

VISTOSO
Community Church

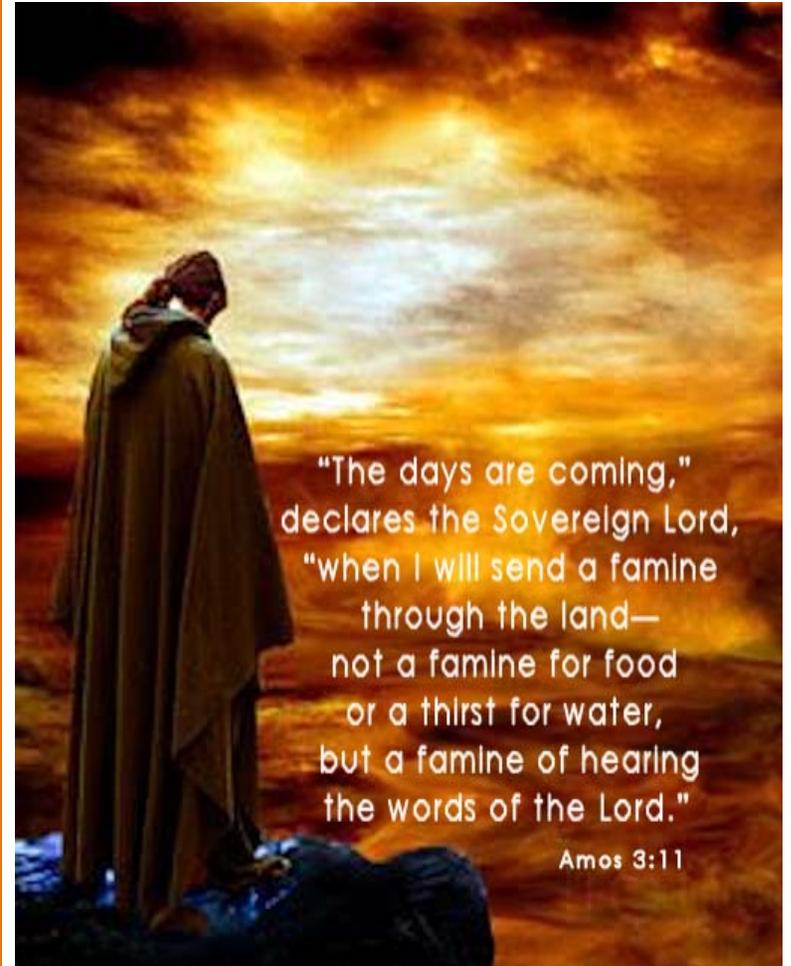
He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit...*John 15:5*

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Vistoso Community Church Publications

Daily Devotional

February 2018



Foreword

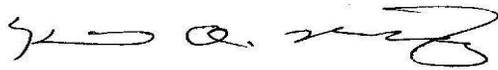
I can't help but sense a certain urgency associated with the days in which we live. Paul certainly sensed the need as well, admonishing Christians by using the words of Isaiah:

*Wake up, O sleeper, rise
from the dead, and Christ
will shine in you.*
Ephesians 5:14

In keeping with the cover verse of Scripture—Amos 3:11—it is my prayer that as a church fellowship we would strive to “redeem the time” by availing ourselves of the Word of God on a daily basis.

Our goal is that, as we study, we might be like “a tree planted by streams of water” (Psalm 1:3) even though a famine for the Word spreads all around us

In His grace,



Kevin Redig

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



The Profound in Jeremiah

Wednesday, February 28: Read Jeremiah 7

The Lord is looking for a people whose hearts are fully devoted to Him and whose lives are being transformed by their walk with God. How do you think God feels about those who *have a form of godliness, but not its power*? To state it another way, how does He feel about those who have a fine religious affiliation, but no substantive relationship with Him? The seventh chapter of Jeremiah answers that question for us in a decisive manner. In Verse 2 we see God sending Jeremiah to the gate of the temple to proclaim a message from God to the people. In particular, note Verse 4:

*Do not trust in deceptive words and say,
“This the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord,
the temple of the Lord!”*

Here is what the people were doing. On the one hand:

*The children gather wood, the fathers light the fire,
and the women knead the dough and make cakes of
bread for the Queen of Heaven. Verse 18*

The people were coming to the temple, ostensibly to worship, but they were also trusting in the temple's presence in Jerusalem to protect them from the Babylonians. They reasoned that God would never let His temple be destroyed. Notice that in Verse 4 God says this is a deceptive hope. In Verse 16, He tells Jeremiah:

*“So do not pray for this people, nor offer
any plea or petition for them; do not plead with me,
for I will not listen to you.”*

That pretty much answers the question we raised at the beginning about God's response! Sloppy worship is never acceptable to God! Nor does He accept double-minded or *going through the motions* kinds of worship. Do you think there is application to be made? We'll try tomorrow!

Returning to John's Gospel

Tuesday, February 27: Read I Corinthians 3

(Continued)

The picture is simple! Branches that are not connected to the vine wither, are collected in the course of keeping the garden tidy, and burned. Why? Because they are of no other value. Jesus is not teaching that should we be unfruitful believers we are going to be burned. He is teaching that we are of no value within His plans and purposes. To be sure, this is a very sobering consideration, and something we should take keenly to heart, but we need not fear for our eternal destiny which is secure.

That is why today's reading in I Corinthians 3 is relevant. For in Verses 11-15 we find the closely related theme of rewards at the judgment seat of Christ being dependent upon the quality of what we produce in this life. Note, even if the life of the believer produces that which goes up in smoke when tested by fire:

If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames. I Corinthians 3:15

Being an unfruitful believer is a situation to be avoided at all costs! Nonetheless, it helps to settle the issue of eternal security at the same time.



Returning to John's Gospel

Thursday, February 1: Read I John 3

As we spend a few days finishing for now our study in the Book of John, again I draw your attention to:

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know you are My disciples." John 13:34-35

We see an example of how Jesus loved those in His periphery in our readings in the Book of John, and there are examples in today's reading as well:

This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. Verse 11

And then just a few verses later,

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love, remains in death. . . This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. Verses 14-16

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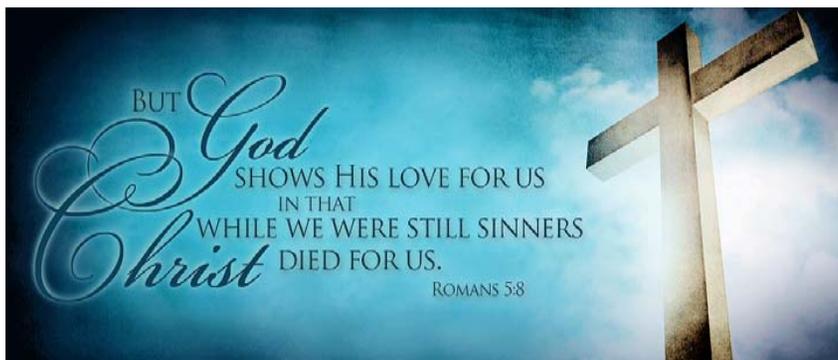
Returning to John's Gospel

Thursday, February 1: Read I John 3 (Continued)

A few considerations:

1. In both passages, the message to love is delivered as a command, not a suggestion.
2. We are not commanded to go and do something that our Lord has not first demonstrated to the nth degree!
3. Our love for others is diagnostic with respect to our internal condition. In other words, are we walking in keeping with the new life? Stated another way that might be more familiar to us, are we walking in the Spirit? If we are not manifesting love for our brothers and sisters, then the answer is "No!" For loving others is indicative of having the life of Christ functioning within. Its absence indicates carnality in the life of the believer.
4. Love for others also has an external function. It bears witness to those who are watching our lives that we are different. Specifically, our love demonstrates that the life of Christ is at work in us. It is meant to be attractive to others and thereby the outward expression of our love has an evangelistic role.

Don't you love the power and simplicity of the Christian life?



Returning to John's Gospel

Tuesday, February 27: Read I Corinthians 3

Before leaving this first section of John 15, let's address a question that may be on your mind, specifically related to Verses 2 and 6. Let's start with Verse 2:

"He (the Father) cuts off every branch in Me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful."

Obviously, the Father (vinedresser) is expecting fruit to be associated with the lives of His children. But what about this *cutting off* of branches that do not bear fruit? The basic meaning of the verb translated *cuts off* is to *lift up* or to *lift up from the ground*. That brings to mind a totally different picture, especially if you have any kind of gardening background. The Father, in grace, acts to bring about and/or provide that which is necessary to bring each one of us to the point we can bear fruit, just as the careful gardener might use a trellis to lift up a branch that has gotten mired in the mud. Then, naturally, those branches that are bearing some fruit, He prunes so that they might be still more fruitful!

There may be personal trials associated with being *lifted up* or *pruned*, but we can trust our Heavenly Father to know best.

Then consider Verse 6:

"If anyone does not remain in Me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned."

Many point to this passage to prove you can lose your salvation if you are not producing fruit. Aside from the fact that interpretation contradicts the many passages which teach eternal security, is that really the message in context?

Continued on the next page.

Returning to John's Gospel

Monday, February 26: Read Romans 7:1-18

Our salvation has many facets. As the result of trusting in who Christ is, and what He did for us on the cross, we are transferred from the dominion of darkness into the Kingdom of the Son (Colossians 1:13-14); we receive eternal life; we are clothed with the very righteousness of Christ (Romans 3:22); and much, much more. What did we do to deserve such a fantastic salvation? Nothing! Why has God done all this? One reason is His love for that which He has created. But, if we study Scripture carefully, we can also find numerous hints as to His purposes. One such hint is in Romans 7:4:

So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God.

The words *in order that* establish purpose for us, *that we might bear fruit to God*. It is essential that we connect this with our reading in John:

"As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in Me. . . He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." John 15:4-5

This ties us right back to yesterday's thoughts. There is no fruit-bearing in our lives, apart from abiding in the One True Vine! And it is important to realize that, although we may think we have produced something of value, God has declared quite clearly—*apart from Me you can do nothing!*

One last thought for today. There is a fine distinction in what we are discussing. We are not told to get out there and *produce* fruit, but to *bear fruit*. What a blessing to understand that production will naturally occur as the *life* of the Vine operates in those branches that abide in Him! Ours is to *bear* what His life produces!

Returning to John's Gospel

Friday, February 2: Read Luke 22

There is one more example from the text of John 13 of how Jesus loved His disciples (and us as well). It is at the end of the chapter. In John 13:37, Peter tells the Lord:

"I will lay down my life for you."

In Matthew 26, Peter's words are even more emphatic:

"Even if all fall away on account of You, I never will." Matthew 26:34

In both the Matthew and John accounts, Jesus makes it clear that Peter will deny Him—not once—but three times. Whatever Peter's failings, he certainly did seem to have a great deal of zeal for the Lord. What happened to him? How did he fail so quickly and so completely? The answer is straightforward and has great applicability to us. He trusted in his own strength to accomplish the Christian Life! Any time we try to follow after the Lord in our own strength, we are destined for failure or, at best, legalistic righteousness! Neither one will be accepted by the Lord. It is only what is done in fellowship with God through the filling of the Spirit that will count for eternity.

Now we should be particularly drawn to a statement by Jesus in today's reading covering the same time period:

"Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." Luke 22:31-32

Simon Peter failed the Lord as completely as it is possible to fail. The Lord obviously knew it would happen, since He predicts it. And yet the Lord loved him enough to pray for him and to keep him in His plans for ministry. You and I have never fallen too far to confess our sins and come back to the Lord. He will always be there! He was there for Peter and He will be there for us!

The Profound in Jeremiah

Monday, February 5: Read Deuteronomy 6

As we look to uncover another profound truth from the book of Jeremiah, let's start by posing a simple question: "Do you think that God wants His people, those who have been saved and brought into the Kingdom of God, to be devoted to Him?" We would assuredly all answer, "Yes!" Although this is a simple question, it is not asked in a simple or purely theoretical way. When asking, "Does God want a devoted and committed people?" I mean devoted to Him and nothing else—devoted exclusively to Him!

Consider the famous passage from today's reading called the Shema:

*Hear O Israel: The Lord your God, the Lord is one!
You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart
with all your soul, and with all your strength.*

Deuteronomy 6:4-5



Returning to John's Gospel

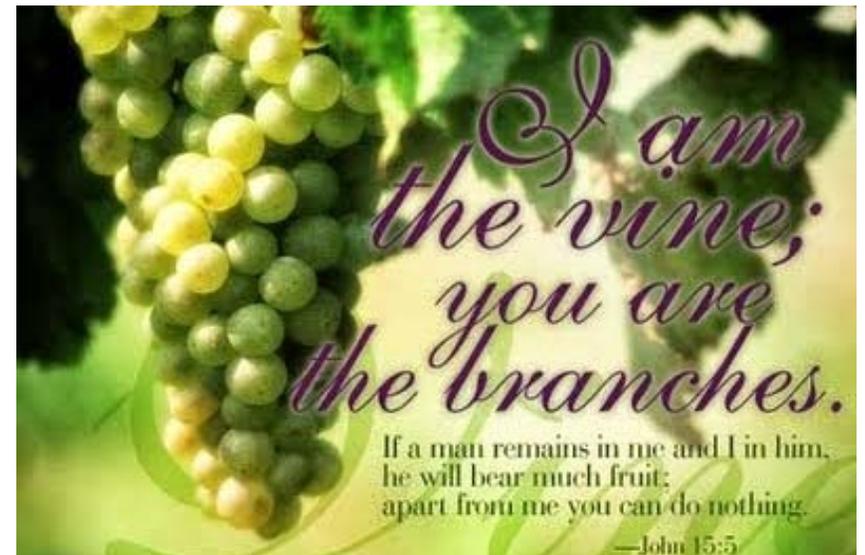
Friday, February 23: Read John 15:1-9

(Continued)

This is one way of mentally reminding ourselves that we have been united with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. Abiding in Christ is to be walking in that new resurrection life. Paul says it this way in Galatians 2:20-21:

*I have been crucified with Christ, I no longer live.
Nevertheless, Christ lives in me. . .*

4. To abide in Christ is to walk by the Holy Spirit. For to live according to the flesh and abiding in Christ are mutually exclusive!



Returning to John's Gospel

Friday, February 23: Read John 15:1-9

This chapter begins with a marvelous metaphor—one with a great deal of explanatory power.

*"I am the true vine,
and My Father is the vinedresser."* Verse 1

We have the Father, the Lord Jesus, and yet remaining to be identified, those who have trusted in Christ—the *branches*!

*"Abide in Me, and I in you. . .
I am the vine, you are the branches."* Verses 4-5

Jesus is the one true vine, and we are to abide in Him! What does it mean to abide?

1. The first and most important point of interpretation is that this is instruction about how to be a serious—meaning productive—follower of Jesus. Note that Judas is gone from the group. This is for believers and it is not about how to get saved. It is instruction on how the saved are to live the Christian Life.
2. To *abide* is to share the thoughts, affections, and purposes of our Lord. This is an admonition to be in the Word of God, for we only abide in Him as we let the *Word of Christ dwell in you richly.* Colossians 3:16
3. To abide in Christ also means to, by faith, consistently *. . .put off the old man. . .be made new in the attitude of our minds. . .put on the new man created to be like Christ in true righteousness and holiness.* Ephesians 4:22-24

The Profound in Jeremiah

Monday, February 5: Read Deuteronomy 6

(Continued)

These descriptive phrases certainly sound like commitment, don't they? Again, is this what God is looking for?

*For the eyes of the LORD range throughout
the earth to strengthen those whose
hearts are fully committed to Him.*
II Chronicles 16:9

Furthermore, failure in this area can have disastrous consequences no matter how illustrious the individual:

*As Solomon grew old, his wives turned
his heart after other gods, and
his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD
his God, as the heart of David
his father had been.* I Kings 11:4

If you ponder this further, you will start to recall all of the times that Bible characters got themselves into trouble by being double-minded. You will remember the difficulties encountered by those paying lip-service to God while hedging their bets with other options.

You see, there seems to be a certain single-mindedness in terms of devotion, allegiance, and trust that is God's intent for His people. Do you think this has changed down through the centuries? I don't think so either.

We need to take this matter very seriously—for as we shall see, God certainly does!

The Profound in Jeremiah

Tuesday, February 6: Read II Chronicles 34-35

Today's reading is your introduction to King Josiah, a tremendous individual among an otherwise forgettable string of Israel's final kings. Recall that Jeremiah was called to ministry during the 13th year of Josiah's reign. That would make Josiah 21 and Jeremiah approximately the same age.

So continuing with the thread that we began yesterday, do you see Josiah as being devoted to the Lord? Do you think his heart was committed to Him? I believe the text makes clear a remarkable level of commitment. For he:

*...walked in the ways of his father David,
not turning aside to the right or left.* II Chronicles 34:2

Josiah purified the temple and began repairs after the neglect under Manasseh. He tore his royal robes and wept before the Lord because of the sin of the people. He had the Law read in the presence of all the people and he led the people in a Passover celebration such that the:

*Passover had not been observed like this in Israel since
the days of the prophet Samuel. . .* II Chronicles 35:18

With all this in mind, how is it that Jeremiah is preaching judgment against Israel? How is it that the nation so quickly spirals into the sin we have already read about in Jeremiah 1 and 2? Or let's ask it this way, "Were the people of Israel devoted to the Lord in the same way as was Josiah?" This is a very important question. We can't find a definitive answer in these two chapters, but we can find hints. In 34:30 he had the people gather to hear the Law read publicly. In 34:32 he required everyone to pledge their obedience to the Law. In 35:7 Josiah provided the Passover sacrifice for those who gathered. So, as a closing question, is what we are seeing the external response of religion or the inward devotion which God is looking for? We'll find out in tomorrow's text.

Returning to John's Gospel

Thursday, February 22: Read John 14:15-31

In this second half of John 14, there are three powerful truths to which we need to draw our attention:

1. One of the great things about John's Gospel is how relational it is. We often say, Christianity is not a religion, but a relationship. Few chapters in the Bible make that more clear than this one:

*"On that day you will realize that I am in the Father,
and you are in Me, and I am in You. . . If anyone loves
Me, he will obey My teaching. My Father will love him,
and We will come to make our home with Him."*

Verses 20-23

2. Consider the indissoluble connection between loving the Lord and obeying Him. We have to realize that we are not loving the Lord whenever we are out of His will. As the above passage shows, the depth of our relationship with Him is directly linked to our obedience. The term *fellowship* is often used to describe the relationship God desires to have with His people. That being the case, fellowship is dependent upon obedience.
3. How are we to know this, keep it before us, and know when we are out of God's will—thus breaking fellowship? He has sent the Holy Spirit who:

*". . . will teach you all things and will remind you
of every thing I have said to you."* Verse 26

Not only does the Spirit lead us into truth by revealing the Word of God to us, but He also reminds us of those things we have at some point learned. It is these reminders from the Holy Spirit that allow us to know when we have disobeyed God, that we might confess our sin and restore our fellowship with Him. This is a picture of personally knowing God, as we lovingly obey through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Christian Life is so winsome, is it not?

Returning to John's Gospel

Wednesday, February 21: Read Acts 4

Jesus seems certain to provoke a response when He says:

"You know the way to the place where I am going." John 14:4

Thomas raises the inevitable question that is meant to be recorded for all of us:

"Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" John 14:5

Every teacher loves a question like this and Jesus takes full advantage to give us an eternal truth:

"I am the way and the truth and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through Me." John 14:6

The disciples are thinking physical location, and Jesus is dealing with reconciliation of lost mankind to God! Jesus is going to return to His rightful place in heaven at the right hand of the Father. The only way for any human being to follow is to do so by placing his or her faith in who Jesus is and what He is going to accomplish on the cross. In truth, this is the one and only way that mankind can be reconciled to God. There is no way back to God for mankind except through Christ. This is non-negotiable from God's side. But the world takes great exception to this claim because of its exclusivity. The world would like for there to be many ways. You will hear all kinds of attacks against this kind of one-way Gospel message. Don't listen! For salvation is a work of God, and what is most amazing, given the rebellious nature of man's heart, is not that there are not many ways, but that there is even one way!

Do you want further proof of the exclusive nature of God's plan of salvation? It can be found in today's reading.

When Peter is defending the exclusiveness of the Gospel before Jewish leadership, he boldly declares:

"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." Acts 4:12

The Profound in Jeremiah

Wednesday, February 7: Read Jeremiah 3

Yesterday we were amazed at the devotion of Josiah and all the good he tried to do for his people. It is easy to raise the question, "God, why did you let him die in battle at such a young age? There are so few like him and Israel desperately needed a king like him!" Today we are going to get things from God's perspective, and this is not to take away from Josiah in any way but rather is an indictment of the people of Israel. In Verse 6 we are dealing with a word from the Lord, specifically, during the time of Josiah. God makes it clear that He first of all judged the Northern Kingdom (Israel), with the expectation that the Southern Kingdom (Judah) would respond. She didn't—and, in fact, became even worse. Note this verse:

"And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah has not returned to Me with her whole heart, but in pretense,"
says the Lord. Jeremiah 3:10

Despite all the positive things that occurred during Josiah's reign, God is telling us that the people were going through the motions. It was all pretense and completely unacceptable to a God who looks on the heart. Here is our first Point of Application as we consider Josiah's devotion and the people's pretense:

You can't have zeal on behalf of someone else no matter how well intentioned. We can't even do it for our neighbors, friends, and family members. Ultimately, it must be a response of each heart to the call of God.

Let's prepare for our next point of application by asking: "When people filled the churches of America following 9/11, do you think we were seeing the devoted hearts that God desires or people going through the motions out of anxiousness—mere pretense? Our history as a nation in the years that follow decisively answers that question.

The Profound in Jeremiah

Thursday, February 8: Read Romans 12

When people turn to God—whether it is under a godly king like Josiah in Jeremiah’s day or in our own land as a follow-up to the 9/11 tragedy—God wants hearts that turn in exclusive devotion to Him. That observation leads directly to a second Point of Application:

The condition of our heart is laid bare before the Lord. (Hebrews 4:13) Therefore, we dare not lose sight of the objective for those who call themselves the children of God. The objective is hearts being transformed, becoming ever more devoted to Him. (Jeremiah 3:10) For He will accept no substitutes or half measures.

Let’s ask the question: “How is it that we can undergo transformation?” Consider the following:

1. There is no hope of God-pleasing transformation apart from being born-again through faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. (John 3:3)
2. Romans 12:2 establishes the goal and process by which we are transformed:

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

3. How is it that our minds are renewed? Through the Word of God and the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. (II Timothy 3:16-17, John 16:13)
4. This requires an ongoing response on our part, specifically to:

...humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save your souls. James 1:21

Returning to John’s Gospel

Tuesday, February 20: Read I Thessalonians 4

(Continued)

It is this group of people who are further expounded upon in Verse 17:

...we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them (those Christians who have already died) in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

A few things for you to consider:

- The term *rapture* comes directly from this passage. The Latin for the Greek word translated *caught up* is the word *rapturo*, which has been transliterated into English as *rapture*.
- The description of those from the church who are alive when Christ comes does not fit the description of Christ coming in Revelation 19 and 20. For in that setting, He comes to reign on this earth. In today’s reading, Christians go to meet Him in the air. Hmm!
- For the connection to our reading in John, consider John 14:3:

“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me that you also may be where I am.”

Jesus is preparing a place for us in His Father’s house, and He is going to come back and take us to be with Him—in His Father’s house. With what text does John 14:3 fit better—being caught up to meet Him in the air or His return to reign and rule on this earth?

I’ll leave you to consider further what is the way to the place where Jesus is going?

Returning to John's Gospel

Tuesday, February 20: Read I Thessalonians 4

There may be those who read this devotional who are not familiar with (or convinced of) an event called the *Rapture of the Church*. Today's reading, in particular Verses 13-17, is some of the strongest evidence for such an event. Although it is beyond the scope of this devotional to provide a defense for the rapture, I would like to briefly introduce it and then connect it to our reading in John 14. Notice in Verse 14, Paul begins a discussion regarding:

*...we who are still alive, who are left till
the coming of the Lord.*



The Profound in Jeremiah

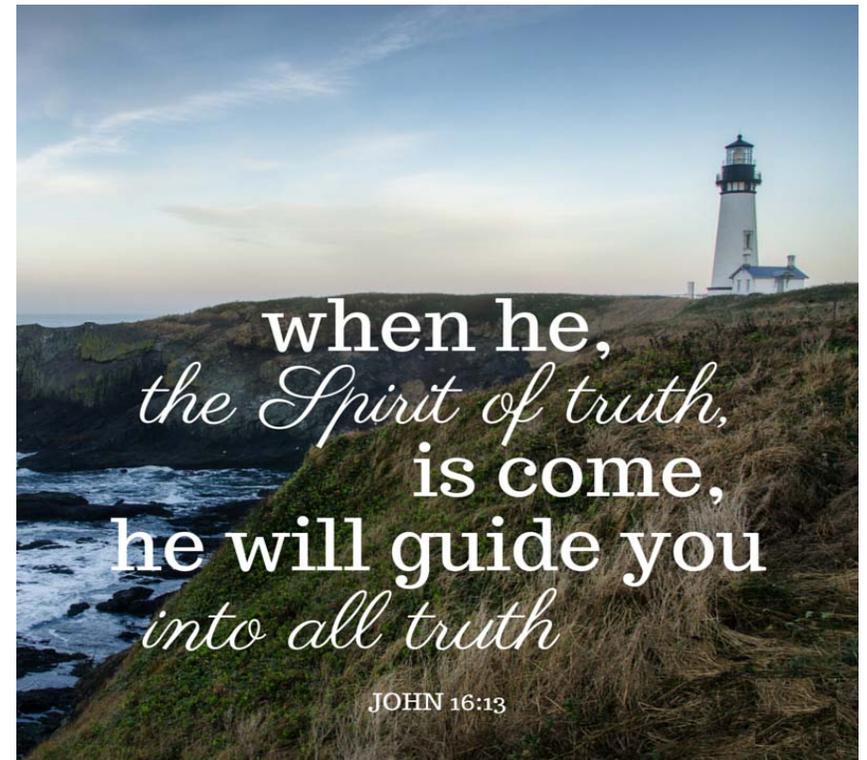
Thursday, February 8: Read Romans 12

(Continued)

5. What should we expect to occur as the Spirit enables us to pursue this response?

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

So you and I have a clear calling don't we—transformation and not pretense! May we encourage each other as we pursue devotion to our great God!



The Profound in Jeremiah

Friday, February 9: Read Jeremiah 5

I like the way the Bible simplifies things. For example, it so often reduces the choices in life to one of two options. On the one hand, we can live life God's way:

- From the right source—new life through Jesus Christ
- With the right process—treating the Word of God as if it were pure spiritual milk whereby we can grow
- In the right attitude—humility and perseverance
- Expecting the right outcome—that as our lives are internally transformed the life of Christ is externally visible

Or, we can live a life that resembles the sinful mess of Jeremiah 5. The manifestations of the sinful nature are evident at every level of society and the people are suffering:

Your wrongdoings have kept these (agricultural production) away; your sins have deprived you of good. Verse 25

Instead of responding to discipline:

"A horrible and shocking thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy lies, the priests rule by their own authority, and My people love it this way. But what will you do in the end?" Verses 30-31

Here is the problem, once we choose to let the sinful nature have its full reign in our lives, we simply flock to that which reinforces the choices we have made. The New Testament describes this as looking for those who will:

... say what their itching ears want to hear. II Timothy 4:3

So here is really the point of today's meditation, we need to be so very careful—all of us—that we are not fooling ourselves. Are we really making those choices that ultimately lead to transformation and a God-honoring life, or are we allowing the sinful nature to *call the shots* while carrying on a pretense of Christianity? Our readings in Jeremiah really challenge our thinking, don't they?

Returning to John's Gospel

Monday, February 19: Read John 14-1-14

Today's devotional focuses on just the first two verses of Chapter 14. The events of Chapter 12 and the dialogue of Chapter 13 have the disciples in a state of inner turmoil. They know the animosity of the Jewish leadership against Jesus is building and in Chapter 13 He has talked about betrayal and departure. Add to that the soon arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus, and from a human perspective, this is an absolute disaster for the disciples! We have the words of Jesus that open the chapter:

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in Me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you."

A few things to ponder:

- Jesus has a lot on His mind. He is going to be betrayed by one of His closest associates, and the cross is coming. Yet, in the midst of this, He takes time out to comfort, encourage, and give a promise to His disciples. We would hope that in the midst of our own troubles, we would be so concerned about others.
- What does Jesus tell His followers to do when their world falls apart? He tells them (and us)—don't let a troubled heart take over. Trust in your heavenly Father and trust in the Son. That's it! Just trust God! He is loving, He is capable, and He has a perfect plan.
- But how are things going to work out? We want to know. Trusting doesn't tell us how in the short term, but Jesus reminds us of the long term. His Father's house (heaven) has an ample number of rooms, and He Himself has prepared a place for each one who has trusted in Him for eternal life. We don't deserve it, but we certainly can take comfort in such a Savior!

A New Look at the Psalms

Friday, February 16: Read Psalm 107 (Continued)

3. We can find ourselves in all kinds of distress by virtue of living in a fallen and rebellious world. The Psalmist talks about the sailor caught in a tempest. I think, reading these verses, about the illness of a loved one or a serious accident of some kind. Once again we cry out to the Lord in our trouble and how many times has He delivered either us or loved ones out of distress. Figuratively speaking:

*He stilled the storm to a whisper;
the waves of the sea were hushed.* Verse 29

In how many ways do we see the goodness of the Lord?
And, how appropriate it is to give Him thanks!



We have completed our five-day survey of some of the Psalms. Monday, we return to our study in the Gospel of John.

A New Look at the Psalms

Monday, February 12: Read Psalm 1

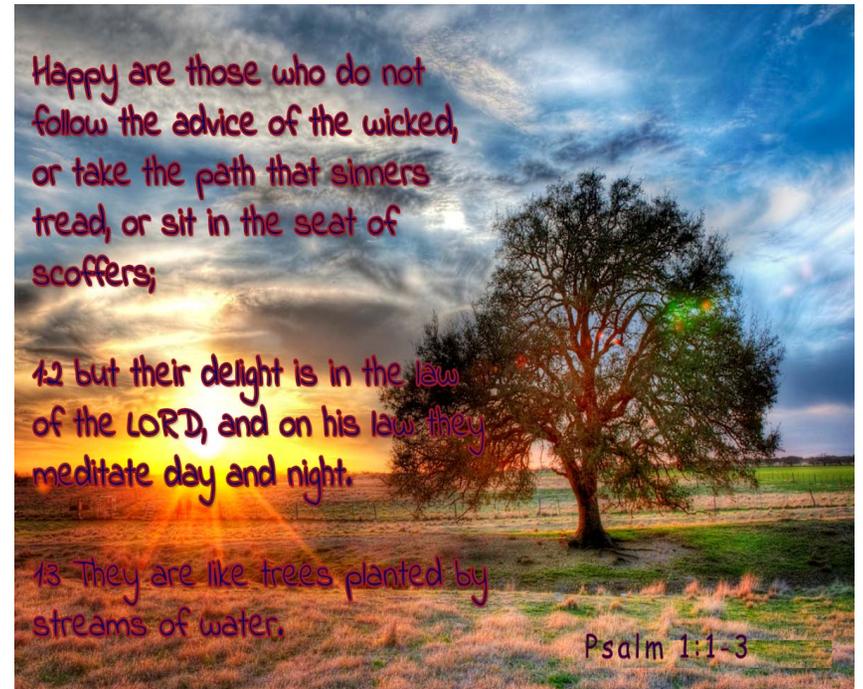
We have largely bypassed the book of Psalms in our devotional reading—something we will now remedy.

The book of Psalms is typically divided into five sections—in part based upon the doxology that can be found at the end of each section. For the next five days, we will be looking at one psalm from each section. I trust it will be a blessing!

Although this Psalm is familiar to most, it deserves a closer look. Consider Verse 1:

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, or stand in the way of sinners, or sit in the seat of mockers.

Continued on the next page.



A New Look at the Psalms

Monday, February 12: Read Psalm 1 (Continued)

Blessed is the man who does **NOT!** This first verse tells us in no uncertain terms of something we need to avoid at all costs. Specifically, Verse 1 is a picture of a life grinding to a halt, and it is important that we recognize the three-step pattern.

1. *Avoid walking in the counsel of the wicked.* Spending too much time listening to those with an ungodly agenda will simply prove the truth of I Corinthians 15:33: “*Bad company corrupts good character.*”
2. *Standing in the way of the sinner.* To stand in the way is to imitate. Listening can lead to doing if we are not on guard.
3. *Sitting in the seat of mockers!* Not only have we listened to the call to do sin, not only have we done it, now we are beginning to become unrecognizable with respect to those who are walking in opposition to the will of God.

It takes time and following the pattern of walk, stand, sit. Now you might think that the psalmist would turn around and give three antidotes to the above three phases of decay. On the contrary, he gives just one. Blessed is the man whose:

...delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night. Verse 2

It is the Word of God that will act as a preservative and counter all of the evil that this world can throw at us. It will show us the destiny of the wicked, the sinner, and the mocker; that we might instead be that:

...tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Verse 3

Consider the options carefully and delight in God's Word!

A New Look at the Psalms

Friday, February 16: Read Psalm 107

This psalm declares a thesis and then provides more than 40 verses to support that thesis. It is a thesis we should apply to our own lives and see if it fits, which it certainly will. Here is the thesis as stated in Verse 1 followed by some explanation:

*Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good;
His love endures forever.*

1. The redeemed should certainly give thanks: “*those He redeemed from the hand of the foe;*” those “*hungry and thirsty*” whose lives were ebbing away; and all of us who have been redeemed from the slave market of sin. We should certainly:

*...give thanks to the Lord for His unfailing love
and His wonderful deeds for men.* Verse 8

The most significant deed for which we should give thanks is the finished work of the cross!

2. Then there are those in “*darkness and deepest gloom,*” who suffer because “*they had rebelled against the words of God and despised the counsel of the most high.*” How is it that God can forgive the repentant sinner? Because God is good, and our sin has been paid for at the cross! Can we be sure?

*Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble,
and He saved them from their distress.* Verse 13

The forgiveness we find in Christ is most definitely a reason to give thanks to God!

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A New Look at the Psalms

Thursday, February 15: Read Psalm 90

(Continued)

Verse 12, our focal verse, is really about understanding the fragile nature of our lives as humans.

So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.

We may have great plans and dreams, but none of us can guarantee the future, or even what tomorrow will bring. So, with that truth in mind, here are some things we can ask of God.



- Let us know Your great love:

Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days. Verse 14

- May we see You at work in our lives, and the lives of our children:

May Your deeds be shown to Your servants, Your splendor to their children. Verse 16

- Bless us by working through us:

May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us; establish the work of our hands for us—yes, establish the work of our hands. Verse 17

A New Look at the Psalms

Tuesday, February 13: Read Psalm 42

Psalm 42 is an excellent complement to Psalm 1. Psalm 1 emphasizes the importance of the Word of God, while Psalm 42 emphasizes pursuing a relationship with the One who stands behind the Word. We will consider this more carefully today. The Bible tells us that

...all Scripture is God-Breathed. . . II Timothy 3:16

God has carefully revealed His mind to man such that we have everything we need for matters of faith and practice. It is not everything we would like to know, it is everything we need to know.

Now even something as exalted as God's Word can be misused by man. For example, the Mosaic Law was taken by the Jews and added to in such a way that it became a means of salvation rather than a means to show mankind he was a sinner in need of a Savior. In our day, there are those who become so focused on the Word that it becomes akin to an idol. I don't recall who said it, but it has stuck with me: "*The Word is not meant to be a means of scholarship; but rather, a means of fellowship with God Himself!*"

John 1 helps with this as well, for it reminds us that behind the written Word stands the Living Word—none other than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. It is no wonder that I Corinthians 2:16 tells us that we have the mind of Christ—for that is what the Word of God is! Now see how beautifully this is presented in Psalm 42:

As the deer pants for the streams of water so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. Where can I go and meet with God? Psalm 42:1-2

Put the two together. Where can we go to meet with God? Why to His Word! We should pause and remember that each time we crack the binding of our Bibles!

A New Look at the Psalms

Wednesday, February 14: Read Psalm 73

Psalm 73 is a psalm not written by David, but by a man who we believe to be his *Director of Music*. This psalm covers a very important topic—a topic I think we tend to learn as we grow older and wish we would have understood at a younger age. It raises the issue of the apparent prosperity of the wicked. Asaph looks around and surmises:

*This is what the wicked are like—always carefree,
they increase in wealth. Verse 12*

It is this apparent carefree prosperity that attracts many followers and it is really bothering Asaph! First, he questions the value of his own efforts to be holy:

*Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure;
in vain have I washed my hands in innocence. Verse 13*

Even worse, envy has crept into his heart:

*But as for me, my feet had almost slipped I had nearly
lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw
the prosperity of the wicked. Verses 2-3*

Asaph was close to walking away from following God. Pick any age group you like—college students, twenty-year olds, middle age—how often have there been those who walk away from the Christian life because they decided they were missing out on the carefree, prosperous life? They failed to do what saved Asaph: He *entered the sanctuary of God and understood their final destiny*. (Verse 17) It takes time in God's Word and listening to the Spirit before we understand:

*Whom have I in heaven but You?
And earth has nothing I desire besides You. Verse 26*

For in reality, choices made in this life determine what comes next, and there are ultimately two options:

*Those who are far from You will perish. . . But as for
me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign
Lord my refuge. . . Verses 27-28*

A New Look at the Psalms

Thursday, February 15: Read Psalm 90

There is far more to this psalm than we can cover in a daily devotional, so consider this a framework for future meditation. It is well worth doing so, for this psalm covers the most practical of subjects—having the proper (divine) perspective on life! Let's start with Verse 12 as the desired outcome and prayer: Lord,

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

In other words, there is wisdom in having a divine perspective on the number of days God has given us. *Numbering them aright*, starts with an understanding that:

- Our days are determined by God who is sovereign over all things. (Verse 2)
- From the standpoint of human history, the life of an individual is not much different than a blade of grass, which springs forth in the morning and has withered and dried by evening. (Verse 5)
- Furthermore, we may know the wrath of God because of sin (Verses 8-9); or simply because we live in a fallen world. (Verse 10)

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*Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love,
that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.*

Psalm 90:14