

NORTHMINSTER DAILY DEVOTIONS



Vol. 34 No. 2

January 28 - February 20 2007

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As you pick this booklet up, you are probably on your way to someplace, or something, or going to meet someone. We all have plans — important people do, you know. When we are not going someplace, we are thinking about the places we will go, or the places we would like to go, all the while, probably not really enjoying where we are. It's hard to sit still and actually enjoy it.

I commend you for actually stopping to pick up this booklet, and my prayer is that you find a window in your day, each day, to encounter the living Word. And if you've discovered that the booklet has been left behind, remember you can find it all at our devotional website — www.godmorning.org!

May God make his powerful presence known to you each day!

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Pete".

Pete Seiferth
Associate Pastor
Spiritual Formation and Church Life

PS: For Lent, we will not be producing this guide, but as a part of 40 Days of Community, we will be using *Better Together*, a resource by Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Community Church in Lake Forest, CA. I encourage you to be a part of a small group during this season, if you are not already a part of one. Our next printed edition will be available for Easter.

Sunday Study Guide

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Luke 6:43-45

Sunday
January 28, 2007

Exodus 5:22—7:25
Matthew 18:21—19:12
Psalm 23:1-6
Proverb 5:22-23

"No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks. -Luke 6:43-45

Each Sunday, we offer a study guide for individual, family, or small group use, based on the week's Biblical text for the sermon.

GATHER in community:

- L Get settled and check in with each other.
- L What is your favorite fruit?
- L Describe a time when you said something that you should not have, yet it slipped out before you could rope it back in.

GROW in God's Word:

Pray for God's inspiration, then read **Luke 6:43-45**

- L What's the point of Jesus analogy of the fruit trees?
- L How critical is the condition of one's heart, in terms of the fruit of one's life?
- L How does the tree and the fruit help you to recognize a "kingdom" person?

GO in God's name:

- L What quality of fruit would those around you say that you are producing?
- L What kind of "nutrients" do you need to be producing better fruit?
- L How can you be intentional about "flowing over" in care and service to someone else this week?

4 *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*

by Jennifer Monroe

Monday
January 29, 2007

Exodus 8:1—9:35
Matthew 19:13-30
Psalm 24:1-10
Proverb 6:1-5

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

-Matthew 19:23-24

The image might make us chuckle: a camel, all knobby knees and awkward bumps, casting an incredulous eye at a man trying to force the tip of its nose through the miniscule eye of a tiny needle. I imagine those standing around when Jesus came up with this creative word picture chuckling too. But then, when the full reality of what Jesus had just said hits them, they don't think it is funny at all.

Matthew says that the disciples are "greatly astonished" and ask Jesus, "Who then can be saved?" They were probably thinking that if it was virtually impossible for the rich, those with wealth and status and prestige to enter the Kingdom, then there was no hope for them, poor, uneducated, common fishermen that they were. Yet, Jesus once again turns their expectations upside down. No, he says, it is not the rich who have an automatic pass into the Kingdom, but rather those who have been willing to give up everything that they have in order to follow him, for "many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first." All too often, perhaps even in spite of ourselves, we idolize the rich. And yet, Jesus tells us that it is those who are enslaved to their money who can never truly enter the Kingdom of Heaven. When Jesus tells the rich young man that the only things standing between him and eternal life are his possessions, he goes away sad, because he simply cannot comprehend life without all of his stuff. May God save us from this fate that is truly worse than death.

Young People: What is one of your favorite possessions? Would you ever be willing to give it away?

Adults: Are you enslaved to your money? What is one way you can start to loosen your hold on your possessions?

Prayer: Father, save us from the tragedy of having to walk away from you because you ask too much of us. Give us the grace we need to give up everything we have to follow you. Amen.

Great Grace

5

by Dick Leon

Tuesday
January 30, 2007

Exodus 10:1—12:13
Matthew 20:1-28
Psalm 25:1-15
Proverb 6:6-11

Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous? So the last will be first, and the first will be last. -Matthew 20:15-16

The parables of Jesus are both memorable and disturbing. This teaching technique is powerfully **memorable**. We can name his parables and we recall each story – the good Samaritan, the prodigal son, the lost coins, the four soils.

But the parables also **disturb** us because they challenge the way we think about life and about God. This parable touches on our sense of *justice*. If someone works a full day they should be paid more than someone who works only one hour. That seems fair. But to pay both the same does not seem fair!

The beauty and power of this parable should not be missed just because it spoils our calculations. Jesus is talking about the Kingdom of Heaven. If you enter into his kingdom early in your life you will be saved. If someone comes to faith at the last minute, the same gift of salvation will be given. Do we begrudge God for his abundant mercy and generosity?

Actually, I find this to be deeply good news. Don't we all know people who still don't get it? Aren't we truly glad the door is still open to them? If God is more generous than anyone deserves ... even us ... then we should rejoice and be glad for ourselves and others. God's justice is strange to our thinking – it is far more generous and merciful!

Thank God, God's Not, Just Just!!

Young People: What does this parable teach you about God?

Adults: Is it a penalty to enter the kingdom early in life or should we all wait until the last minute and then jump in?

Prayer: Great God, you are indeed merciful in your might and mighty in your mercy. Thank you for your amazing grace to us all. Amen.

Fame

by Marshall Worden

Wednesday
January 31, 2007

Exodus 12:14—13:16
Matthew 20:29—21:22
Psalm 25:16-22
Proverb 6:12-15

The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant. "Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him. "Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read, 'From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise'?" -Matthew 21:14-16

This January has been a month of speechifying and sports. There were the college football bowl games, a new Congress beginning, the President's State of the Union, the excitement of UA basketball, the Governor's State of the State, even the Mayor's State of the City and, of course, the playoffs leading to Super Bowl XLI this coming Sunday. Crowd behavior at these events is often mindless and pretty much over the top, accompanied by shouting, raucousness, screaming, ovations, hoorays, and adulation for players and politicians.

That's one reaction to fame. But when Jesus, whose fame had been growing, does wonderful things, heals the blind and the lame and the children shout, the religious leaders are indignant. The children cannot contain their glee and shout, "Hosanna to the Son of David." The children respond to Jesus with passion and jubilant praise. Other witnesses are sour and quiet.

Also in our Matthew passage for today, we find two blind men who shout at Jesus, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!" The people, not the religious leaders, tell the blind men to be quiet, but who in turn shout even louder. Jesus has compassion and heals their blindness. Now, with there eyes truly open, the two men follow Jesus.

We have a famous friend in Jesus.

Young People: Who is a famous person you admire? Why do you like that person?

Adults: Is our exuberance and passion for Jesus like that of the blind men and the children? Or are we on the sidelines, all quiet and glum?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for the wonderful things you do for us. May the crowds around us see our passion and love for you. Amen.

Questions

7

by Scott Coverdale

Thursday
February 1, 2007

Exodus 13:17—15:18
Matthew 21:23-46
Psalm 26:1-12
Proverb 6:16-19

Jesus replied, "I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things." -Matthew 21:24

Jesus did this all the time. People were continually asking him all sorts of questions that they thought were deep or tricky or essential. Think of the questions he heard: Who is my neighbor? What is the greatest commandment? Who then can be saved? Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath? What must I do to have eternal life? How can a man be born again?

Jesus had a notable tendency to turn questions around in such a way that they held serious implications for the one who had come to him with the question. Jesus challenges us to look at things differently, to look at the real issue behind our questions, and not the legal and mechanical issues that tend to hold our attention.

Some of my own enduring questions are these: How does God judge people of other faiths? Why is there evil in the world? What are Heaven and hell? Sometimes I have heard Jesus answer me like this: When you show me that you have mastered the truth that you do know (*that I must learn to love the Lord God with my whole heart and to love my neighbor as myself*) then I will make these other mysteries clear to you ...

Ask yourself: What is your toughest question for God? What question might God ask you in reply?

Prayer: God of Heaven, please lead me beyond my usual framework of questions and answers. Let me follow your voice past my usual concerns. Let me receive your very self as the answer to my deepest need.

How Much is Enough?

by Deb Van Scoyk

Friday
February 2, 2007

Exodus 15:19—17:7
Matthew 22:1-33
Psalm 27:1-6
Proverb 6:20-26

This is what the Lord has commanded: "Each one is to gather as much as he needs. Take an omer for each person you have in your tent." The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little. And when they measured it by the omer, he who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little. Each one gathered as much as he needed. Then Moses said to them, "No one is to keep any of it until morning." However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell. So Moses was angry with them.

-Exodus 16:16-20

One has only to review statistics on the average obesity rate in America or the amount of money spent per person on Christmas gifts last season to recognize how little we've changed from the Israelites who struggled, as we obviously struggle today, with trusting the word of our Lord.

Perhaps the implied limitations of "need" have been entirely supplanted by the boundless extremes of "want."

Young People: Have you ever been tempted to keep an extra piece of candy rather than sharing it with your friend? Do you believe that God knows what you really need and want?

Adults: Have we become too consumed with providing for our family's "wants?" Should we be giving more to others as we increase our level of faith in God's promises to provide for our needs?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we seek peace in the knowledge that you have provided for our every need. Lord, help us to avoid the pitfall of insecurity that promotes our need to covet money and things — help us to trust in your knowledge of our hearts' desires, and teach us the joy of caring and sharing in a world so overwhelmed by need. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Please, Fence Me In

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by Dick Leon

Saturday
February 3, 2007

Exodus 17:8—19:15
Matthew 22:34—23:12
Psalm 27:7-14
Proverb 6:27-35

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. -Exodus 20:2

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment."

-Matthew 22:37-38

What do you think – are these words a good fit for our society today?

Oh, give me land, lots of land under starry skies above,
Don't fence me in.

Let me ride through the wide open country that I love,
Don't fence me in.

Let me be by myself in the evening' breeze,
And listen to the murmur of the cottonwood trees,
Send me off forever but I ask you please,
Don't fence me in.

I want to ride to the ridge where the west commences
And gaze at the moon till I lose my senses
And I can't look at hovels and I can't stand fences
Don't fence me in.

For too many today, fences are out and permissiveness is in. I want to propose a different plea. *Please, fence me in!* I need boundaries in my life or I will go astray in every imaginable way!

The Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 are repeated in their most essential form by Jesus in Matthew 22:37. These teachings are a marvelous gift to us all! We need the fences of God to live wisely, safely, sanely, happily and well!

Young People: What classroom is best for you ... the one with clear rules of behavior or the one in which anything goes?

Adults: What is your attitude to boundaries in your life? Do you resent them or welcome them?

Prayer: Lord, remind us that we need your boundaries in our lives and give us the wisdom and strength to keep them in this permissive society. Amen.

Sunday Study Guide

Galatians 2:20

Sunday
February 4, 2007

Exodus 19:16—21:21
Matthew 23:13-39
Psalm 28:1-9
Proverb 7:1-5

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. -Galatians 2:20

Each Sunday, we offer a study guide for individual, family, or small group use, based on the week's Biblical text for the sermon.

GATHER in community:

- L Get settled and check in with each other.
- L What is your opinion about confrontation and conflict? Do you deal with it well?
- L Have you ever stood up to the “boss” when you felt you needed to?

GROW in God's Word:

Pray for God's inspiration, then read **Galatians 2:1-21**

- L Why did Paul confront Peter? What was the source of Paul's frustration?
- L Why was it so important to Paul that Gentiles not have to follow Jewish customs?
- L What does the concept of justification mean? How is a person “justified in Christ”?
- L For Paul, what is the status of the “self” (ego) in light of Christ's crucifixion and death?

GO in God's name:

- L In light of verse 20, who inhabits your skin more these days, “I” or “Christ”?
- L In what ways can Christ live through you in this coming week?

Living Like Christ, Day By Day

11

by Marie Ruiz

Monday
February 5, 2007

Exodus 21:22—23:13
Matthew 24:1-28
Psalm 29:1-11
Proverb 7:6-23

Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming I am the Christ, and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains. -Matthew 24:4-8

When I was a little girl I would often hear sermons that cautioned that the second coming of Christ was imminent, and sometimes it would strike fear into the core of my being. As a little child, I really didn't want Christ to come back to earth soon, I wanted to grow up and experience life. What I didn't understand then and to some degree even now is that we cannot know the time of the coming of Christ. But what we do with the information regarding signs of his coming noted in the Scripture above should cause us to live in a very different way than those who have no hope of his return. We should live expectantly knowing that even if we only had one more day to live, everything done in that one day should reflect the very nature of God living within us. We can be a reflection of Godliness only by knowing what God is like and the only way we'll know that for sure is to read about him in his word. God takes great delight in you — he even rejoices over you with song! (*Zephaniah 3:17*)

Today, rejoice in the fact that the God who created you died for your sins and rose again for you so that you can be with him eternally. He longs for you to open his Word and drink in of his goodness so that what is poured out of you will be his Godly nature. Think about how he rejoices when you come to him as a child and sit at his feet with a desire to learn from him. He's already singing a song for you!

Young People: God has given us his Word in the Bible so that we can learn from him and know how to live as young people. **God loves you!** Love him back by reading his Word and learn from him.

Adults: God's message is so clear, live as if this will be your last day. Let no one deceive you ...but cling to the truth in God's Word. Love him with all your heart and learn of him.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to remember that better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere. Day by day and with each passing moment, help us find our strength in you.

De Profundis

by Jennifer Monroe

Tuesday
February 6, 2007

Exodus 23:14—25:40
Matthew 24:29-51
Psalm 30:1-12
Proverb 7:24-27

You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing to you and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give you thanks forever. -Psalm 30:11-12

We were barely alive in those houses of dust. We stumbled around in darkness so thick we could not see our hands. We were scrabbling at the bottoms of deep slimy pits, speechless but for the sharp keening wails erupting from our insides. Our burlap shirts chafed and rubbed us raw and we could feel the cold earthen dampness of our graves. We were alone, but for the taunting cries of those who hated us, jeering and mocking our distress, their voices echoing in our ears.

And then our hearts formed the words our mouths could barely shape: "O Lord, be our help!"

Suddenly, we are in the light, brought out into sun and heat and warmth. We are lifted, resurrected, on soft green grass beside a running stream. We can smell rain and pine trees and fresh growing things. Our hands are clean, fingernails mended, torn skin healed. Silks and satins cover our bodies, and as we move we can feel the breeze blowing them like banners. Our feet stumble into first a hesitant walk, then a run, then a wild, joyful dance. It feels as though we are flying. It is the morning, the time for rejoicing. We open our mouths and sing, sing, sing!

Young People: Has there been a time in your life when you were really sad? How did you get help?

Adults: How have you seen the Lord rescue you in the past? Can you give thanks for times when he has lifted you up?

Prayer: O Lord, when we feel as though we are at the bottom, when we feel like we cannot sink any lower, when we are lost and hurting, remind us of your promise to lift us up. Give us the strength to call on you for help and the faith to believe you will answer.

Do You Have A Plan?

13

by Ken Skodiak

Wednesday
February 7, 2007

Exodus 26:1—27:21
Matthew 25:1-30
Psalm 31:1-8
Proverb 8:1-11

Make the tabernacle with ten curtains of finely twisted linen and blue, purple and scarlet yarn, with cherubim worked into them by a skilled craftsman.

-Exodus 26:1

The rest of this reading in Exodus talks to Israel how and what the tabernacle will look like and how it will be built. Matthew 25 starts off with the story of the 10 virgins.

Both stories are about preparation and how we build our lives. It seems to me that as we think about our lives and how we live them, we can either think and plan and leave God almost totally out of the picture, or we can go the other way and plan for nothing and believe that God will just somehow supply everything we need without us putting any thought into our lives whatsoever.

Both are wrong of course and in these two passages in particular tell us that even God has a plan. He does not “fly by the seat of his pants” as it were. He is a God of order and purpose and he wants us to be thoughtful about the resources he has given us and to use those for his glory.

In the Matthew story, we get an idea of what happens when one does not plan and just assumes that everything will turn out okay in the end, but they were wrong and the consequences are not pretty.

It is a difficult balance that we walk. We are to trust God with our lives but we are also to use the resources that God has created us with and given to us to build the kind of life he wants us to have. A life that in the end is to be used to glorify God.

Young People: What kind of life are you hoping to have in the future and do you see the future in general as something you look forward to or fear?

Adults: What parts of your life do you need to take more control over and which parts do you need to give over to God?

Prayer: Lord Almighty, maker of all and sustainer of all. Help us to make plans understanding that it is you that controls our lives and you whom through all blessings come and go. To your glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Within Our Reach

by Scott Coverdale

Thursday
February 8, 2007

Exodus 28:1-43
Matthew 25:31—26:13
Psalm 31:9-18
Proverb 8:12-13

The King will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." -Matthew 25:40

This is one of my favorite passages in the Bible, and perhaps the one that makes me the most uncomfortable. Here, Jesus says that our treatment of the poor and neglected people is the basis on which our souls are judged. Yikes! Jesus says nothing here about church membership, Westminster confession, or religious heritage. I must acknowledge that the majority of my time and money go to making a nice home and providing for the comfort and convenience of myself and my family. I want to put money aside for retirement; I like to take a nice vacation once in a while. Bad things? No. But I have a nagging sense that in the story of the sheep and goats, I would be one of those people sputtering, "But, but, but ..."

We know who the poor are. We live in a city with them, we live on a street with them, we live in a world where war, poverty and other violence disenfranchises and cripples and kills our brothers and sisters on a continual basis. We cannot cure the world of its ills, but this passage is about doing the simple things that are within our reach. It is about recognizing Jesus in all of his unexpected disguises. I think that coming closer to Christ is always a matter of taking one small step after another. I think that most of us can figure out the next small step on that path before us.

Ask yourself: In what way can I begin to take better care of my brothers and sisters in need? In what disguise would I be most surprised to find Jesus?

Prayer: Dear Merciful God, please give me compassion and soften my heart towards those whose needs I can begin to meet in your name. Teach me to see the poor as you see them; to see Jesus in the hunger of the world.

The Lord's Supper

15

by Dick Leon

Friday
February 9, 2007

Exodus 29:1—30:10
Matthew 26:14-46
Psalm 31:19-24
Proverb 8:14-26

Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." -Matthew 26:27-28

I am always amazed at how the whole Bible holds together. Look at these four texts together. In *Exodus* we read about the sacrificial system by which God forgave sin. In *Psalms* 31 we are reminded of the abundant goodness of God. (*Can anything be more good than the news of God's forgiveness?*) In *Proverbs* we read of wisdom that has been an enduring companion to God since creation. And in *Matthew* we come to Jesus' establishment of the Lord's Supper which re-presents his atoning work on the cross and replaces the sacrificial system named in *Exodus*!

The blood shed by the lamb in *Exodus* is replaced by the blood shed by the Lamb of God on the cross. God's goodness (*Psalms*) and God's wisdom (*Proverbs*) are made manifest in this profound Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The whole Biblical story holds together because it was all written by the same God!

The Greek word for "giving thanks" in the description of how Jesus instituted this Sacrament is *eucharisto* from which we get the rich word that has been used for centuries, Eucharist. Whenever we share in the Supper we are giving thanks for all God has accomplished in the work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

God is abundantly good, wonderfully wise and amazingly gracious. Thanks be to God!

Young People: When you take communion think this thought: The God who made me, came to save me, because he loves me!

Adults: When you receive the elements of the Lord's Supper think about God's abundant goodness and give thanks to him for what he did on the Cross.

Prayer: We do thank you, God, for you have made full provision for our salvation by the work on the cross of your Son, Our Lord, Jesus Christ, in whose mighty name we pray. Amen.

God's Provision

by Jennifer Hager

Saturday
February 10, 2007

Exodus 30:11—31:18
Matthew 26:47-68
Psalm 32:1-11
Proverb 8:27-32

... and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts ... -Exodus 31:3

My friend Pam asked me if I would like to participate in writing devotionals for the church. I readily said yes, because I thought I could use the various daily devotional resources I had. I figured I could check out *My Utmost for His Highest* by Oswald Chambers and *Experiencing God Day-by-Day* by Henry T. and Richard Blackaby and neatly paraphrase what they had to say about Scripture and send it on in.

Then I attended the planning meeting for those in the church who would be writing devotionals and found out that the ministry was for us to write about our own experience related to a Scripture lesson. Oh NO! Was I mature enough in my walk with God to be able to apply Scripture to my life? Would I sound foolish and silly? My fellow writers immediately offered support to me and most importantly, I asked God to assure me that this was a ministry for me.

God did not send me a personal message like: "Jennifer, I want you to write devotionals for Northminster." What he did do is so much richer and so much more loving than that simple response. He put onto and into my heart experiences he had given me that allowed me to write a devotional about the Scripture passage I had signed up for. He assured me and equipped all at one time.

Young People: Do you have special things that you like to do and are good at doing? Thank the Lord Jesus for the help he has given you.

Adults: When you have challenges in your work, do you turn to the Lord and ask him to show you the tools he has given you and how to use them?

Prayer: Almighty God, thank you for giving the tools I need to do your work. In all things, help me to recognize your hand in my life. Amen.

Sunday Study Guide

17

Exodus 19:3-6

Sunday
February 11, 2007

Exodus 32:1—33:23
Matthew 26:69—27:14
Psalm 33:1-11
Proverb 8:33-36

Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites." -Exodus 19:3-6

Each Sunday, we offer a study guide for individual, family, or small group use, based on the week's Biblical text for the sermon.

GATHER in community:

- L Get settled and check in with each other.
- L What is your dream vacation destination?
- L Is there a special place you remember clearly where you had a powerful experience with God?

GROW in God's Word:

Pray for God's inspiration, then read **Exodus 19**

- L What were God's hopes and intentions for the people of Israel (3-6)? In this covenant, what were the responsibilities of the people, and how would God respond?
- L God has them do a lot to prepare for their encounter. Why do you think so much emphasis is placed on barring people from the mountain, washing their clothes, abstaining from sex, and special effects?
- L What is the important news that God shares with the people in chapter 20?
- L What affect do you think preparation has in getting ready for a "God-sighting."

GO in God's name:

- L How do you, or could you better prepare to meet God? ... in Sunday worship? ... at the Lord's Supper? ... in daily worship and devotion? ... in everyday situations of life?

Humiliation

by Dick Leon

Monday
February 12, 2007

Exodus 34:1—35:9
Matthew 27:15-31
Psalm 33:12-22
Proverb 9:1-6

But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you ... -Matthew 22:31

I wonder if we can ever understand the mystery of Christ's submission to hostile forces that led to his death on the cross. One thing haunts me about it all; that Jesus *chose* to die for us. When you follow him from the Upper Room to the cross there are numerous opportunities open to him when he could have escaped and avoided the cross. And if he had wanted he could also have called down a legion of angels to rescue him.

But, no, he didn't turn away because for some mysterious reason we will never fully understand this was God's plan and God's will. And the last thing we could ever imagine Jesus doing was to disobey his Father and save himself even from the injustice and agony of the cross.

Eyes of faith see the radiance of God in this suffering Jesus. Other eyes cannot see him for who he is because of their darkness within. Playing on our text from Matthew and Exodus, George Herbert imagines these words being spoken by Jesus:

My face they cover, though it be divine.
As Moses face was veiled, so is mine,
Lest on their double-dark souls either shine!

Young People: What do you think was the most agonizing part to Jesus of his path to the cross?

Adults: Why do you think Jesus went to the cross so willingly?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, we stand in wonder and awe at what you have done for us on the cross and the humiliation you endured on the way to your death. Protect us from double-dark souls lest we too miss the radiance of your face. Amen.

Do You Know Your Talents?

19

by Frank Shallenberger

Tuesday
February 13, 2007

Exodus 35:10—36:38
Matthew 27:32-66
Psalm 34:1-10
Proverb 9:7-8

Then Moses said to the Israelites, "See, the Lord has chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts." -Exodus 35:30-31

God has a plan for the lives of each one of us. God has given us talents and skills, meant not only to enable us to support ourselves and our families but also to serve him in special ways.

Just as Bezalel was given the talents to work in gold, silver and bronze as well as precious stones and wood, we too, you and I, are given talents and skills. Not all of us are artisans but all of us working together for the glory of God and his Kingdom can accomplish great things.

Each and everyone of our skills, whether we are a secretary in an office, a worker at a filling station, a laborer in construction or the fields, a cook or a plumber were designed by God and they matter to him. God doesn't evaluate us on the kind of work we do. He never intended our work to define our identity. God doesn't determine our worth by our productivity, what we accomplish in our lives, how successful we are. He loves us just the way we are, just the way he personally made each one of us to be.

Young People: Are you applying your skills to learn at school and in the church? Are you doing your very best to get the grades that will enable you to serve God as an adult?

Adults: Do you know what your skills are? If you do, are you using them for God's glory?

Prayer: Holy Spirit, Enabler of every human ability, open my eyes that I might see the talents the Lord has given me that the work he wishes done in my family, in church and this community might be accomplished in a manner pleasing to him.

Love Need Not Be Lost

by Anne Price

Wednesday
February 14, 2007

Exodus 37:1—38:31
Matthew 28:1-20
Psalm 34:11-22
Proverb 9:9-10

The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. -Psalm 34:18

This Valentines Day many will be sharing gifts, cards, and words of love. However, back on February 14, 1992, my husband had just suddenly died from a motorcycle accident. My heart was broken. I didn't know how I could go on without him. Immediately, I was surrounded by friends from our two churches. I needed God with skin on. He came in the body of my Catholic priest and the pastor of my husband's church.

It was hard to put my prayers into words because even my usual thinking skills were not working. God heard my cries and groans. He was with me every minute.

Over time, with God's help, I was able to go on and build a new life. Now I am married to a fine man whom I love completely. I can again enjoy Valentines Day.

God loves us every day.

Young People: Do you know God has a very special Valentine for you today?

Adults: Can we feel God's presence in our lonely prayers?

Prayer: Thank you Father for lifting my spirit when I cry out to you in private. Amen.

When Jesus Calls

21

by Lisa Grenier

Thursday
February 15, 2007

Exodus 39:1—40:38
Mark 1:1-28
Psalm 35:1-16
Proverb 9:11-12

"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." -Mark 1:17

In this verse, Jesus calls ordinary men to discipleship. There are three parts to his statement and each one applies to us today.

First, Jesus beckons us to *come* to him. The men he chose as disciples were a diverse group just like you and me. Jesus calls them to come to him. Have you made a conscious decision to *turn away* from your own selfish, sinful desires and *come to* Jesus receiving him as your personal savior? It's the best decision you could ever make!

Secondly, Jesus calls us to *follow* him. Being a follower of Jesus certainly does not just mean attending worship services on Sunday morning! Jesus wants you to follow him everyday of the week. Obey him and grow in him through Bible study, prayer and fellowship with other Christians. Following Jesus is not a part time commitment!

If we come and follow him, the last part of the verse tells us *Jesus* assumes the full responsibility to make us *fishers of men*. Jesus gives you the power to live a transformed life which results in your life bearing witness to others who subsequently become followers of Christ! He gives you the words to share your faith with others making you into a fisher of men (and women)!

Young People: Do the kids at school know you are a Christian? Who could you invite to activities or services at Northminster?

Adults: What else should you do to grow in Christ? How does your life show others that you are a Christian?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for calling me to follow you. Help me to grow closer to you everyday and to live my life in a way that draws others to you. Amen.

Heaven and Earth

by Scott Coverdale

Friday
February 16, 2007

Leviticus 1:1—3:17
Mark 1:1—2:12
Psalm 35:17-28
Proverb 9:13-18

He is to wash the inner parts and the legs with water, and the priest is to burn all of it on the altar. It is a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD. -Leviticus 1:9

I remember a few years ago when I was at work and my pager did not function. I was puzzled until I heard a news item on the radio that a large solar flare had sent a burst of gamma rays into space and had interfered with the function of several telecommunications satellites. I was amazed to realize that an event on the surface of the sun could have a material impact on me and my ability to communicate with my co-workers and family.

In the Leviticus passage, if you actually read the whole chapter, you will see a long and detailed prescription for animal sacrifice. I am not particularly attracted to the notion of killing bulls and goats to atone for sins or to make me a friend of God. But one thing I realize this practice taught is that the intersection of heaven and earth was broad and deep and immediate. A sin that we commit today has ramifications in Heaven, (*a damaged relationship*) and in turn our repentance and God's mercy again shifts reality and makes restoration possible. The sacrificial system was the content of a conversation between people and God.

The New Testament teaches us that the conversation, the dialogue between Heaven and earth, continues. It is not carried out in the blood of sheep and cattle, but in the gift of Christ the Word, in the prayer of our hearts, and in the actions of our hands. It is our privilege to converse with heaven. It is God's grace to us that allows it to be so.

Ask Yourself: How are my words and actions touching Heaven today? How is Heaven touching me?

Prayer: God in Heaven, please show me your hand in my life today, and let my ear hear your word to me. Please let me see as well, how my life today can touch your heart and Heaven.

Treasures Defined

23

by Deb Van Scoyk

Saturday
February 17, 2007

Leviticus 4:1—5:19
Mark 2:13—3:6
Psalm 36:1-12
Proverb 10:1-2

A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish son grief to his mother. Ill-gotten treasures are of no value, but righteousness delivers from death.

-Proverbs 10:1-2

There once lived an ambitious teenager, anxious to prove himself far superior to his father as both a businessman and a provider for his family.

As providence would have it, this young man landed a job as the captain of a vessel carrying goods of various sorts from Colombia, South America to the shores of North America. Knowing there would be some risk involved in transporting some of his goods, the young man sought and received a hefty sum for his services — an agreeable arrangement, as this was to be only a *one-time* experience, entirely justified by the need for a down-payment on the young man's first home.

The young man worked hard, played by the new rules dictated by his job, and was so successful he was offered more work — and then more — and the years passed.

The cargo flowed from Colombia to many great cities in North America. Thousands of dollars fell into the young man's hands. He acquired material possessions far beyond his dreams and took great pride in having surpassed his father's lifetime financial accomplishments ten-fold. And then his luck ran out ...

His sentence was fifteen years. Our government confiscated his house in the Hamptons and his yacht. His beautiful wife left him, and his children grew up without their father. His life has been a sad testament to the value of ill-gotten treasures.

Young People: You can work hard to earn money to buy a new video game, or someone might just give you the game. Do you think the game would mean more to you if you'd earned the money yourself to buy it?

Adults: God gave us Ten Commandments — let's all imagine how wonderful the world would be if we all played by those rules.

Prayer: Lord, we praise you and stand in awe of the examples you set for our daily lives. Keep us focused forever on your way. Amen.

Sunday Study Guide

Job 1:8

Sunday
February 18, 2007

Leviticus 6:1—7:27
Mark 3:7-30
Psalm 37:7-30
Proverb 10:3-4

Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil." -Job 1:8

Each Sunday, we offer a study guide for individual, family, or small group use, based on the week's Biblical text for the sermon.

GATHER in community:

- L Get settled and check in with each other.
- L When have you had occasion to mutter, "when it rains, it pours."
- L Have you ever been accused of doing something that you were innocent of?

GROW in God's Word:

Pray for God's inspiration, then read **Job 1:8**

- L Why do you think God presented his servant Job to Satan as one who was blameless and upright?
- L How do you feel about God giving Satan permission to test Job?
- L What impresses you most about Job?
- L How would you have reacted under the same circumstances?
- L How do our circumstances affect our faith in God?

GO in God's name:

- L The Christian season of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday (2/20/2007). It traditionally is a season of reflection and spiritual renewal in preparation for Holy Week and Easter. How can you make Lent a special time of growth this year?
- L NPC will be embarking together on the 40 Days of Community (2/25-4/7) as we grow closer to one another, and reach out in love to our community. Find out how you can be involved!

Taking Possession of God's Truth 25

by Richard Edwards

Monday
February 19, 2007

Leviticus 7:28—9:6
Mark 3:31—4:25
Psalm 37:12-29
Proverb 10:5

“Consider carefully what you hear,” he continued. “With the measure you use, it will be measured to you — and even more. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.”

-Mark 4:24-25

In *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes*, writer G.I. Williamson includes; “Many reject the Reformed Faith ...because they assume that divine sovereignty cancels all true human liberty and responsibility.” Actually our verse seems to lay responsibility squarely ON us. If we do not appropriate God's truth we risk losing what little truth we may know and it won't be available for our possession and use when we need it.

The NIV commentators, remind us that Mark was probably written to Roman Christians to prepare them for the persecutions of 64-67 CE. This quotation after Jesus' teachings certainly would have reminded the Roman Christians to prepare for persecution by taking possession of a large measure of God's truth.

There is one way we take possession of God's truth as our key verse directs. Our church has made this the year of Bible reading. Whether we are about to be torn apart for the world's entertainment or torn apart by our inner demons like the individual in the next chapter a large measure of God's truth is our preparation.

Young People: Learning the truth about God and his love is really important — the Bible says so! What are fun ways to learn about the Bible, worship, prayer and how to show God's love?

Adults: How eager and hungry are you for God's Word of truth, and what other appetites do you have that push a deeper relationship with God out of the way?

Prayer: Holy God, it is alarming to be reminded that with the intensity with which we seek your truth from your Word, we will also be as intensely blessed with understanding. By your Spirit, fill us with a hunger and thirst to consume your Biblical revelation of the gospel of Jesus Christ — that we may be equipped for your service and worship. Amen.

Being an Example

by Marshall Worden

Tuesday
February 20, 2007

Leviticus 9:7—10:20
Mark 4:26—5:20
Psalm 37:30-40
Proverb 10:6-7

Moses then said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD spoke of when he said: 'Among those who approach me I will show myself holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honored.'" Aaron remained silent. -Leviticus 10:3

A number of years ago, I was at a relatively formal and sedate restaurant for a business lunch at which my associates were being rather loud and raucous. I was not being very successful in controlling their bad behavior. Nearby sat a quiet and dignified couple that obviously observed our table. I often wondered what that couple thought of their bible study leader that day.

A few years later while in Portland, Oregon, I was having dinner in a hotel dining room, when in bounds this boisterous and colorful red-haired man who rushes to the table to dramatically greet me for the first time. I was a bit stunned and curious what impression this pastor left on the others attending the evangelism conference.

Christians live in fishbowls. We set examples, sometimes positive and, unfortunately, sometimes negative. My light-hearted stories serve to remind us that we are always representing Christ and that others are observing us. I'm particularly aware of this scrutiny in the workplace, where few of my colleagues are believers. I'm also especially alert to how I seem to new believers; often I disappoint myself. And then there's behavior at church: Am I modeling Christ to others?

In the Leviticus story, God judges Nadab and Abihu harshly for disobedience and for dishonoring him before the people. God expects respect. Our behavior is supposed to honor him.

Young People: Are you being a good example to those with whom you go to school? How can you do better?

Adults: Do your words and actions display Christ-like behavior to those in your workplace and community? What can you change to better honor Christ in front of others?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I need help from you to better represent you with friends and neighbors. I want to honor you in everything I do. Amen.

During Lent, February 21 to April 8, Northminster will be participating in the 40 Days of Community and using the devotional book, *Better Together*, edited by Pastor Rick Warren.

The next issue of the Northminster Daily Devotions booklet, covering April 9 to April 28, will be available on Easter, April 8, 2007 in the Narthex and church office.

If you wish to continue *The One Year Bible* daily Scripture reading program, please pick up a copy of our *One Year Bible Daily Scripture Readings* booklet in the Narthex or church office. This booklet is also available at www.godmorning.org.



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