to miss Him?

Lest you think I am singling out the Jews, note that only hardness of heart could cause a lost and desperately needy human race to miss a resurrected Savior!!

Return to Isaiah

Wednesday, August 2: Read Isaiah 53

I have had you read this chapter in the past in preparation for Easter. However, because of its preeminent position as a prophetic passage, I am having you read it again. Let me remind you of the accuracy with which this passage speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ:

- His humble beginnings meant the establishment did not “esteem” Him. (Verse 2-3)
- He took up our infirmities, was pierced for our transgressions; crushed for our iniquities, and the Lord laid upon Him the iniquity of us all. (Verse 5)
- His punishment brought us peace. (Verse 5)
- He was assigned a grave with the wicked and with the rich in His death in Verse 9. (As a criminal, Jesus’ body would have been taken to the town dump, but a rich man placed His body in a new tomb hewn from the rock.)
- A clear reference to the resurrection in Verse 11.

*After the suffering of His soul,
He will see the light of life. . .*

- The Father assigned Him a “portion with the great” and “gave Him a name above every name”

*“...because He poured out His life unto death,
and was numbered with the transgressors.
For He bore the sin of many. . .” (Verse 12)*

How could the Jews possibly have missed this? How can they miss it today? Written over 700 years before the crucifixion, it rings so true! Oh Lord, that we would be open to Your Word and the teaching of Your Spirit, that we would not miss the truth You have for us in your prophetic plan for the future. Might the Jewish people of our day and the future, turn and look on the One whom they have pierced and respond in faith to their Messiah—“*who bore the sin of many*” that all might find forgiveness in Him.

Return to Isaiah

Thursday, August 3: Read Isaiah 54

I want to make sure that we can extract truth from the poetic and figurative language that Isaiah is using during this extended section of prophecy. The key interpretive verse in this chapter is Verse 6:

The Lord will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit—a wife who married young, only to be rejected. . .

This verse is talking about the nation Israel. It is very similar to the way that God deals with Israel as the “unfaithful wife” in the book of Hosea. Much of the rest of the chapter is meant to give great hope to the Jews, that God will restore and bless them. Consider the following sampling:

For your Maker is your husband—the Lord Almighty is His name—the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer. . .
Verse 5

“In a surge of anger I hid My face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you”... Verse 8

“Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet My unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor My covenant of peace be removed. . .” Verse 10

The Lord has a plan for His people and it is His plan that includes redemption and restoration. As blessed as we are during this age of the Church, we dare not think that God has forgotten His chosen people. And just as a reminder, is there any way to make the promise of this chapter apply to the Church?

I ask this because many teach that the Church has replaced Israel. But to force this passage to apply to the Church is to do it great damage. This applies to a nation that will yet one day, turn and “*look on Me, the one they have pierced,*” and what a great day for the remnant of Israel that will be!

Return to Isaiah

Friday, August 4: Read Isaiah 55

As we begin Chapter 55 we have moved away from the subject of the Servant of the Lord and into one of the great pictures of salvation by grace—and yes, in the Old Testament. Did you happen to notice as you read the chapter that it starts with the call in the first few verses to come, eat and drink, without cost? That's grace!

Come, all you who are thirsty. . . you who have no money, come, buy and eat. . . without money and without cost.

It continues with the call to salvation by turning to the Lord:

Seek the Lord while He may be found; call on Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his evil thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him, and to our God, for He will freely pardon. Verses 6-7

I am sure you recognized the last portion of the chapter for I refer to it often. Read through Verses 8-11 again:

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways," declares the Lord. . . "As the rain and snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth. . . so is My word that goes out from My mouth: It will not return to Me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

Now in the context, this is a promise for those who will accept the gracious offer of salvation by turning to the Lord. Although this is not man's way, it is God's and He will honor His Word. However, as soon as the passage refers to "thoughts and ways," it expands the whole thing to apply to everything God has revealed to us about Himself and His promises—the content of the Word of God. It is not man's ways, but much higher and much more certain to accomplish all that it says.

Return to Isaiah

Monday, August 7: Read Isaiah 57

This is a great chapter with two lessons I find very helpful. We'll tackle the first lesson today. There are many Bible passages that speak of God rescuing, protecting, and delivering His own. Consider Job 33:28 as an example:

*God has delivered me from going down to the pit,
and I shall live to enjoy the light of life. Job 33:28*

And given the story of Job, we can begin to think that restoration of everything lost, including health and wealth, is some kind of a mandatory Christian experience. This, in turn, can cause us to doubt God's faithfulness when a vibrant Christian man or woman dies of cancer, or is struck by a drunk driver, or a thousand other things. Isaiah 57:1-2 can be very helpful at times like these.

*The righteous perish, and no one ponders it in his heart;
devout men are taken away, and no one understands
that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil.
Those who walk uprightly enter into peace;
they find rest as they lie in death.*

This is blunt, straight-forward talk, and I find it a wonderful counterbalance to the simultaneous truth that God does so often rescue His own. For this passage tells us, first of all, that when something bad happens to a Christian, it didn't escape God's notice nor was He unable to prevent it. Rather, there are other issues in play. For example, the righteous may be taken away, simply to keep them from evil. I think there are others as well, but this is a big one. Do you see this in the context of Job? The Lord could have brought Him home, simply to put an end to his suffering at the hands of Satan. And had he done so, Job would have found a peace and rest that He never had on this earth—despite his prosperity! That's why Paul said:

...for to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Philippians 1:21

Return to Isaiah

Tuesday, August 8: Read Numbers 12

As you saw in today's reading, Miriam and Aaron are seeking to elevate themselves and apparently gain more exalted positions among the Israelites. Not surprisingly, we don't hear a word about position from Moses because:

Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth. Verse 3

And so what we see for the rest of the chapter is God stepping in to take up the case of His servant Moses. And, true to form, the chapter closes with Moses praying for the Lord to have mercy and heal his sister!

Now what does this have to do with our systematic reading of Isaiah? The answer is that we have one more thing in Chapter 57 to which I would like to draw your attention:

For this is what the High and Lofty One says—He who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite." Verse 15

Consider also a related statement in Isaiah 66:2:

"This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at My Word."

Numbers 12, and many other passages, show us the ugliness of pride. Isaiah 57 and 66 show us how God feels about humility as a quality and those who possess it. They are *esteemed* by God. He *lives* with them. He *revives* them. Perhaps this is how Moses was able to minister to such an obstinate people for 40 years, he was humble and therefore enabled by God. These readings in Isaiah make it very clear to me how I should view myself in the midst of whatever ministry the Lord gives to me—humbly, contritely (as one *crushed*), and trembling at His Word!

The Gospel of John

Wednesday, August 9: Read John 2:1-12

As we return to the Gospel of John, today's reading brings us to the first of the seven miracles John records in his Gospel account. It is a fascinating miracle in that it records the turning of water into wine at a wedding banquet.

There have been many attempts to develop a natural explanation to this narrative, and I am always amazed at the naïveté of those who try to do so. I say that because efforts to explain away the miraculous typically go something like this, "Jesus took some wine and added it to the stone water jars creating a mixture of mostly water and a little bit of wine."

If you are going to contradict the inspired Word of God, you should at least put some thought into your alternative theory. For, according to the text, the jars were full to the very top—there was no room for anything else. The banquet master declared it to be the "best" wine and he would not have been fooled by a watery mixture. Plus, His disciples saw the whole thing. Do you put your faith in a gimmick or revealed glory? The text answers that question:

This, the first of His miraculous signs, Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee. He thus revealed His glory, and His disciples put their faith in Him. John 2:11

How about a point of application? I love the way Mary handles this whole thing. Consider this question: Is God able to manage both our need and His purposes? Of course, the answer is yes. However, here is where the application comes in: is our response like Mary's? She doesn't sulk, doesn't beg, doesn't get anxious. Instead she simply tells the servants to do whatever Jesus says.

Consider the power if we prayed the same way: "Lord we delight to leave the outcome up to You, and, in the meantime, we will do whatever yYou say!"

The Gospel of John

Thursday, August 10: Read I Corinthians 15:1-32

So, what is your view of miracles? Did Jesus actually change water into wine? Or, do you agree with theologians like Rudolph Bultmann, who held to the position:

We who use electricity to turn on a light with the flick of a switch could not possibly believe in miracles! To believe in the miraculous is ridiculous. There is no physical bodily resurrection.

In fact, he went so far as to say, “*We must demythologize the text of Scripture.*” Here is an example of what he meant by that. The resurrection has become:

...something here and now. . . entering into a new dimension of existence, a being set free from the past and from guilt and from care and being made open to one’s fellow-man in love.

This is gobbledygook of the first degree. For Christ’s resurrection has not “become” anything. It is the physical and bodily raising of the humanity of Jesus Christ from the dead as a kind of “first-fruits” of what is possible for all those who will put their faith in Him.



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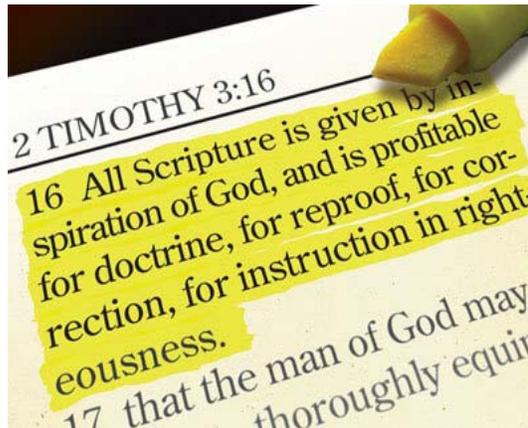
The Gospel of John

Thursday, August 10: Read I Corinthians 15:1-32

Continued

Furthermore, it is not only the prototype resurrection body that all believers have as a hope for the future, it is a clear message from God the Father regarding His complete satisfaction with the work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Although many theologians of our day have rejected outright the miraculous, which includes the truth of the resurrection, we must hold to the authority of Scripture:



*For if the dead are not raised,
then Christ has not been raised either. . .
Your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. . .
if only for this life we have hope. . .
We are to be pitied more than all men.
I Corinthians 15:16-19*

*For what I received I passed on to you of first
importance: that Christ died for our sins
according to the Scriptures, that He was buried,
that He was raised on the third day according to the
Scriptures, and that He appeared to Peter,
and then to the Twelve. After that He appeared to more
than five hundred. . . I Corinthians 15:1-6*

No bodily resurrection? Paul will not allow this to stand. Note how carefully Paul dismisses this bogus claim, sure to come in the future: the resurrected Jesus appeared to Peter, the twelve, and then 500 eye-witnesses!

The Gospel of John

Friday, August 11: Read Hebrews 11

Since we dug a little deeper into the subject of miracles, I thought we should do the same with the subject of faith. Did you notice this message in our last reading in John?

This, the first of His miraculous signs, Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee. He thus revealed His glory, and His disciples put their faith in Him. John 2:11

Faith, as a response to the revelation of God, is typically ridiculed by the world, and the greater the world's degree of sophistication, the greater the ridicule. And yet, what does God very explicitly say?

Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen Me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." John 20:29

Without faith it is impossible to please God. For those who come to Him must believe that He exists, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. Hebrews 11:6

Not only is faith necessary to please God, but notice, in the John 20 passage, how Jesus places a premium upon faith in contrast to that which is seen.

The kind of faith that pleases God, per Hebrews 11:6, is not some kind of *blind* faith or, as falsely described by one theologian, a *leap of faith*. A leap of faith might be described as the act of believing or accepting something intangible or without evidence. Does that fit the text of John 2:11? Absolutely not! The faith of the disciples was not *blind* or a *leap*. On the contrary, the evidence provided by Jesus, via His miracle, authenticated who He was. So the disciples exercised faith based upon the evidence. As it turns out, their faith was not in the least misplaced nor will ours be when that faith is in the person and work of Jesus Christ or His Word!

The Gospel of John

Monday, August 14: Read Romans 10

I hope you have been thinking about the devotionals of the past few days, and at some point said to yourself, “Wait a minute, there has got to be more to prompt faith than miracles. I haven’t really seen that many myself!” Good point, and something we will consider today.

We believe in the historicity of Jesus Christ, we believe in the substitutionary atonement He accomplished on the cross, and we believe in a physical, bodily resurrection from the dead. All of these are real events. But what about our day to day life as Christians? We don’t have daily miracles, at least not clearly supernatural events, so then what is the object of our faith? Our reading for today answers that very question, and at the same time lays down an absolutely essential truth for the child of God.

*Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message,
and the message is heard through the Word of Christ.*

Romans 10:17

Let me give you the King James translation which is marvelous for its succinctness:

*So then faith cometh by hearing,
and hearing by the word of God.*

Now connect this to our study of the past few days. The disciples believed as they saw the miracles Jesus performed. Jesus proclaims a blessing on those who believe without seeing. Who can do that? We all can do that who accept the content of the Word of God for what it is—God’s mind revealed to us. For “*All Scripture is God-breathed. . .*” It is this very content that will prompt faith in the child of God. Do you feel your faith wavering? Turn to the pages of the Word to have it renewed. In fact, as we accept the testimony of Jesus’ first miracle, we see with the *eyes of faith* that He really is the Son of God. When we believe, the miracle, as recorded in the Word of God, has done its job. It has prompted our faith!

The Gospel of John

Tuesday, August 15: Read John 2:13-25

Consider this verse near the end of our reading for today:

... many people saw the miraculous signs He was doing and believed in His name. But Jesus would not entrust Himself to them, for He knew all men.

John 2:23-24

Let's begin with a very straightforward question: "Why did Jesus not entrust himself to those who had believed?"

The specific answer from the text, ". . .for He (Jesus) *knew all men*" is not as clear as we might like. We will have to do further work in order to determine the correct interpretation. Let me walk you through a few possibilities.

It is very common to take the interpretive position that the individuals of Verse 23 had *spurious* or false faith. This means that interpreters who hold to this position do not believe that the individuals of Verse 23 had really believed nor were they really saved.

From a purely theological standpoint, this is a very *handy* interpretation for Christian theologians to take. Can you guess why? Because it allows them to cover all manner of Christian failure by simply claiming that those who failed were never really Christians at all! For example, how do we, as Christians, explain a Christian husband leaving his wife and children for another woman or a Christian businessman embezzling funds from his company. When it happens in your sphere of influence, this becomes a very practical issue. One way, certainly the easiest way, is to hold to the position that the *sinner*s in question were never really Christians.

There is, however, a much more important question for us than whether or not the explanation is easy and gets us off the hook from answering tough questions. The bigger question is whether or not this is good interpretation of the Scripture!

Continued on the next page.

The Gospel of John

Tuesday, August 15: Read John 2:13-25

Continued

Go back to the text and see what the Scripture says they did.

- The Scripture says they saw the miracles and then believed in His name. The phrase “*believed in His name*” is the exact same phrase used in John 1:12 to describe the means by which we become children of God. The Greek word translated “*believe*” is the same word used in John 1:12, 3:16, 4:42, 4:53, 5:24 and many other passages in the Gospel of John. All of these are directly related to a person’s salvation—either explicitly or implicitly.
- Let’s go back to the beginning of our study and the truth contained in John 20:31. John’s purpose for constructing his gospel around a collection of miracles is very clear and specific and that is to prompt belief, which in turn directly leads to eternal life!

Miracles are meant to prompt belief on the part of those who see them and belief is the criteria for eternal life. Isn’t this exactly what we see occurring in John 2:23-24?

As nice as it might be to have an excuse to cover for all manner of failure within the Christian community, it is simply bad Bible interpretation to nullify the purpose of John’s gospel simply because it doesn’t fit your theology or your theological preferences. This is what you are doing when you say that belief following an example of the miraculous is not really belief! I think it is much more consistent with the text to hold to a position that there were those in Jerusalem who, after seeing the miracles, believed in Jesus as Messiah and thus became children of God.

But what about our original question? Why did Jesus not entrust himself to them? We will continue our discussion in the next lesson.

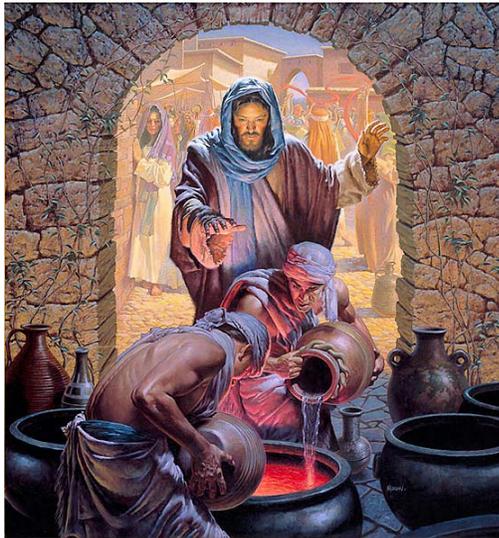
The Gospel of John

Wednesday, August 16: Read Matthew 6

So, after taking the position that those who saw the miracles and believed had become children of God, why would Jesus not entrust Himself to them? First of all, could it have something to do with John 2:4?

*"Woman, why do you involve Me?" Jesus replied.
"My hour has not yet come."*

In this dialogue Mary has asked Jesus to intervene because of a potential social *faux pas* on the part of family



friends.

Jesus at first declines to act on the social issue, but then turns around and performs a miracle that the text clearly tells us strengthens the faith of His disciples.

In John 2:4, I want to draw your attention to the phrase:

" . . . My time has not yet come." The Jews were looking for a

Messiah that would be a great king and military victor. At the time of Christ, this meant they were looking for someone who would drive the hated Romans from Israel.

These brand new Jewish converts would certainly have brought this mindset with them. But was that the purpose of the First Advent? First the cross and then the crown!

In the plan of His heavenly Father, Jesus' first coming was going to culminate in the cross. However, when He comes again, it is indeed going to be as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Continued on the next page.

The Gospel of John

Wednesday, August 16: Read Matthew 6

Continued

These new believers had something else other than the cross in mind, and so Jesus refused to be sidetracked from the plan of God by entrusting Himself to them. To see an example of how new believers can think apart from the plan of God, consider Peter and his actions as recorded in Matthew 16:22. Can you believe that Peter tries to dissuade Jesus from going to the cross? Why this is the very reason He came. These are nothing more than the words of Satan in the mouth of Peter.

**THEN PETER TOOK HIM,
AND BEGAN TO REBUKE
HIM, SAYING, BE IT
FAR FROM THEE, LORD:
THIS SHALL NOT BE
UNTO THEE.**

- Matthew 16:22

Jesus certainly refuses to entrust Himself to Peter and the others. With such a monumental rebuke to Peter, does that mean his faith was false? Just go back a few verses to Matthew 16:15-f. Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah is said to have come from the Father and be the basis upon which the coming church will be built. You have to do some serious theological gymnastics to try and take the position that Peter was not yet saved when rebuked by Jesus for acting contrary to the plan of God.

The simple truth is this is something that new believers often do. If we are honest with ourselves, we can probably look back in our own lives and remember times when we got ahead of the Lord and headed in the wrong direction. I can sum this up by simply stating: a saved person is not going to start out as a mature Christian. Entry into the family of God happens at the moment of faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Maturity comes with both time and pursuit of a relationship with our Lord. This coincides perfectly with the truth that is waiting for us in John 15 where, as believers, we are told to abide continually in the Vine that is none other than Jesus Christ!

The Gospel of John

Thursday, August 17: Read Luke 22

The Gospel is always on my mind. And so the issues of how we are saved, assurance of that salvation, and what it means when we fail are hugely important. These topics are so important that we are going to insert a brief *parenthesis* into our study of John's gospel in order to consider these issues more closely.

Let's consider Peter. The following verse from Luke 22:62 immediately follows Peter's three denials of our Lord

And he (Peter) went outside and wept bitterly.

How do you think Peter was feeling right at this moment and for the doubtless sleepless hours ahead? Did he feel a sense of failure? How about guilt? Do you think it is possible that he questioned his relationship with the Lord? If you have been a believer for any length of time, you have experienced similar feelings. We all have! Our sin may not have been quite so dramatic as Peter's, but we know we have let the Lord down and now we wonder where we stand with Him. Do you see what I mean about these kind of things—salvation, assurance, and dealing with failure—being hugely important?

Now how would the *spurious faith* theology of John 2:23 explain Peter's behavior. Why that's easy. It would simply tell us that Peter had never *really* believed. This explanation might solve the issue of how could a *real* follower of Jesus Christ deny Him, but it ignores the clear record of Scripture. We looked earlier at Matthew 16:15-f, in which the believing testimony of Peter is said to be the response upon which the Church will be built. There are many, many other instances in the four Gospels where Peter is stated to have believed prior to his denial.

So instead of relying on a man-made theology, let's ask the question, "What would John tell us about Peter?" We discuss that question tomorrow!

The Gospel of John

Friday, August 18: Read I John 5

What would John tell us? How about:

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. I John 5:13

Consider two things:

- Based upon the above reference, if Peter could identify a time in his own life when he had believed in the person and work of Jesus Christ, then by the authority of the Word of God he could know that he was saved.
- Equally important, knowing that he was eternally secure in Christ—we call this having *assurance*—is meant to be the very first thing to help Peter recover from his failure.

Notice how tenderly and personally Jesus deals with Peter in John 21:7-19 even after Peter's denials. Jesus displays no hint of rejection for Peter's failure. The cross even paid for Peter's denial and our Lord still had plans for him.

Do you see the application for us? How are we to understand the basis of our relationship with God the Father through His Son? What kind of picture does Scripture paint describing the *firmness* of that relationship—especially when we fail? Does it put on pressure so that if we do fail, we must fear being cut off, or, does it deal with the question of whether or not we had really become His children? Of course not! This kind of pressure is going to cause most believers to either *choke* or become phonies. It is like telling a teammate as he heads to the plate: "Don't strike out!"

The Biblical picture of how God deals with failure promotes an ever greater appreciation for a "*mercy that endureth forever!*" For the Christian Way of Life is not ultimately about how worthy we are. It is, instead, about how worthy He is!

The Gospel of John

Monday, August 21: Read John 3:1-8

We are moving from the miracle of Chapter 2 to the narrative of Chapters 3 and 4. Perhaps one of the most famous portions of narrative in the Bible is between Jesus and Nicodemus.

Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." John 3:3

Who is Nicodemus? Two things we should know. First, he is a VIP as a member of the Sanhedrin. In fact, his name means "ruler of the people." Second, he is a renowned teacher. You can verify this in Verse 10, for apparently Jesus himself was aware of his reputation.

Why did Nicodemus come at night to talk with our Lord? There certainly has been a lot of speculation on this item over the years. In truth, the text doesn't really tell us. It could be something as simple as the fact that, as a member of the Sanhedrin and a prominent teacher, he was so busy with doing good that evening was the only time he had room in his schedule. On the other hand, he may very well have been interested in Jesus and as a member of the Sanhedrin, he wished to keep his interest a secret.

Now look closely at Verse 2 and you will see what is really bugging Nicodemus. Although he calls Jesus a "teacher come from God," he doesn't ask him a single theological question. That is because he doesn't have any! As a Pharisee and teacher, he is quite certain he has things down cold in the realm of theology.

However, the issue of miracles has him vexed! The only person who can do miracles is someone with divine power. Yet Jesus is *without portfolio* in the mind of Nicodemus, and so he wants an explanation. Do you see how the intended purpose of miracles is at work in the soul of Nicodemus? (John 20:30-31)

The Gospel of John

Tuesday, August 22: Read John 5:30-47

How do you handle a VIP like Nicodemus? Jesus' approach might surprise you. Nicodemus starts by giving Jesus an honorary title, Rabbi. The politically correct thing for Jesus to do would be to let Nicodemus finish his gracious introduction and reply in kind. Instead, one sentence into Nicodemus' greeting, Jesus cuts him off, and says the following,

"No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." John 3:3

You must realize this is a slap in the face to the proud Pharisee! Maybe you are not sure, so let me ask you, "Did Nicodemus understand what Jesus was talking about?" Verses 4 and 9 make it clear that he did not. So, in effect, Jesus said to Nicodemus something akin to the following: "You think that by your religious system you are in God's Kingdom. But I tell you there is truth you know nothing about which, until you both understand it and respond to it, is going to keep you from ever entering the Kingdom."

What a shocker this must have been for Nicodemus, and it certainly must have captured his attention. Furthermore, you can tell from the dialogue that follows that he has completely lost control of the conversation, which is now focused upon what Jesus has to say (which is where it belongs). There is a time to avoid the pleasantries and *cut to the chase!* Jesus did just that in the course of his dialogue with the religious Jews of His day. He must have given them quite a shock also when He told them you cannot obtain eternal life from the Scriptures without also coming to the Savior whom the Scriptures proclaim.

You see, it is possible to make an idol even out of the written Word, if you ignore the Living Word from which the Bible receives its authority.

The Gospel of John

Wednesday, August 23: Read I Corinthians 2

There is one more thing I would like you to consider before leaving the narrative between Nicodemus and Jesus. It is something that I trust will help you as you try to share your faith with others. Here is the principle:

Lost people (like Nicodemus) have a very difficult time wrapping their minds around spiritual truth, so stick with the one thing they need the most!

The reason for this is found in the last part of today's reading: spiritually dead people cannot understand spiritual truth. If it weren't for the ministry of the Holy Spirit at work in the hearts of men, no one would come to salvation. It doesn't matter if it is sophisticated lost people like Nicodemus, or unsophisticated like the Samaritan woman. It is very important for us to stick to what is the *main issue* when dealing with lost people. That issue is their need of salvation and God's answer to that need in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

You can see this point in the first part of today's reading when Paul said,

For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Verse 2

All too often we get involved in discussions of spiritual things about which the lost might be curious. Then, before you know it, we are deep into an explanation which might show our theological knowledge but goes right over the head of the lost individual. More often than not, when this happens to me, it is just something that the lost person turns around later and uses to ridicule Christianity. I've learned the lesson the hard way: when dealing with a lost person, stick with their need before a Holy God and the good news of the Gospel. If I am going to be ridiculed by a lost person, I want it to be with respect to the cross of Christ and nothing else.

The Gospel of John

Thursday, August 24: Read John 3:18-36

We make all kinds of decisions every day. Some we consider to be really big and worth making with care—what career to pursue, whom to marry, and so on. But the single biggest decision that will be made by all members of the human race, one way or the other, is whether or not they will place their faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is not hard to support such a claim beginning with the very first verse of our reading,

Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. John 3:18

Couple this with the very last verse of our reading and you have all the repetition you need to affirm this truth:

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him. John 3:36

I am claiming is that eternal life and freedom from God's condemnation on the one hand, and the absence of life coupled with condemnation on the other hand, is related to one single decision. That decision is whether or not we believed in Jesus Christ. What could be more significant than these two options? But, what we have between these two options are some of the reasons man would choose death and condemnation: they love the darkness and the deeds of darkness (Verse 19-20) or they love the ways of this world more than the call to a spiritual relationship with their Creator (Verse 31). Despite our natural inclination to unbelief, God has provided the means of salvation. We don't have to stay in the darkness! For whoever believes in the Son can be transferred from the dominion of darkness to the Kingdom of the Son. God has done all the work, ours is but to come in child-like faith.

Finishing Isaiah

Friday, August 25: Read Isaiah 58

Today we return to the book of Isaiah to finish this great Old Testament book of prophecy and doctrine. We will finish the month and run just a bit into September, but we won't cover all of the remaining chapters. You may want to read the ones we skip on your own.

Does this sound desirable to you?

*Then your light will break forth like the dawn,
and your healing will quickly appear;
then your righteousness will go before you,
and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.
Then you will call, and the Lord will answer;
you will cry for help, and He will say, "Here I am."*

Verses 8-9

Righteousness before, the glory of the Lord behind, and God's presence in difficulty, this sounds very desirable to me! Now the rest of the chapter, both before and after these verses is about the conditions necessary for the people of Israel to receive such blessings.

We have to be careful, since during the Church-age we have been blessed in the heavenlies with every spiritual



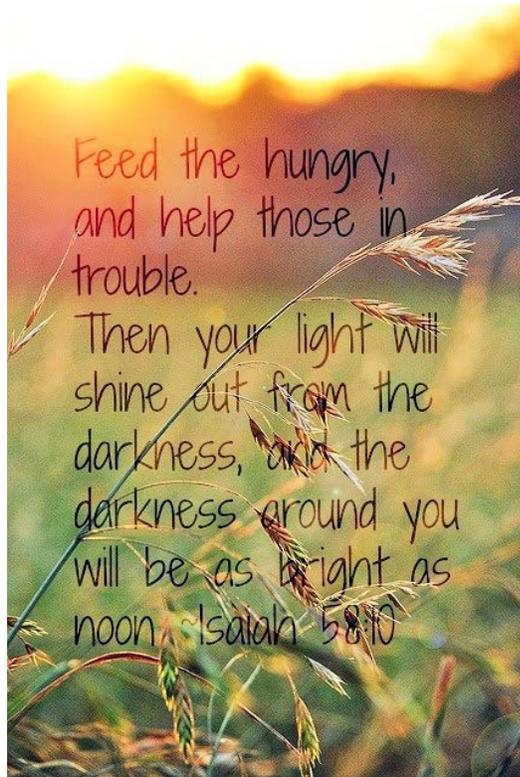
blessing in Christ (Ephesians 1:3), and this in grace apart from merit on our part. Nonetheless, we can certainly

see in this chapter what it is that pleases God, what draws the new life within.

Continued on the next page.

Finishing Isaiah

Friday, August 25: Read Isaiah 58 Continued



In Verses 2-6 it is clear that religious rituals (like fasting) is of no interest to God when it is not accompanied by a humbling of the heart and, most importantly, a change in outward behavior. In the context of Verses 6-7, the focus is on feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and correcting injustice in the land. Notice how closely the New Testament of James is related to making sure that our faith is con-

nected to works addressing the same kinds of need:

Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?

James 2:15-16

The latter half of Isaiah 58 continues to address social injustice as well as keeping the Sabbath. This chapter reminds us that there is not one speck of hypocrisy associated with the Christian life.

Quite a reminder to watch ourselves closely.

Finishing Isaiah

Monday, August 28: Read Isaiah 59

This is an absolutely marvelous chapter! As you have been reading Isaiah, I hope you realize there is a difference between teaching the chapter and using it for illustrative purposes. To teach it involves all the intricacies of context and how this applies to Israel. However, to draw upon it as illustration involves extracting material to illustrate truth. This chapter is fertile soil. Let me show you. The chapter begins with the terrible plight of those in sin:

*...your iniquities have separated you from your God;
your sins have hidden His face. Verse 2*

And then it moves on to documenting their sinful behavior:

*...your hands are stained with blood. . .
your lips have spoken lies and
your tongue mutters wicked things. Verses 2-3*

And it is not just the individual, but society:

*...Their feet rush into sin. . . Their thoughts are evil
thoughts. . . So justice is far from us, and righteousness
does not reach us. Verses 7,9*

This is exactly like the New Testament analysis of man—“dead in trespasses and sin” (Ephesians 2:1)—a hopeless and helpless situation. What does the New Testament say, “God so loved the world He sent His Son. . .” What does Isaiah say:

*He saw there was no one. . . no one to intervene;
so His own arm worked salvation for Him,
and His own righteousness sustained Him.*

What a marvelous way to picture the status of man: none are righteous, not even one. So God reached into this world by the “Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us,” and then going to the cross to suffer in our place, to receive upon Himself the wrath of God that we deserve. Truly, His own arm has worked salvation for all of us, and in His righteousness we can find righteousness. Hallelujah, what a Savior.

Finishing Isaiah

Tuesday, August 29: Read Isaiah 61

Today let me try to tackle prophecy from a different angle. For in prophetic scriptures it is hard to decide what is literal and what is figurative, what has happened and what is yet to come. So let me give you a prophetic road map regarding the Jewish people. We know God loves them and has a plan for them, but sometimes it is hard to follow.

- The second person of the trinity took on flesh and dwelt among His people and proclaimed,

*"The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on Me,
because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good news
to the poor. He has sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from
darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year
of the Lord's favor. . ."* Isaiah 61:1-2a

- But the Jewish people rejected their Messiah, and so,

*"The days will come upon you when enemies will build
an embankment against you. . .they will dash you to
the ground, and the children within your walls.
They will not leave one stone upon another because
you did not recognize the time of God's
coming to you."* Luke 19:42-44

- Although their time in the crucible will be very hard, Isaiah 61 makes it clear a time of blessing is coming:

*...to comfort all who mourn and to provide for those who
grieve in Zion. . . And you will be called priests of the
Lord. . .Instead of their shame My people will receive a
double portion. . .they will rejoice in their
inheritance.* Isaiah 61:2b-7

Now read the last few verses and rejoice. This is our claim—Jew and Gentile:

*I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God.
For He has clothed me with garments of salvation and
arrayed me in a robe of righteousness. . .* Isaiah 61:10

Finishing Isaiah

Wednesday, August 30: Read Isaiah 62

We are nearly finished with this very lengthy and complex book. As we conclude, let me ask you not to rush through the readings or long for a return to the New Testament. These next four chapters, today and tomorrow and the first two lessons in September, provide a powerful image of God's attitude toward Israel and her future history. Grasping them will help you understand much of God's love for Israel and His interaction with them. From this chapter we can glean God's zeal for Israel!

Chapter 62 starts with God speaking powerfully and poetically about His zeal for Israel:

*"For Zion's sake I will not keep silent. . .
till her righteousness shines out like the dawn,
her salvation like a blazing torch." Verse 1*

Notice her relationship to other nations in Verses 2 and 3:

*The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings
your glory. . . You will be a crown of splendor in the
Lord's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God.*



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Return to Isaiah

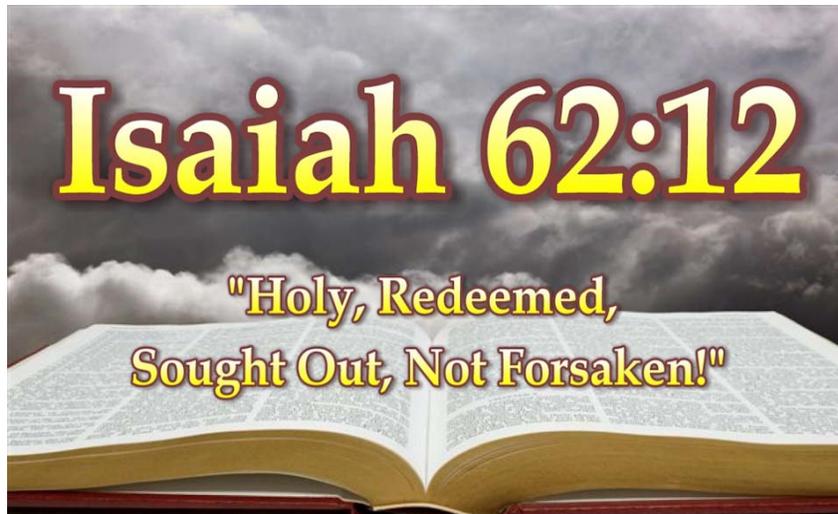
Wednesday, August 30: Read Isaiah 62 continued

Now I want to make sure we understand the geography and Verse 7 will help:

*You who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest,
and give Him no rest till He establishes Jerusalem
and makes her the praise of the earth.*

There is a certain turn-about regarding Israel's future:

*The Lord has sworn by His right hand and by His
mighty arm: Never again will I give your grain as food
for your enemies. . . never again foreigners drink
the new wine. . . Verse 8*



As I have asked you many times—is there any way you can twist and bend this so that it applies to the Church? Not if you are going to give any kind of weight to the plain meaning of words. National Israel, centered in Jerusalem, has a future and it will be a glorious one! They are going to occupy a place of prominence. God will make it so! What do you think is going to be necessary for that to happen? Read on. . .

Return to Isaiah

Thursday, August 31: Read Isaiah 63

God's zeal for His people means He has a wonderful plan for their future, but we cannot isolate this from the other aspects of God's nature. This chapter tells us what else is coming, and it is terrible indeed.

*Who is this coming from Edom, from Bozrah,
with His garments stained crimson? Verse 1*

The text tells us who this is, and why:

*"It is I speaking in righteousness mighty to save. . . I
trampled them (the nations) in My anger and trod them
down in My wrath; their blood spattered My garments
. . . For the day of vengeance was in My heart, and the
year of My redemption has come." Verses 1, 3-4*

This is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, and He is taking His vengeance upon the nations who have not only rejected Him but persecuted His people. For the Lord will redeem His people. So we can see that the wrath of God is going to be poured out on Gentile nations, but that is not all. We can also see, although God has a future for His chosen people, they are currently also under the wrath of God, as they have been many times in their history:

*In His love and mercy He redeemed them; He lifted them
up and carried them. . . Yet they rebelled and grieved His
Holy Spirit. So He turned and became their enemy. . . .
Why, O Lord, do you make us wander from Your ways
and harden our hearts so we do not revere You?
Return for the sake of Your servants, the tribes
that are Your inheritance. Verses 9-11*

Do you see the tension here? God longs to redeem and pour out blessings, but the people have chosen rebellion and sin. In fact, this is the plight of the Jewish people in our day! What is going to be necessary for things to change? Keep reading next month!

VISTOSO

Community Church

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

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