

Daily Devotional

November 2016

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

Colossians 3:16



Foreword

During the course of this month we will finish up our study of I Corinthians and begin to read through the Old Testament book of Isaiah. It is not hard to understand why those who study the Word of God see it as a source of infinite riches, and at the same time daily sustenance.

May God bless you as you study the written Word—always with the intent of knowing the Living Word which stands behind the text we study. What a blessing to “sit at the feet of Jesus, and listen to what He has to say!”

In His grace,



Kevin Redig



Bible references in this booklet are taken from the New King James Version (NKJV) or the 1986 New International Version (NIV)

I Corinthians Flashbacks

Tuesday November 1: Read Ephesians 3

Read what Ephesians 3:9-11 has to say about the Church:

“... God who created all things through Jesus Christ: to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the Church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

God intends to put on display His wisdom through the Church. It is this Church that Jesus intends to present glorious, without spot or wrinkle (Ephesians 5:23-27). It is this Church that Jesus purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28). It is this Church that Jesus called His Bride (Revelation 19:7-8). So what exactly is the Church? The question should be, “Who is the Church?” You could describe it as all those who have placed their faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ, since the cross. You could also describe the Church, as in our study in I Corinthians 12, as all those baptized into the Body of Christ:

For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one Body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. I Corinthians 12:13

For this is true Church membership: baptized by the Spirit into the Body of Christ; which is the Church, which occurs whenever a person turns to Christ and places his or her faith in Him. Once again, this puts the subject of spiritual gifts in a whole new light. They are meant for function within the Body of Christ—His Church!

“Now you are the Body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the Church God has appointed...”
I Corinthians 12:27-28

What follows is a list of spiritual gifts—so then, each part, each gift is for the function of the whole under the Headship of Jesus Christ.

I Corinthians Flashbacks

Wednesday November 2: Read I Corinthians 13 (slowly)

It is so common to hear the 13th chapter of I Corinthians read at a wedding that those not familiar with the Bible no doubt think the context must be marriage. How compelling for us to note that the real context is Paul showing the Corinthians how they are supposed to act towards one another in the Church! Not in squabbling over whose gift is better or who is more spiritual, but in the “*more excellent way*” defined by chapter 13.

That’s not to say that the chapter doesn’t have application in the context of marriage and family—for it most certainly does. I just want you to realize that the actual context for this magnificent passage is the normal way we are to interact with one another in the Church! Just another example of how much God cares about the testimony of the Body of Christ to a watching world.

Let’s list the qualities associated with love as listed in I Corinthians 13:4-8:

Love is patient, kind, does not envy, does not boast, is not puffed up (proud), not rude, does not seek its own (demand love in return), not easily angered, thinks no evil, does not rejoice in iniquity, rejoices with the truth, always protects, hopes and perseveres.

Love never fails. Now faith hope and love abide, but the greatest of these is love.

I Corinthians Flashbacks

Wednesday November 2:
Read I Corinthians 13 (slowly) (Continued)

Now our first point of understanding is that this is not meant to be an exhaustive list of qualities, but rather a representative list. The characteristics mentioned establish a pattern into which many other qualities can be placed. For example, we could add compassion and gentleness to the list. God is love, and what it means to have character like His is not limited by a finite list.

Second, let me give you a working definition of love. It is an abstract term, so you may find a definition to be helpful. Love, the agape kind of love of I Corinthians 13, is an active pursuit of what's best (in terms of priority) for another. In short, this is a selfless focus upon another. In fact, focus on self immediately negates the ability to truly love another. This kind of love is also very personal in nature. I think you'll agree, we need to spend at least one more day on this topic.



Do everything in love-{I Corinthians 13}

I Corinthians Flashbacks

Thursday November 3: Read John 13

Although the context of I Corinthians 13 involves behavior in the Church, I want us to expand it today to other areas of application. Here is my thesis:

*Love, as described in I Corinthians 13,
is a litmus test for the Christian!*

What is a litmus test? In the world of analytical chemistry, litmus paper is coated with a chemical that, when placed in any liquid, can immediately tell you if it is an acid or base. So then a litmus test is any means by which something can be quickly and easily tested and an accurate result determined.

So based upon our context, if you find I Corinthians 13 love abounding in a church, that Church is operating as God intended. Now let's expand our testing. If you find this kind of love in a marriage, then it is highly likely that marriage is functioning as it should. The same is true for the family setting. And although the qualities associated with *agape* love are provided in I Corinthians 13, let me also remind you of our working definition from yesterday:

*Love (agape love) is an active pursuit of
what's best for another.*

This kind of love is so unusual, especially in contrast to the selfish love of the world, that should it be found in an entire body of believers (and it should be), it would have an astounding evangelistic thrust.

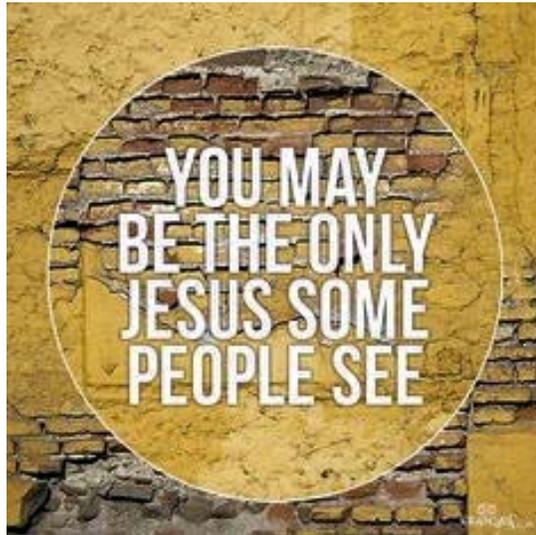
I Corinthians Flashbacks

Thursday November 3: Read John 13 (Continued)

How do I know this? Did you notice John 13:34-35 in our reading today?

*A new commandment I give to you,
that you love one another; as I have loved you,
that you also love one another.
By this all will know that you are My disciples,
if you have love for one another.*

And of course you won't be surprised that of the five words for love in the Greek language, this is exactly the same one used in I Corinthians 13. So if what is begun in the Church, spills over into the marriage, family and extended family—what a mighty testimony VCC would have to the transforming ability of the Word of God and the Spirit of God!



I Corinthians Flashbacks

Friday, November 4: Read Philipians 2

Without once using the word love, Philipians 2:3-4 displays a remarkable connection to the subject matter of I Corinthians 13.

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

If you couple this to what we have just learned about love from I Corinthians 13, do you see how this puts every talent, gift, and ministry in its place? It is so important to subordinate our natural talents and strengths to something—and here it is: the Lordship of our Savior and service to the saints!

Now I hope you are thinking, “Wow, the bar has been raised so high, I don’t think I can do that!” Of course not! At least, you cannot do it in your own strength. To love like this requires the grace of God as ministered to us through the Spirit of God. To love like this is a supernatural way of dealing with other people, which requires supernatural enablement.

One last thing for you to think about on this topic of love—the principle of love forces us to place a premium on what’s really important. Let me explain, in English we can love our car, love traveling, and soon. But can you apply the Greek word agape, the word translated love in I Corinthians 13 to these things? Of course not. For agape love is relational in nature. So if we are to obey the clear-cut commands of Scripture that leaves us to focus love upon God above and people. Equally important, both of these are going to exist forever! See if Matthew 6:21 doesn’t challenge your thinking along these very lines:

Where your treasure (love) is, there will your heart be also.

I Corinthians Flashbacks

Monday November 7: Read I Corinthians 14

Strife within a church fellowship is a terrible thing! It pits the members of the body against one another when they are meant to be working together. It creates stress where there is meant to be fellowship and it completely compromises the intended witness of Christ-like love to a watching world. There are a number of things that cause strife in a church, but one of the more common through the centuries has been the kind of “*pride of life*” described in I John 2:15-17, or as one translation says, “*boasting of what one has and does.*” This is exactly the situation in Corinth. Garland explains it this way:

*Christian worship is to reflect the character of God. . .
The disorder in Corinth is not attributable to the Holy Spirit but to narcissistic exhibitionism, disdain for others with ‘lesser’ gifts, and disregard for the common good.*

Now some may have been thinking, “We sure have been spending a lot of time in I Corinthians Chapters 12-14.” That is because I desperately want us to avoid the negative effects of strife in our fellowship. We will not have to worry about falling into strife, at least in terms of spiritual one-upmanship, if we, as a fellowship, would just come to grips with the following: the nature of our spiritual union in the Body of Christ, our giftedness for the common good, and the overarching principle of agape love.

This is what Chapter 14 is all about, it is an application of the principles found in Chapters 12 and 13. Love is pre-eminent (Verse 1). Seek the gifts that build up the church (Verse 12). Peace is of God (Verse 33) and everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way (Verse 40). In other words, if we understand the principles of Chapters 12-13, we should be able to make the application of Chapter 14. I trust our time spent meditating on these concepts will help us watch ourselves, and our witness, closely.

I Corinthians Flashbacks

Tuesday November 8: Read Revelation 2

Let me start with a simple statement that should help us make further application of I Corinthians 14:

The Church is called to: tolerate no fads, no detours, and not let even the legitimate become a distraction.

I use the term Church, because Paul has in mind the corporate gatherings of the church, we would call it gathering for worship.

*So if the whole church comes together. . . (Verse 23);
and what shall we say then brothers? When you come together. . . (Verse 26)*

In the case of the Corinthians, they had let the gift of tongues dominate their church gatherings. Now, although it was a functional gift in the early church, it was being misused by the Corinthians, and Paul is correcting that.

By way of application, this forces me to ask, what legitimate things are we misusing in our day? Music is certainly an appropriate part of gathering for worship, but what about when music becomes entertainment? We love celebrity testimonies, but can you explain why the testimony of someone who has every material possession carries more weight than the testimony of someone who has next to nothing and can still point to God's work in their lives? And then the misuse I find most painful—anything that focuses on the preacher and his skill in delivery; rather than on these overriding issues:

- Was the Word taught?
- Was the message delivered in the power of the Spirit?

I Corinthians Flashbacks

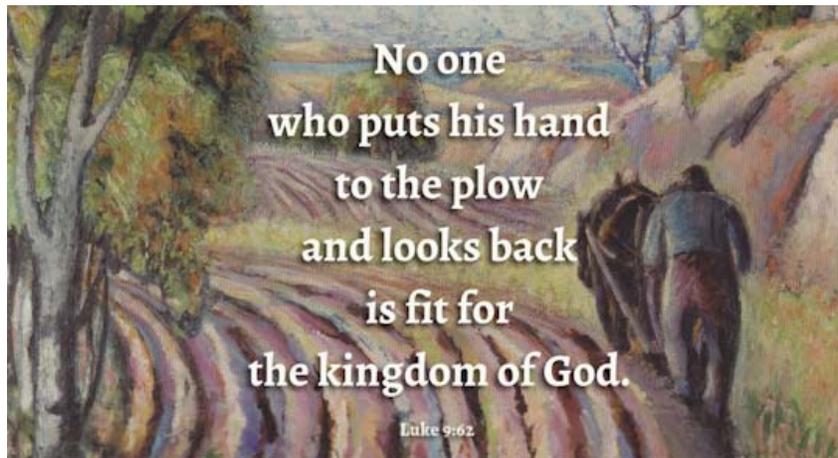
Tuesday November 8: Read Revelation 2
(Continued)

For when we gather, it is for the purpose of tuning our hearts to God, exalting His name, and proclaiming His Word! And with respect to the latter, it is this that prepares God's people for works of service, It is this that gives us unity in the faith. It is this that keeps us from being tossed to and fro by every wind of teaching so that we might grow up into Him who is the Head, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So again, I remind us:

Tolerate no fads, no detours, and don't let even the legitimate become a distraction.

And make no mistake about it, after reading the very familiar second chapter of Revelation, we should see just how easy it is for this to occur and the terrible consequences that can result! Pray to God that we, as a fellowship, would "keep our hand to the plow" in terms of following after the Lord.



I Corinthians Flashbacks

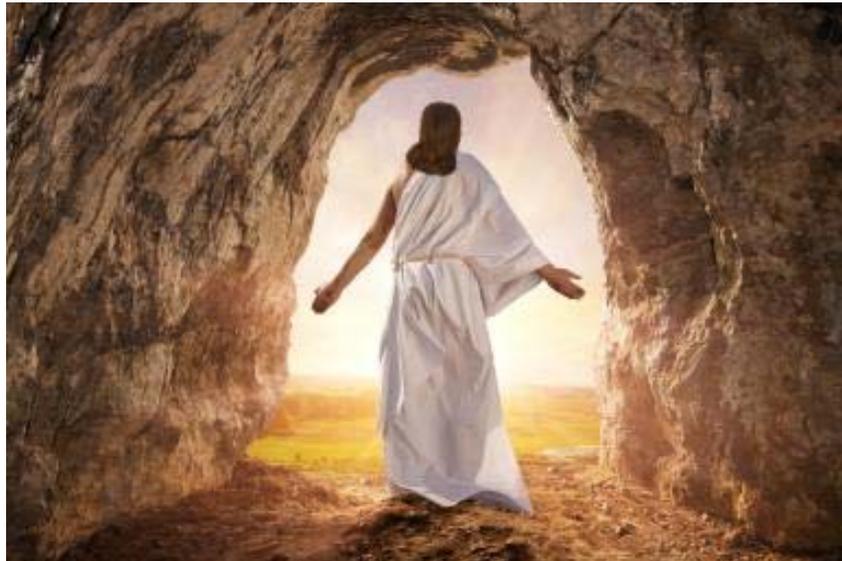
Wednesday November 9:
Read I Corinthians 15:1-23

What did Paul preach in the city of Corinth? In 1Cor 2:2 it tells us: “Christ and Him crucified.” In chapter 15, he says:

For what I received I passed on to you as 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 more than 500 of the brothers. . .”

I Corinthians 15:3-6

Christ died in our place and for our sins, and then was raised from the dead with a new immortal body to show He was the Son of God—just as He claimed.



I Corinthians Flashbacks

Wednesday November 9:

Read I Corinthians 15:1-23 (Continued)

Chapter 15 teaches us that every child of God should have the same expectation of a resurrection body—one that is imperishable—just like that of our Lord. For Christians, the cross is the place where our sins have been paid for, and the resurrection, a future bodily, physical resurrection, is our great hope for the future. Then:

Death will have been swallowed up in victory.
I Corinthians 15:54

This message from Paul to the Corinthians was in direct conflict with the prevailing Greek beliefs of Paul's day. And yet, many believed. This message is in direct conflict with the prevailing beliefs of science and medicine of our day. And yet, many still believe. Listen:

If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. I Corinthians 15:19

Our hope is a blessed hope of the sure and certain return of Jesus Christ to take us to Himself. It may be foolish to many of our acquaintances, but has not...

God made foolish the wisdom of the world...
I Corinthians 1:20

And, is not God...

pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. I Corinthians 1:21

And all God's people said. . .Amen!

I Corinthians Flashbacks

Thursday November 10: Read Philipians 2

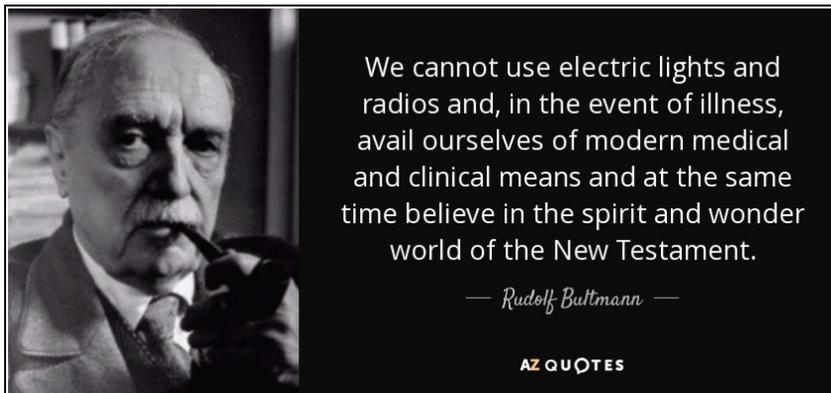
I Corinthians 15:12 lays down a gauntlet for every born-again Christian:

But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

In Paul's day the cultured Greeks mocked the idea of a resurrection (Acts 17:32). However, this passage indicates that this false teaching is coming from someone within the Church! It is no different in our day. Some influential group on the outside of the church attacks the resurrection, and then there are sure to follow those inside the church who feel we have stay "current and relevant."

Read this quote from Rudolph Bultmann::

A historical fact which involves a resurrection from the dead is utterly inconceivable. . .



I Corinthians Flashbacks

Thursday November 10: Read Philipians 2
(Continued)

Bultmann at one time chided Christians for believing in the Resurrection in this day in which we have the modern convenience of the light bulb! To him, it was just too far-fetched now that we *know* so much. Would you be surprised to learn that this man was one of the most influential theologians of the 20th century?

So what is your belief with respect to the Resurrection?

I trust you see in I Corinthians 15 that without a doubt a bodily, physical resurrection is in view. Furthermore, I asked you to read Philipians 2, because without specifying the resurrection by name, it tells us how God honored Christ by promoting him from the obedience of the cross to the place of honor in glory. And, there is only one way to get from one to the other.

And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. . . Philipians 2:8-11

The only way from death on the cross to the highest place of exaltation is a Resurrection!

I Corinthians Flashbacks

Friday November 11: Read Daniel 2

Friday November 11: Read Daniel 2

Continuing our discussion of resurrection, I Corinthians 15:23 is an often overlooked verse of Scripture:

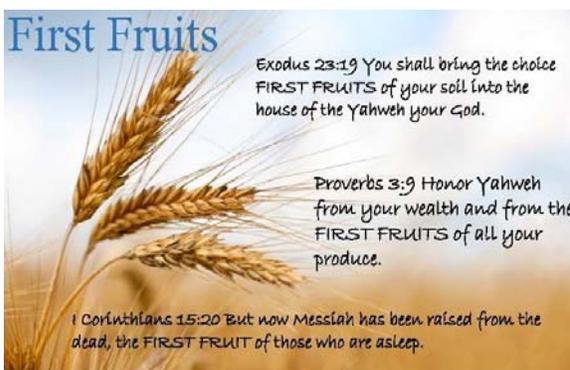
. . . in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the first-fruits; then, when He comes, those who belong to Him.

The reference to “first-fruits” is a reference to a Jewish feast day. In taking the first grain to ripen (barley), the Jews paused to thank God for the harvest that was going to come in

the months ahead. Jesus is the first to be resurrected with a new body like His. He is the first-fruits of the resurrection, but there is much more to follow.

I thought you would enjoy seeing the Scripture that talks about those *groups* that are going to be resurrected in the future. Just keep in mind—Christ was first!

For we (of the church) who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. I Thessalonians 4:15-17

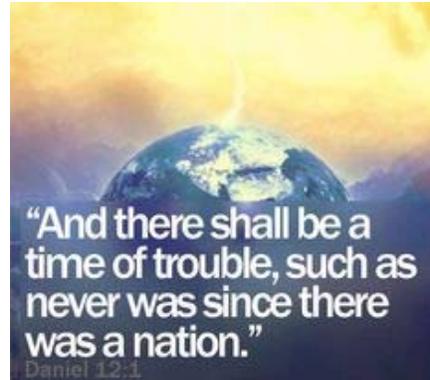


I Corinthians Flashbacks

Friday November 11: Read Daniel 2 (Continued)

Thus far we have covered the church age saints, now lets turn to the Old Testament:

And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation. . . And many who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. Daniel 12:1-2



And then there are those who die during the time of the Great Tribulation.

Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Revelation 20:4-5

Amazing how much God can pack into one verse isn't it?

Finally, there is one other resurrection, the one that we would just as soon that not anyone would experience. This final resurrection is of those who are going to experience the Second Death upon being cast into the Lake of Fire. (Revelation 20:11-15)

I Corinthians Flashbacks

**Monday November 14:
Read I Corinthians 15:24-58**

*(This is part of a message originally given on Memorial Day.
It seemed fitting given our November remembrance.)*

Last Friday was Veteran's Day. Like Memorial Day, there is a certain bittersweetness associated with this remembrance holiday. For, on the one hand, I appreciate the fine men and women who have made so many sacrifices to serve in our armed forces. On the other hand, I think of how many over the centuries have made the ultimate sacrifice in the giving of their lives.

For me, this bittersweetness is captured in the image of the military cemetery—row upon row of the fallen. Not only is it somber, but there is a certain angst associated with enjoying the blessings of freedom, when they are in turn built



upon the sacrifices—the death—of others. Is not the thankfulness for personal benefit coupled with the pain of loss or guilt associated with the price paid? The reality of Christianity and the power of God is that for the Christian, we must understand the long row of tombstones in this context.

I Corinthians Flashbacks

Monday November 14:
Read I Corinthians 15:24-58 (Continued)

These soldiers were called to serve. But, is this not true of the Christian as well? Are we not ambassadors for Christ, witnesses to the power of the resurrection, and those who hold out the Gospel of life? Furthermore, every soldier has a specialty. Have we not learned that every Christian has a spiritual gift and a role to play within the Body of Christ in fulfilling our mission of reaching the lost?

One final question. Is it worth it to answer the call, to fulfill the mission, and to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of Christ? Consider the words of one who felt so strongly the answer was yes!

“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he can never lose.” (Missionary Jim Elliot)

And then heed the words of Scripture:

*For whoever desires to save his life will lose it,
but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's
will save it. Mark 8:35*

We dare not lose sight of the fact that every human being will eventually rise from the dead. This and every other cemetery will be empty. Some will rise to a resurrection body and an eternity with God; and some to eternal separation in the Lake of Fire. It is not so much that some live and some die. Rather, it is that all are appointed once to die and then judgment. What matters is each person's individual response to the Gospel, and then, for those who respond in faith, the quality of the life lived thereafter!

I Corinthians Flashbacks

Tuesday November 15: Read Revelation 21

After describing the quality of the resurrection body: incorruptible and immortal, I Corinthians 15 goes on to tell us:

Death is swallowed up in victory.

You see, man felt the sting of death because of sin (Verse 56), but the salvation that is ours through faith in Jesus Christ dealt with the penalty of sin, the power of sin, and the presence of sin. This is why death is swallowed up in victory. Be very careful to note that this victory is found in one and only one place:

...thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

I had you read Revelation 21 today because I wanted you to see what victory looks like. Consider how sin manifests itself in so many forms of death and suffering in this world, and then consider the following:

Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, there shall be no more death, nor sorrow nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.

Revelation 21:3-4

Can we say it one more time:

Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord!

And all God's people said, "Amen."

I Corinthians Flashbacks

Wednesday November 16: Read I Corinthians 16

I want to close out our study of I Corinthians by looking at one verse from Chapter 16 and one from the Psalms.

Consider first, Psalm 90:12:

*Teach us to number our days aright,
that we may gain a heart of wisdom.*

In context, this verse is challenging us to realize how short are our lives on this earth, and then to live in such a way as to make our lives count. Or as reiterated in Ephesians 5:15-:

*...walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise,
redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*

Now let's connect this with I Corinthians 16:13:

*Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith, be men of
courage; be strong. Do everything in love.*

After all that we have learned, Paul's final admonition is to be on guard, stand firm, be courageous and be strong. And then wrap it all up with love—a I Corinthians 13 kind of love. A love that we learned in context is a kind of spirit-enabled love that works towards the very best for others, is more important than one's giftedness, and requires sacrifice on the one doing the loving. Now connect these two Scriptures together.

Do you want to number your days aright—then be on guard lest apathy toward spiritual things creeps in. Do you want to redeem the time—then never tire of being reminded of the great truths of the faith. Realize that ours is a calling to stand for the truth in the face of opposition from this world. Be strong in the strength that only the Lord can provide. Do you want to test how well you are doing at properly valuing the days the Lord has given you? See how well you are living in light of I Corinthians 13—doing everything in love. It is just one verse, but it is quite a challenge and the perfect way to close this great letter to the Church!

Lesson from Isaiah

Thursday November 17: Read Luke 24

You are probably wondering why we are starting at the end of the Gospel of Luke, and you are going to be even more perplexed when I tell you that we are starting a study in the book of Isaiah.

Aside from the encouragement to be found in the final chapter of Luke's Gospel, I wanted you to see Verses 25, 27:



He (Jesus) said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. . . And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets He explained to them. . ."

We have to realize that "the prophets" is not just a reference to a collection of Old Testament individuals, but also to a portion of the Old Testament text itself. The Hebrew *Nevi'im* can be translated "the prophets" and refers to the prophetic books of the Old Testament. So now you can understand that Jesus expected His disciples to be aware of what the Old Testament had to say about Him—how it pointed to Him.

Lessons from Isaiah

Thursday November 17: Read Luke 24
(Continued)

The book of Isaiah is one of the great prophetic books of the Old Testament. Quotes from Isaiah appear 65 times in the New Testament, the most quotes of any prophetic book. It is also a rich source of truth related to the New Testament, and for this reason it is often called the Romans of the Old Testament.

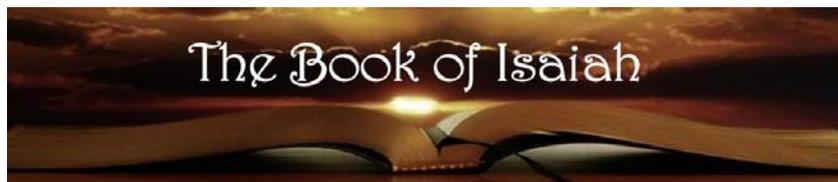
A few helpful things to know before we begin:

- Isaiah ministered to the southern kingdom of Judah, including during the time of the Northern Kingdom's destruction at the hands of the Assyrians.
- Isaiah served for more than 40 years during the reigns of four different kings.
- Isaiah is considered to be the most eloquent writer of the Old Testament.

And lastly, here is a very brief outline of the book of Isaiah:

- Chapters 1-35: A prophetic warning.
- Chapters 36-39: Historical Narrative.
- Chapters 40-66: God's Grace in Judgment.

Tomorrow we will turn to the text of this great book.



Lessons from Isaiah

Friday November 18: Read Isaiah 1:1-20

You might find yourself a bit daunted by the task of reading through such a large Old Testament book. Here are a few reasons to do so:

- Much of it was prophecy at the time it was written—prophecy that God has subsequently fulfilled. I think you'll recognize it and be encouraged.
- There is much prophecy remaining to be fulfilled—which will help you understand the future.
- There is quite a bit of high drama written by the most eloquent writer of the Old Testament. I believe it will grab and hold your attention.

After reading the first chapter, I am sure you have noted that the audience is a nation in decline, for God chastises them directly:

*My people do not know me and they do not understand.
..they have turned their backs on the
Holy One of Israel! Verse 4*

Furthermore, the people are suffering as the result of their rebellion:

*"Why do you persist in rebellion? Your whole head is
injured, your whole heart afflicted." Verse 5*

This is always the way it works. We don't gain escape from a overly restrictive God when we rebel. Rather, we just open ourselves up to the consequences for our rebellion and move further and further away from the place of blessing.

Lessons from Isaiah

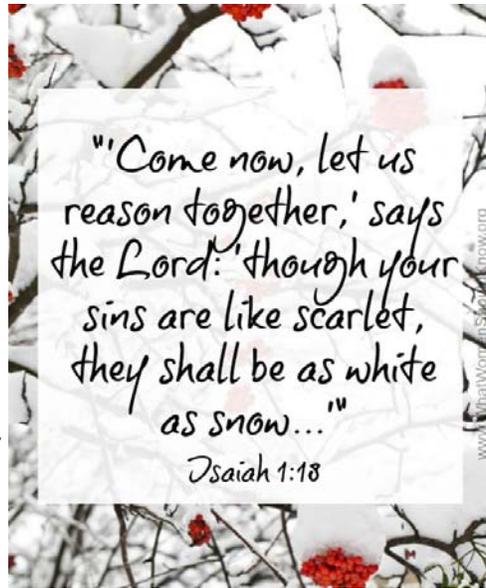
Friday November 18: Read Isaiah 1:1-20
(Continued)

This was true individually and corporately for Israel, and do you have a sense that it is happening in our nation as well?

Now what does God have to say about all this? Consider Verses 18-20. Do you see how gracious God is?

"Come now, let us reason together. . . though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow. . ."

Even in the midst of the evil behavior and idolatry we will find in the book of Isaiah, God would rather bless the people than curse them. In fact, in Chapter 30 God is pictured as tapping His foot, just waiting to be gracious to His people. God was tapping His foot in Isaiah's day as He is, I believe, in our day as well.



How do we become recipients of this grace? We'll investigate further tomorrow.

Lessons from Isaiah

Monday November 21: Read Isaiah 1:18-31

Chapter 1 contains many of the elements of a courtroom scene. For example, did you notice how God is laying out the evidence against the people of Israel—and they have sinned in almost every possible way. But as we saw yesterday, God is willing to cleanse the people of their sins. What do they need to do? They need to turn back to God (Verse 4) and be “*willing and obedient*” (Verse 19) . If they do, they “*will eat the best from the land*”, if they do not, “*they will be devoured by the sword.*”

It seems like such a simple choice, doesn't it? Why would anyone choose hell over heaven, judgment over blessing? Let me give you two reasons. First, because

The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. II Corinthians 4:4

Lost people are blinded to the reality of their lost condition, and the consequences associated with it. Second, let's take it a step further, by recalling a Scripture we have studied earlier,

*My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge.
(Hosea 4:6) . . . a people without understanding will
come to ruin!” (Hosea 4:14)*

You see even those who are saved can put themselves in a position where the discipline of God is coming, simply by apathy toward and ignorance of the Word of God. What should we do when we come under conviction this is our predicament? Come to the One calling our name, let the light of His Word reveal our sin, confess it. We can trust in His cleansing that *though our sins be like scarlet, through the cleansing available via the cross, they shall be white as snow.* What a loving and gracious God has saved us!

Lessons from Isaiah

Tuesday November 22: Read Isaiah 2

Chapter 2 introduces us to one of the hardest things about reading a prophetic book. We tend to think in terms of chronology. In other words, if Chapter 1 is a call for Israel to repent before discipline falls, then Chapter 2 should continue the narrative. Further, we also tend to think of time unfolding in only one direction. So what do we have in Chapter 2? A partial break in the narrative with the content jumping back and forth in time. Here is the flow.

- In Verses 1-5, we have a description of the glorious future that awaits Israel when Israel is the chief nation on earth (*the mountain of the Lord's temple is chief among the mountains* (nations)). This is not going to happen until the Lord returns to rule and reign on this earth.
- In Verses 6-8, we are back to a description of the current circumstances and Israel's sin.
- In Verses 9-11, we have the discipline that is coming soon if something doesn't change.
- In Verses 12-21, we have a description of events that are going to occur during another future time we often refer to as the *Tribulation*.

Now this chronology isn't meant to make a case for one particular view of the future. Rather, I want to introduce you to the challenge we face when studying prophecy. Just two more things to note: First, there are many modern theologians who state that Isaiah 2:1-5 is descriptive of the Church. Read it again carefully. Does that seem evenly remotely the case? You have to terribly distort the clear meaning of language to hold that position. Secondly, And even if we are not quite sure when one period begins and another ends, we can all agree that the obvious implication of Verse 22, is to turn and trust in the Lord!

Stop trusting in man, who has but a breath in his nostrils. Of what account is he? Amen!

Lessons from Isaiah

Wednesday November 23: Read Galatians t

Perhaps you are still wondering if it is going to be worth our time to sort through this lengthy Old Testament book. I assure you, we will be blessed. However, before we proceed further, I want to introduce you to a principle that will help keep us from making unwarranted application while studying this great book. Here it is:

Not all Scripture is to us, but it is all for us!

This means we must carefully discern, and be firm about, the audience and applicability of each Scripture. For example, you can't automatically take something specifically directed to Israel and apply it to the Church. However, no matter who the audience is, we can always step back and ask the questions: Are there any general principles being taught? Can we confirm them elsewhere in Scripture?

Let me give you two examples that have already shown up in our brief study. Isaiah 1:2-4 teach that the Israelites are under a terrible indictment because of sin. Ephesians 2:1 teaches the same thing about the entire human race:

...you were dead in your transgressions and sins.

God graciously offered reconciliation to the Israelites in Isaiah 1:18, and He most certainly has offered it to the entire human race through the salvation that is available in His Son (John 3:16). Lastly, one of the most powerful themes we will find throughout the book of Isaiah is that *choices have consequences!* Consider Galatians 6:7,

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

As you can see, the book of Isaiah might not be written

Lessons from Isaiah

Thursday November 24: Read Isaiah 3

My first response after reading this chapter is, "Ouch!" For anyone hearing or reading this prophecy can tell that really bad things are coming. Let's note Verse 13:

The Lord takes His place in court; He rises to judge the people.

Once again, we have the imagery of a courtroom scene and God himself as judge. And then, most of the rest of the chapter is devoted to documenting two things: the sin of the people and the judgment about to fall. As to sin:

*...their words and deeds are against them,
they parade their sin like Sodom, the elders and leaders
plunder from the poor, and the women of Zion are
haughty. . .flirting with their eyes.*

And Verses 1-2 says all we need to know about discipline:

*...the Lord Almighty is about to take from Jerusalem
and Judah both supply and support...*

The section goes on to describe the loss of food, water, political leadership, spiritual leadership, and justice. (When you look at our nation, do you suppose that the loss of leadership and justice could be discipline from the hand of the Lord? I believe so.) Now, you would think that this would get the people's attention and cause them to cry out to the Lord, "What do we need to do in order to keep this from happening?" We have already seen the answer in Chapter 1: turn from their sin, to the Lord, and He will forgive them.

*Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and
compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love,
and he relents from sending calamity. Joel 2:13*

This is God's steadfast way of dealing with His people, and yet we are so stubborn. There is no future in pursuing sin, as the people of Israel are going to find out. May it please God that we would learn from their error and subsequent discipline!

Lessons from Isaiah

Friday November 25: Read Isaiah 4

Chapter 4 provides us with an excellent opportunity to learn something about the study of prophecy—specifically the factor of time. Let me show you what I mean:

- In Chapter 3:1- 4:1, we have a description of a very difficult time for Israel, as she is disciplined for her sin.
- In Isaiah 4:2, we have an abrupt change that runs through the end of this short chapter. All of a sudden we see God's blessing upon Israel.

The first observation we can make is that chapter breaks and verse numbers have been added by human editors and are not inspired. Here, it would seem the editors may have started Chapter 4 in the wrong place. But the much bigger issue is this: at the time Isaiah wrote Chapters 3 and 4, all of the content was prophetic. I mean that none of it had happened at that time. Furthermore, what Isaiah has done is run two distinct prophecies together. The first one involves discipline (Isaiah 3:1-4:1). The second one involves a much more distant future time when Christ returns and establishes His kingdom. Another way of describing this is to tell you that today the prophecy of Isaiah 3 has already been fulfilled while Isaiah 4:2-6 has not yet occurred. This tendency to run multiple prophecies together is very common and will take practice to unravel. I want you to get used to it, because there are many more to come.

Lessons from Isaiah

Friday November 25: Read Isaiah 4 (Continued)

Here is a diagram that might help.



Now imagine each of the mountain peaks in the diagram is a Biblical prophecy contained within a particular portion of Scripture. From the perspective of the stick man, he would see just one peak. The second prophecy is hidden behind the first, but he would be reading both prophecies.

However, for us, looking from the perspective of the historical record on the completed Canon of Scripture, we can often see both peaks. Therefore, we should be able to distinguish the prophecies in terms of both their distinct time and their distinct content. This might seem confusing, but we are going to get a chance to practice our discernment in Chapter 5, as well as a number of other places in the book of Isaiah.

Just remember, when reading something prophetic, where the pieces don't all seem to fit, consider the possibility that you are dealing with more than one distinct prophecy.

Lessons from Isaiah

Monday November 28: Read Isaiah 5:1-13

Isaiah Chapter 5 contains language that is very figurative in nature, yet very easy to interpret—in part, because God interprets for us. The chapter starts out talking about a vineyard loved by the Lord. Notice how God has done everything necessary in order to establish a vineyard that would produce choice grapes. And yet the verdict from God's perspective is very clear,

When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad?

Vineyard, grapes—what is the chapter talking about? You probably already suspect, but Verse 7 makes it clear.

*The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel,
and the men of Judah are the garden of His delight.*

Israel and Judah likely refer to both the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel. Neither are walking in obedience to the Lord. The chapter, as a whole, reveals that the sin of the people includes social, moral and spiritual failure. So what is God going to do about it? God's declaration is one of prophecy. In Verse 5, God is going to remove His protective hand. In Verses 6-10, there is going to be both population decline and lack of agricultural production. And then, in Verse 13, the final judgment is exile for the people.

As a point of application, let's ask the question, "What has God given us in this fifth chapter of Isaiah? Is this a principle, or a one time thing that just applies to the Jew? What I mean is this. When God, in grace, provides for the needs of a people and then they choose instead to pursue sin, should they expect judgment to follow? I would suggest the answer is yes. Furthermore, what do you think this might mean for the future of the United States? Should we expect, or are we already seeing, the hand of God's judgment? We'll continue this investigation tomorrow.

Lessons from Isaiah

Tuesday November 29: Read Romans 1

I wanted you to read Romans 1, in particular Verses 18-32, as a follow-up to the prophecy we noted yesterday in Isaiah 5. We are trying to learn if the pattern of sin and judgment has application to nations outside of Israel.

Notice in Romans 1, the nation of Israel is nowhere in sight. Rather, in Verse 18, we have men who suppress the truth about the existence of God. The reason for this suppression is laid out in Verse 21. It is not that they don't know about the existence of God, rather, it is that they have made a conscious choice not to give Him glory or to give Him thanks for what He has created and provided. In other words, they do not want to bend the knee to even the thought of a Sovereign God. What does God do? Notice that three times in Verses 24-32 it says that God "gave them over." Gave them over to what—to an ever-worsening pattern of sin. What is happening in Romans 1 is a clear statement of what God will do when a people reject Him as Creator and provider. He will turn them over to the consequences of that rejection, and those consequences include an increasing manifestation of the fallen nature of man.

Lost mankind has this idea that to get "out from under the thumb of God" will somehow result in some kind of liberation. We have all the evidence we need to prove or disprove this theory. What has happened in the United States over the course of the past 30 years as we have increasingly turned our backs on God, rejecting Him as Creator and Sovereign? Look at the social and cultural mess we are in right now and tell me, has it been liberating or enslaving? We have been "turned over" just as the Word of God declares and we are reaping the consequences. God's ways, although they do demand something of us—are always for the best!

Lessons from Isaiah

Wednesday November 30:
Read Isaiah 5:13-30

The second half of Isaiah Chapter 5 is much the same as the first half. The people are persistent in their sin—even daring God to act (Verse 19). And, they are going to be severely disciplined by God as the result. The language is striking:

*Woe to those who call evil good and good evil,
who put darkness for light and light for darkness,
who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.*

This passage makes it very clear that although we might be able to fool ourselves, we don't pull anything over on God. Again, what's God's response? As we should expect by now:

*. . .the Lord's anger burns against His people;
His hand is raised and He strikes them down.*

The call for this discipline was certainly prophetic at the time it was written. It was God declaring that He is going to discipline.

Now I want you to think through something very carefully with me. The northern kingdom was attacked and conquered by the Assyrians in 722 BC, with most of its people deported. What would you do if you were living in the southern kingdom of Judah following this calamity? Would you be thinking, "Those nasty people to the north got what they deserved but God is going to protect us because we are *better*?"

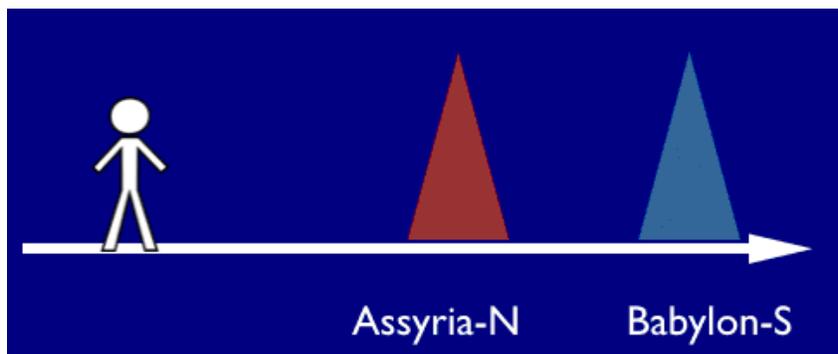
Lessons from Isaiah

Wednesday November 30:
Read Isaiah 5:13-30 (Continued)

Or, would you be thinking, “The people in the northern kingdom were sinful, God said He would strike them, and He did. We are sinful, we had better turn from our sin and back to God, or the same thing is going to happen to us?”

For the most part the people in the southern kingdom chose the former. They chose to ignore the lesson instead of applying it to themselves. And, in 586 BC the southern kingdom went into exile.

That would make Chapter 5 prophetic in the two mountains form shown in our diagram. This is just one of a number of repeating patterns throughout the Word of God. Oh that we would pay attention and respond. How much suffering we could avoid. For in this world we know we are already going to have tribulation (John 16:33), we don't need to add discipline to it.



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

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