

2018 NEWSPAPER DEVOTIONAL ARTICLES by Rev. Mike Jones

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January 2, 2018 FINISH WELL

Someone stated that one third of the leaders in the Bible did not finish well. I can think of a few- Moses was a tremendous leader but he disobeyed God by striking the rock at the end of his ministry and was not allowed to enter the promised land. David was a man after God's own heart but he committed adultery at the end of his ministry and family tragedies and national tragedies followed him the rest of his life. Solomon led Israel to great wealth with his great wisdom but toward the end of his ministry his wives' gods stole his heart and his sons ended up splitting the nation. Need I list more?

It does not have to be that way [If one third failed that means two thirds did not!]. Determine, with God's help, that you will run well and that you will finish well as a Christian. Guard your mind, hedge your heart, and set your eyes on eternity. Refuse to live lukewarm and determine to be more than a conqueror through Him who loves us (Set a big Goal that only a Big God can accomplish and expect Great Things).

Satan is a real enemy that must be fought all the days of your life but, praise God, Christ has promised that He would never leave or forsake us. Just don't take your eyes off the goal and stumble within sight of the finish line.

January 3, 2018 BRING YOUR CHILDREN TO CHURCH

Now that you've given your children presents for a moment; consider giving them principles for a lifetime. They will get these life principles from somewhere. I think you should make sure they get them from the Word of God. Here are 4 reasons you should make it a priority to expose your family to sound Bible Teaching each week.

1. GOD COMMANDS IT- "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deut 6:6-7).

2. IT HELPS BUILD A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD - "That from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (II Tim 3:15).

3. IT INSTILLS A SPIRITUAL HERITAGE IN THE CHILD- "When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also" (II Tim 1:5).

4. JESUS LIKES CHILDREN IN CHURCH! "Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the Kingdom of heaven" (Matt 19:14).

Don't just give your Children food, clothes, and toys. Give them Principles that will last for a life time- "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov 22:6).

January 09, 2018

WHEN GOD IS WITH US

Having "God with us" is more than a cradle and a cross. It means God is with us in life!

When we WORK and WITNESS for Him- (Mat 28:19-20) "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, even unto the end of the world." What a joy to know that I do not have to do the work of God alone. One of the great truths I have learned in life is that I can do all things with Christ to strengthen me.

When we WORSHIP Him- (Mat 18:20) "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, THERE AM I IN THE MIDST of them". Church is not just a group of people meeting together to discuss matters of common interest; it is a Holy place where we meet a Holy God and learn of His will for our life. Church is a place to fellowship with God and His family.

Finally, and this is such a comfort, God is with us when we WALK through the Valley of the shadow of death- (Psa 23:4) "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for THOU ART WITH ME; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

Make sure God is with you today.

January 10, 2018

FREEDOM FUNDAMENTALS

One of the messiest times in the Bible was when "Every man did that which was right in his own sight" and individual freedom turned into collective chaos. In our present PC Society where "someone" (no one seems to know who) constantly changes the definition of what is right or wrong it is important to recognize freedom fundamentals.

Freedom carries Consequences. I have the freedom to jump off a building if I so desire but the sudden stop is a killer! Every action has an equal and opposite reaction. Freedom without awareness of consequences is dangerous.

Freedom requires Responsibility. I have the freedom to swing my arm any way I want; but my freedom ends at your nose! Freedom without responsibility becomes anarchy and chaos. Laws and Government were instituted to ensure men assumed responsibility for their Freedom.

Freedom should be combined with Consideration. I have the Freedom to go a week without bathing but it would be very inconsiderate to those around me. That is why the golden rule is still, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you".

Freedom to give up your Freedom could be your most important freedom. The strings on a fiddle only find their music when they surrender their Freedom for the purpose of their life. Jesus taught that if we become servants to Him we would be "free indeed". It sounds like bondage but, in reality, it is the heart freedom that allows our life to be music instead of a mess.

January 16, 2018 NOT KNOWING GOD

Why don't you know what you need to know about God? Why do you know more about dancing cats, disastrous stunt crashes, or divorcing celebrities than you know about the God of the universe? Why do you think that simply knowing there is a God is all you need to know about God?

Did you know that not desiring to know about God can have moral altering consequences? ("And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;" Romans 1:28).

Did you know that if you do not want to receive God's truth then God may take away your ability to know the truth? ("And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12).

Why do you have time and energy to spend hours searching the web for a bargain or a boasting point ("I know something you do not know!") but you can never find time to search the scriptures and learn about God's plan and personality? A thousand years from now, which do you think will be most important?

January 17, 2018 THE METHUSELAH BRIDGE

Did you know that Methuselah is the "bridge" between Adam and Noah; between God's creation of the earth and His "destruction" of the earth by the flood? According to the generational records in Genesis chapter five, there were 1,056 years from the creation of Adam until the birth of Noah. Adam was 687 years old when Methuselah was born and he lived another 243 years after Methuselah was born.

Methuselah was 369 years old when Noah was born and he lived another 600 years. All of this simply shows that Methuselah had the opportunity to spend a lot of time in his early life talking with Adam and then he had a lot of time to talk with Noah in his later life. This means Methuselah got the story of Creation "straight from the horse's mouth" (Adam) and was then able to share that story directly to Noah.

The practice of "passing along" God's word and His works should continue even today. Paul told Timothy: "The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2). It is amazing the impact personal experience and proven application can have on a listener.

Methuselah died the year of the flood as the Bible's oldest man (969 years old). But he did more than exist for many years; he became a great belief bridge builder. Go and do thou likewise.

January 23, 2018 HEARERS

Sometimes what you heard is not what you heard! Several times during my ministry I have been berated by someone about a statement I made that I did not make. One time the person and I listened to the entire audio copy of the sermon and even though the person did not hear the statement attributed to me he still remained firm in his belief that I had said it!

The Bible identifies many kinds of "Hearers": (1) Deaf Hearers ("ears to hear, and hear not" Ezekiel 12:2), (2) Dull Hearers [Think husband reading his paper while his wife talks about her day] ("For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing" Matthew 13:15), (3) Distracted Hearers ("these hear the word and the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful". Mark 4:18-19), and (4) Deflected Hearers [In one ear and out the other] ("they by the way side when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts." Mark 4:15).

The simple truth is that people often hear what they want to hear or expect to hear. Remember that this week when you are building your faith as a "Divine" Hearer ("So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" Romans 10:17.) but you only hear God say, "Neither do I condemn you" and tune out the "Now go and sin no more".

January 24, 2018 BORN AGAIN BENEFITS

When a person is "Born Again" a wonderful life changing process begins. First of all a Born Again person changes from someone dead in trespasses and sin into a new creature who has been "quickened" (given life) by God. The wrath of God against the sins committed by this person has been appeased by the death of Christ and this person is now Justified (Just as if they had never sinned) before God.

But Justification is just the beginning. When a person is Born Again by faith in Christ the Holy Spirit moves into this person and begins to instruct them in how to walk with Christ in a new holy life (Sanctification). The ways and wishes of God become increasingly clear and dear to this child of God as he devotes himself to serving God and daily denies his own sinful selfish ways.

All of this will one day end gloriously when this Born Again child of God is brought into the very presence of God where they will receive a new body and live in a heavenly home. We call this Glorification because all the trials and troubles are over and these believers in Christ now live in the purity and peace of God's glory.

So a Christian is someone who has escaped the penalty of sin, is escaping the power of sin, and will one day escape the very presence of sin. He is now justified by the blood of Christ, is being sanctified by the Spirit of God, and will one day be glorified in the very presence of God. Good stuff being a Christian. I am glad I am one.

January 30, 2018 SOUL HEALING

“I said, LORD, be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee.” (Psalms 41:4)

Amazingly, this is the only place in the entire Bible where the phrase “heal my soul” is found. The word “soul” as used in the Bible means “the living part of a person” and refers to the fact that when God created man He “formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Genesis 2:7). The soul is the eternal part of man that exists even after his fleshly body has ceased to function.

In light of the fact that the eternal abode of the soul is either a place of painful punishment or perpetual pleasure, it should be obvious why people would want God to “save their soul”. You do not have to be a rocket scientist to realize that Heaven is much better than the alternative!

But why would a person cry for God to “heal their soul”? According to the rest of this verse the Psalmist had sinned against God which brought “sickness” to his soul. Now he is asking for forgiveness and cleansing by God so his soul could return to health and happiness.

If life has lost its joy and you seem to simply exist from day to day it may be you, like the Psalmist, need to cry out to God, “Heal my soul”. Life is good when your soul is “well”.

January 31, 2018 SATAN’S STRATEGY

Knowing Satan’s Strategy can be the difference between an abysmal existence and an abundant life. When we first encounter Satan in the Bible he is a sneaky snake using the “divide and deceive” strategy to defeat Eve. Later he deployed the discord strategy to split the Church by encouraging Christians to join him as an accuser of the brethren (Re 12:10). He also uses the doubt strategy to produce powerless people by appearing as an angel of light preaching compromise and confusion (2Cor 11:14). Satan has a plan and it never makes you better.

Satan’s strategy to defeat people today is to make them lukewarm “believers”. Satan does not mind if a person believes in God as long as they do not act on that belief (Even demons believe in God: “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble” James 2:19). Satan does not object if you reverence and respect God as long as you serve the gods of this world (“They feared the LORD, and served their own gods,” 2 Kings 17:33). Satan is not opposed to loaning you to God on Sunday as long as you are back serving him on Monday.

From the beginning Satan has had a strategy to trick you as a snake in order to devour you as a lion. Satan is the bad man with the bad plan and you need to be aware of that.

February 6, 2018

FAVOR OF THE LORD

The Phrase “favor of the Lord” is found only three times in scripture: About Wisdom (“Whoso findeth me (wisdom) findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the LORD” Proverbs 8:35), about Walking correctly with God (“A good man obtaineth favour of the LORD: but a man of wicked devices will he condemn” Proverbs 12:2), and about finding a good Wife (“Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD” Proverbs 18:22).

Today is my 48th anniversary and time to celebrate the “favor of the Lord” shown to me in giving me the lovely Princess Paula to be my wife. Being married to a preacher means she has listened to the same sermons, heard the same jokes, and tolerated (with a smile) constantly being used in illustrations.

She has endured not having a home to call her own (We've always lived in parsonages). She has moved from state to state as God's plan unfolded in my life and ministry. And she graciously accepted always being expected to be a little better, and do a little more, because she was the Preacher's wife.

She is a diamond among jewels, a Princess among ladies, and favor from the Lord to someone as unworthy as her husband. She is indeed a good thing; and it would be a good thing to let your “good thing” know you think she is a good thing also.

February 7, 2018

WORDS

Words are important. They can inspire, insult, or instruct. They can stir deep emotions, encourage or discourage, and even reveal your inner being (“Those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart” Matthew 15:18).

No wonder the Bible declares “Death and life are in the power of the tongue” (Prov. 18:21). And warns us that Words have eternal consequences (“Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment” Mat 12:36).

Realizing this we should pray for our words to be GUARDED (“Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips” Psa 141:3), GRACIOUS (“Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers” Eph 4:29), and FEW (“In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise” Prov 10:19).

Your words display the reality of your religion (“If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain” James 1:26). So pray for the Lord to give you the right words at the right time (“The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary” Isa 50:4).

Remember words matter before you Tweet, Facebook, or otherwise engage in social media; “For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned” Mat 12:37.

February 13, 2018 PEACE WITH PROBLEMS

The problem with problems is that sometimes we let the problems become the problem. Problems are a common and persistent situation (“Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble” Job 14:1) so we need to come to peace with our problems (“I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content” Philippians 4:11) before the problem become a greater problem.

In order to come to peace with problems you should first of all “Call Out” (Pray and ask God for wisdom, guidance, and strength). Praying about problems allows you to join with God in seeing and solving the situation.

Next you should “Cull Out” your problems by learning to differentiate between normal problems and people problems (Do not attack the sale’s clerk because you had a flat tire). You have to “shrug off” normal problems (“I saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all” Ecclesiastes 9:11) and “love off” or “leave off” people problems.

Finally, you should “Chill Out” about your problems (Walk by faith believing you and God can deal with any situation). God will never leave you or forsake you. You will have a problem of a problem if you forget that!

February 14, 2018 PRINCESS PAULA LOVE

While riding with my wife recently, I asked her to share with me four words which she thought best described “Love”. Her answer was so good until I wanted to share it with you. According to Princess Paula Love is: (You know she is a preacher’s wife when she illiterates her points!).

1) Truthful- Love means you are honest with one another. God did not pretend we were perfect so He could love us (“God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” Romans 5:8). Being truthful turns a romance into a relationship enabling the years to draw you together instead of wedge you apart.

2) Trustful- Love means you can depend on one another. Your mate can trust your word when you are together and your actions when you are apart.

3) Thoughtful- Love thinks of the other. It is not self-centered or self-satisfying (I try to never get a cup of coffee without asking my wife if she wants a cup). Love knows the “little foxes spoil the vine” and in the same way the little things can make or break a relationship.

4) Tender- Love is not heavy handed and controlling. It does not treat the person loved as a slave or a child but with respect and sensitivity.

Real Love is the greatest gift God has given man. May you experience and express that gift this week.

February 20, 2018 LOVE'S CHARACTER

Love is the character of God and the characteristic of His followers. Love is the foundation stone for God's commandments (Love God above all and love your neighbor as yourself-Matt 22:35-40). Love is so important until without it your good works are meaningless music (1Cor 13:1) and your claims about a relationship with God are worthless words ("He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love" 1 John 4:8).

But what does Love really mean? Is it simply an emotional high you feel about a project or a person? Is it a romantic relationship that is "more than sex"? What is the meaning and characteristics of real Love and how do we experience and demonstrate this genuine love?

Genuine Love loves without first being loved ("God commended his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" Romans 5:8). Genuine Love is willing to sacrifice everything for the object of its love (John 3:16). And genuine Love is a "walk" as well as a talk-("let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" 1 John 3:18).

Love makes hard choices ("whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth" Hebrews 12:6) and permanent commitments ("I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee" Jeremiah 31:3). Love changes how you see and serve others because genuine Love reaches the very core of your being. May you experience and express that kind of love this week.

February 21, 2018 INSOMNIAC GOD

There are several "not thought of as good" characteristics of God which are seldom mentioned by preachers. God is Jealous- "Thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God:" (Exodus 34:14). God gets angry- "God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day" (Psalms 7:11).

Another seldom mentioned characteristic is that God is an "insomniac"- "God will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep" (Psalms 121:3-4). This means we will never lift a prayer need to Heaven and find a "do not disturb, taking a nap" sign on Heaven's door!

Since we know God is an insomniac this means we should not be one ("It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep" Psalms 127:2). Knowing God holds my breath in His hands (Dan 5:23) and my wellbeing in His heart (Jer 29:11) makes my sleep a lot more peaceful.

I'm glad God is an insomniac. I am also glad our "insomniac God" sometimes suffers memory loss- "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" (Hebrews 8:12). Past not remembered and never forgotten in the present; that is a comforting comforter to curl up with at night.

February 27, 2018 LIGHT SIGHT

A blind man does not need more light; he needs sight! Lighting more candles will not make a blind man see. Taking a blind man to marvelous vistas of beauty or showing him magnificent works of art will not give the blind man sight. It is not a light problem; it is a sight problem.

Jesus could cure physical blindness. I cannot. My "job" is to help people get spiritual sight by telling them Jesus is the Light of the world and they can walk in that light.

Some people cannot see because they will not see ("This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light" John 3:19). These people must see the benefit of sight.

Some people cannot see because they are wearing blindfolds ("He that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes" 1 John 2:11). These people must remove the obstruction to sight.

But all people must believe coming to the light will give them sight ("Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" John 8:12).

People need to be told they are not doomed to the destruction and despair of darkness. They can get sight and walk in the light- and we get to tell them that good news. Glory!

February 28, 2018 SPIT FAITH

Normally spitting on a person is a sign of reproach ("Then did they spit in Jesus' face, and buffeted him" Mt 26:67). On several occasions, however, Jesus surprises people by using spit in their healing process.

People brought a man to Jesus who was deaf and had a speech impediment. Jesus put his fingers into the ears of the man and then spit on his finger and touched the man's tongue. He then prays and the man is healed. Unusual to say the least!

Another time Jesus healed a blind man by spitting on the ground, making a mud ball, and putting it on the blind man's eyes. He then tells the blind man to go wash in a certain pool and he will receive his sight. For another blind man, Jesus spits directly onto his eyes and the man begins to vaguely see. Then Jesus touches the man's eyes and he sees clearly. Strange healing methods!

Most times Jesus simply spoke a word and people were healed. Why did He use spit on these occasions? The common denominator in the "spit" cases is that these people did not approach Jesus for healing until they were brought or urged by others to come. They did not have enough faith to seek Jesus on their own so Jesus had to build their faith in the healing process by using spit as a physical sign. When people had enough faith to come on their own then a simple word was all that was needed for their healing.

Does Jesus need to "spit on you" to get you to trust in Him? Or will you come in faith believing He can and will meet your needs?

March 6, 2018 BUILD YOUR OWN DEVOTION

Many times people read my devotions and think (rightly so), “I could do a better job than that if I were given the opportunity”. Well, here is your chance! Below are several devotional thoughts I gleaned while listening to sermons recently. Take time this week to build them into well thought out devotions. Then take what you have written and share it with family and friends. And may your inspiration and life changing faith far surpass anything I could ever do.

People wanted to be with Jesus for the Food He provided, the Miracles He performed, and the Fame He possessed. When He stopped distributing bread and started talking about the cross the crowd quickly faded. Popularity is fleeting when commitment is proclaimed.

Satan tempted Eve with Forbidden Pleasures (“You shall not eat of every tree of the garden”), False Promises (“You shall not surely die”), and Fleshly Pride (“you will be like God”). These are the same tactics Satan uses to tempt people today.

Far too many people “believe in” Christ instead of instead of asking Christ into their heart. They believe a person (probably divine) named Jesus did great things while on earth and they are willing for Him to forgive their sins, make things better for them, and (way in future) welcome them to Heaven. But they do not want Christ “in them” changing them into a new creature. They do not mind using God but they do not want God to use them.

March 7, 2018 MAKE DISCIPLES

Multitudes of people go through church educational systems each year. They memorize answers about Noah, Jonah, and Paul but they seldom produce Christian change in their community or in society. Maybe that would change if these three objectives were used in Christian Education:

1) Rethink the Thought. If the student only repeats back to you what you have said then they are memorizing the message instead of learning the truth. Jesus did not simply say, “I am the Messiah”; He asked his disciples, “Who do men/then who do YOU, say that I, the son of man, am?” Instruction needed to turn into understanding.

2) Apply the Application. Knowledge in the head that cannot be translated into activity in the life has little use- “Faith without works is dead”. If you want students to be “better people” then tell them what they must do in order to achieve that goal. Almost all of Paul’s writing in the Bible taught doctrine in the first half of the book and duty in the second half- A good objective for teachers.

3) Pass the Principle. If the student cannot pass the lesson on to others, then they have not really learned it yet. It becomes their own when they able to give it away! Jesus did not call disciples to simply congregate. He called them to “Go into all the world and make disciples”.

The world will be different when Churches strive to train disciples instead of simply educate students.

March 13, 2018 YOUR PATH OF LIFE

Most people know my “life verse” is “Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (Psalms 16:11). The three principles in this verse have been my life guide: 1) God has a plan for my life and He will show it to me. 2) The joy my heart craves is found in a personal relationship with my wonderful savior. 3) There is coming a day of eternal rest, earned rewards (God does not forget or overlook what I do), and everlasting rejoicing (when I finally see Him face to face whom so long I have known heart to heart).

Many Christians seem to either not WANT to know or not know HOW to know the “Path of Life” God has prepared for them. Here are some guidelines that will help you find the peace and pleasure of God’s plan:

The Path of life will be revealed (“Thou will show me the path of Life”). Then it must be taken (“Choose ye this day whom you will serve”). It must be followed (“Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left” Isaiah 30:21).

And, finally, it must be completed. Paul said, “I have finished my course”. Do not quit walking the path until you are inside Heaven’s door!

March 14, 2018 TRUST AND CONFIDENCE

When I visited and preached in India I realized “Faith” was a word I used a lot but it was not always understood the way I intended by the person to whom I was talking. It soon became evident that the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian is not faith. Both of them have faith. The difference is in the object of their faith.

A Greek definition of “Faith” used by Jesus is “Trust and confidence that springs from your belief in God”. I had to read that definition several times before I grasped the importance of the “God” who is the source of your trust and confidence. That is why God’s first two commandments were 1) Make me your number one God and 2) Do not make up any other gods.

The best illustration I can give for this is a trapeze artist. In order for a trapeze artist to perform as he should he must have trust and confidence that when he releases his hold on his trapeze and launches out into the air, the person on the other trapeze can (and will) catch him. It is an irreversible decision that is profoundly dependent on trust and confidence in someone else.

It is not enough to have “faith in god”. Your “Trust and Confidence” when you let go and launch out into eternity must be in the True God. Trusting the “gods of this world” will not end well when you are reaching for another world.

March 20, 2018 DEATH DETAILS

Before we celebrate the resurrection we should remember that death precedes resurrection. Here are some death details we need to be aware of.

Your Coffin may already be waiting for you in the local Mortuary! (James 4:14) Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.

You can make changes before death but not afterwards- (Ecclesiastes 11:3) If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth: and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be.

Blaming others will not take the blame from you when you face God's Judgment- (1 Corinthians 3:13) Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. (Romans 14:12) So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

Being wrong about eternity will make you eternally wrong- Those who have died shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation (John 5:29).

You are headed for a head on collision with death. Thinking about getting right with God will not make you right with God. Think about that!

March 21, 2018 SERIOUSNESS OF SIN

In writing about the tremendous pain and suffering that Christ endured for us, Isaiah the prophet explains why sin is so difficult to control and so dangerous to allow to continue unchecked- "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." Isaiah 53:6

First, Sin is serious because it is PART OF OUR NATURE- "All we like sheep have gone astray". You do not teach sheep to wander, you must provide a shepherd to guide them. Man is born with a sin nature and will go astray at the first opportunity; and every opportunity after that. Love for family and respect for the law defers man from many open acts of sin but the sin nature remains within.

Second, Sin is serious because it is AN ACT OF REBELLION- "We have turned every one to his own way". Not only is it our nature to do wrong, it is our will to satisfy self above all else. We want to BE God; not SERVE God. We prefer wasting our inheritance in the far country over living under the authority of the father's house. We are determined that rules will not rule us.

Finally, Sin is serious because of THE PRICE OF ITS DEBT- "The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all". The wages of sin is death. Death is not simply ceasing to exist in this life. Death is eternal separation from God, who is life, in the place of punishment designed for those who rebel against God.

The good news is that Jesus paid the price of this debt on Calvary's cross. We can now come to God and receive pardon for past sin, strength for present living, and the promise of eternal bliss simply by Faith in the sacrifice of Christ. Glory!

March 27, 2018 EASTER ANTICIPATION

As a Pastor, I did a great deal of counseling. One of the first rules I learned was not to think ahead of the person with the problem. A person's mind operates much faster than their mouth (I know someone will have something to say about that!). A Counselor must not allow his mind to jump to conclusions about what he thinks the person is going to say and become so engrossed in how he is going to answer until he misses what the person really says. When that happens, the Counselor begins to counsel his own perception instead of the real problem.

Easter is a wonderful time of year but it is so familiar until if we are not careful we will anticipate instead of celebrate and miss Easter's life changing glory. The sermon about Jesus dying for our sins is so common until many in the congregation listen with one ear and make their meal plans with the other!

Easter reminds us that Jesus did not come simply to die for our past sins. He was also raised from the dead so we could be born again and experience eternal abundant life. Resurrection turns the wonder of redemption from our past mistakes into the glorious story of a new life down here with the added benefit of a Heavenly home up there.

Do not miss the glory and wonder of Easter. What a sad thing it would be if we were so busy anticipating the preacher's sermon until we missed God's message!

March 28, 2018 DYING DECLARATIONS

Dying Declarations have long been considered more powerful than everyday conversation. Knowing that the person uttering the words will soon leave this life and has nothing to gain (or lose) gives extra importance and impact to their final declarations.

Thus, the seven dying declarations of Jesus on the cross are worthy of our thoughtful and earnest consideration. These declarations are normally grouped into three categories:

Pardon Declarations: 1) Offering hope and forgiveness to a thief dying beside Him (Verily, I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise). 2) Calling on God to forgive those who had so cruelly hurt and crucified Him (Father forgive them; for they know not what they do).

Parent Declarations: 1) Passing responsibility for Mother Mary's care to John (Woman, behold thy son! Behold thy mother!). 2) Crying to His Heavenly Father as He wrestled with the horror of separation for sin's payment (Eli, Eli, Lamasabachthani? [My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?]).

Personal Declarations: 1) His thirst as a man (After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst). 2) His task declared completed (When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished) 3) His Trust in God's care even in death (Jesus cried with a loud voice, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost)

Dying could not stop His love; it magnified it! Soon even death would learn it could not hold Him. What a Savior! No wonder so many bow at His feet in awe and admiration.

April 3, 2018 HE IS ABLE

Two blind men came to Jesus and asked to be healed. Jesus said to them, "Believe ye that I am able to do this?" Their healing was based on their faith in His ability. Easter should build our faith as it reminds us of the tremendous abilities of our Great God.

- 1) He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him. Heb 7:25
- 2) Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling. Jude 24
- 3) He is able to succour (Assist) them that are tempted. Heb 2:18
- 4) And being fully persuaded that, what he has promised, He was also able to perform. Rom 4:21
- 5) God is able to make all grace abound toward you. 2 Cor 9:8
- 6) I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day. II Tim 1:12

The two blind men responded to Jesus, "Yes, we believe that you are ABLE" and were healed by the power of Jesus' touch.

If we believe in God's ability then soon we will see God's power at work in our lives ("Now unto HIM THAT IS ABLE to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that worketh in us"). This may enable us to give sight to eyes blinded by sin. And wouldn't that make a great day!

April 4, 2018 DARK WEEKS

Easter is over and we know that Jesus "hit the game winning homer in the bottom of the ninth" but there were several times during the game when things looked pretty bleak. Remember that as you deal with life this week.

During the great victory celebration of Palm Sunday the Disciples basked in the adulation and adoration of the multitudes. Little did they know that the coming week would find them struggling in the darkness of life's changing circumstances as the crowd's cries changed into, "Crucify him, crucify him" and they watched their hoped for Messiah die on a cross.

Jesus's week included betrayal by a coworker (Judas); abandonment by men He had mentored for three years (Disciples); denial by one of His closest associates (Peter); scorned by his nation (Give us Barabbas and crucify this man); mocked, slapped, and spit on by his jailers; and "forsaken" by his Father as He shouldered sin's death debt. In spite of all of this Jesus confidently committed His spirit to God's care; and we all know how well Easter week ended!

Easter taught the disciples that trusting God in the dark is as important as walking with God in the Light. This truth helped transform back wood's fishermen into world changing disciples who would willingly go to jail rather than cease preaching the glorious gospel of Christ. And I pray it will help you confidently face any dark weeks that come your way with faith that the game is not over as long as Jesus is on your team.

April 10, 2018 FIVE FATAL MISTAKES

I am dumbfounded when sinners choose to live without God's freely given pardon and His life changing partnership. I have been a Christian since I was fourteen and it is "the best thing since peanut butter"! It just "boggles my brain" that sinners do not constantly badger Christians until someone tells them how they can also enjoy eternal abundant life. Seriously, who would want to chance Hell when they can walk with God now and live with God for eternity?

Here are the five most common mistakes Sinners make about salvation:

Feeling you can delay ("behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" 2Corinthians 6:2). Focusing on Saint's mistakes ("every man shall die for his own sin" 2 Chronicles 25:4). Fearing you will not be able to be "perfect" or "hold out" ("And an highway shall be there...the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein" Isaiah 35:8). Desiring Fleshly pleasures above divine service (You like sin and you do not want to give it up for Christian living).

Finally, and fatally, failing to come to God via Faith in God's plan (Trying to use your good works to replace God's Grace). God made salvation easy; you should not make it hard. But remember, it will be hard if you do not try- "He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy" Proverbs 29:1).

April 11, 2018 GET A GOAL

A wise man once said, "He who aims at nothing usually hits it". Successful People are Goal Setters. They make a Decision to accomplish something, have a Desire to accomplish something, and have the Discipline needed to turn their "Dream" into reality. If you hope to accomplish anything of value in the coming months you need to Get a Goal.

What do you want to accomplish? If you do not know where you are going then it is hard to get there! For example, the goal of Christians should be to introduce someone to Jesus, instruct them in Christian living, and induct them into God's army. A church where people just show up will soon be shut up!

How do you expect to accomplish your goal? People do not plan to fail; they simply fail to plan. Jesus put it this way, "Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch?" (Luke 6:39). Fumbling in the dark in a hard way to find light.

Who / What is preventing you from accomplishing your goal? Most often the obstacle is you. If it is someone or something else find out how to get over, under, around, or through the roadblock. Do not let an excuse be an excuse: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13).

Finally, when do you expect to see results from your goal? (A goal with no end usually ends the goal). So set a goal to get a goal and marvel at the great things a great God can do with and for you.

April 17, 2018 TIRED OF GOD

God exhorts us not to be weary IN the way (“let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” Galatians 6:9) but He also warns us about becoming weary OF the way (“But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; but thou hast BEEN WEARY OF ME, O Israel. Thou hast not brought me the small cattle of thy burnt offerings; neither hast thou honored me with thy sacrifices. I have not caused thee to serve with an offering, nor wearied thee with incense. Thou hast bought me no sweet cane with money, neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices: but thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities” Isaiah 43:22-24).

It is a sad thing when we are so tired of God until God gets tired of us! But that is exactly what happened in these verses as the worship of God changed from adoration and sacrifice into the weariness of simply showing up and putting up with God.

The catastrophic result of this “weariness” was a dead prayer life (“Thou hast not called upon me”), failure to honor God with regular service (“Nor honored me with thy sacrifices”), and, most important of all, causing God to be so weary of their lukewarm living and lack of true worship until He had to punish them instead of bless them (“Thou hast made me to serve with thy sins”).

When God is not part of our life we tend to leave God out of our life. And that is a dangerous place to be!

April 18, 2018 6,464

Christian witnessing has been described as one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. In technical terms Christian evangelism seeks to lead someone to acknowledge their sinful condition, repent of the acts and attitudes keeping them from a relationship with God, accept by faith the payment Jesus Christ made for their sins, and then commit themselves to daily living God’s plan for their life.

The Bible gives five descriptions of people who seek to do evangelistic work. 1) Athletes- “He who wins souls is wise” (Prov 11:30). “Wins” here means “to capture a trophy” and describes the effort, energy, and singlemindedness needed to accomplish your soul winning goal. 2) Fishermen: God calls us to be “fishers of men”. Sometimes we cast a net into the sea (evangelistic services) and sometimes we use a single fishing pole but we always fish; not simply “play in the water”. 3) Firemen- “Snatching men out of the fire” (Jude 23). It is a serious responsibility that we are willing to put our life on the line for. 4) Farmer- He sows seeds everywhere realizing birds will eat some and weeds will choke some but he continues to plant, plow, and wait on God to give the increase so he can see fields white unto harvest. 5) Ambassador for Christ (2Cor 5:20). These represent Christ in their life and speech so people see the love of God manifested and want to serve Christ.

The worldwide death rate is 6,464 deaths per hour. What are you doing to help prepare them for eternity?

April 24, 2018 MAIN MESSAGE

Christians must be reminded from time to time that the Main Thing must always be the main thing because anything less than the Main Thing does not get the Main Thing done. (If you do not know “Church Speak” the Main Thing is winning people to faith and fellowship with Christ). Here are several ways you can help keep the Main Thing the main thing this week.

Declare your Faith: Share how your relationship with Christ has changed your life. Speak about how your relationship with Christ has not only changed you but how it has also changed your family and friends. Tell it, text it, phone it, or write it. Use social media for the gospel instead of gossip (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat). Christians have never had more opportunities to share Christ.

Demonstrate Christ: Jesus said a cup of cold water given in His Name would not lose its reward. Find ways this week to show Christ without words. Help the needy, comfort the bereaved, bless total strangers with unexpected act of goodness. Genuine love can soften the hardest heart.

Donate to Christian causes: Support missionaries and organizations that go where you cannot go and who minister beyond your ability. Multiply your ministry by helping others do their ministry.

Most people talk about things they love, loathe, or lament. This week make it your goal to talk about your Lord! After all, that is the Main Thing.

April 25, 2018 MY MOMENT

I believe God selected me to live in this moment of time on purpose. God could have created me at any time but He chose for me to exist now so my life could make a difference at this moment: “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee” (Jeremiah 1:5). My job is not to make excuses but to make a difference.

I believe my moment requires me to be different from the world if I am to change the world: “I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil” (John 17:15). I want to be in touch with our culture but I do not need to “wallow in the mud” in order to give someone a helping hand out of the ditch.

I believe that if I do what I can, where I am, with what I have then my moment will make people’s lives better: “Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk” (Acts 3:6). I do not need to have a lot to do a lot if I partner with God.

This is my moment. I can seize it and rejoice, or miss it and regret, but my moment is just for a moment and then my moment will be gone.

May 1, 2018 CHOOSING A CHURCH

Everyone should be in God's house every week if work and health permit. But how are you to choose where to attend? Remember that many times friends and "fiancées" will develop from the people of the church you attend so you need to consider your family as well as your faith. Here are some helpful guidelines.

What is their FAITH? Have they accepted the Word of God as their rule of faith and practice or is the ministry based on the personality and performance of a special person? Do they teach you how to meet God, experience God, live for God, and prepare to spend eternity with God? If you attend this church for five years will its teachings and worship have the potential to make you and your family the kind of people God expects you to be?

Who are their FOLLOWERS? Will you "fit in" with the worship style and character of the congregation? A church is a body of believers. Will you fit into the "skin" of this body?

How will you be FED the Word of God? Different people learn in different ways but if you attend a church for a month and your family has never discussed the message of the Sunday message then you are probably getting the husk of the wheat instead of the Bread of Life.

A church is where the dead are raised to life and the living are prepared to die. Your choice is important but not choosing is not an option.

May 2, 2018 MARY'S MOTHER

Was she dead?? Was she uncaring and unconcerned? Was she so ashamed of her unwed pregnant daughter until she disowned her? We really have no way of knowing because the Scriptures are completely silent on the subject of Mary's Mother. We don't know her name, her family background, or anything about her character (In case you're interested, we also know nothing about Mary's Father except his name (Heli) and that only because Luke lists the genealogy of Mary when Jesus began his ministry).

Whatever the reasons, we do know that when Mary was told by the angel that she would be the mother of the Christ child she immediately went to see her cousin Elisabeth with the good news instead of seeking the comfort and care of her mother. [A good choice because when these two mothers-to-be of divinely predicted children met, the baby leaped in the womb of Elisabeth and she was filled with the Holy Ghost; while Mary uttered her marvelous Magnificat of praise to God].

People do not always have the "perfect mother" in their life. Mothers can get caught up in drugs, drink, divorce, or debauchery just like anyone else. If God has called you to a difficult task in life just remember that even if mother is not there for you, God is. Trust Him to provide an "Elisabeth" for you who can share your heart and help heal your hurt as you prepare to be the magnificent Mary God intended you to be.

May 8, 2018 STAR SERMONS

Scientists presently believe there are around 2 trillion galaxies in the universe with each galaxy containing an average of 100 million stars. Our Great God made these stars (“God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also” Genesis 1:16) and knows each of them by name (“God telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names” Psalms 147:4). Now that is a great God!

No matter what you believe about creation there always has to be a “power” of some kind which made the beginning the beginning. And those of us in the know know that this beginning creation power was God (“All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made” John 1:3). No wonder heavenly citizens proclaim, “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created” (Revelation 4:11).

All around the world people look up and see God’s “Star Sermons” (“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard” Psalms 19:1-3). They show God’s greatness and tell us that the God who made the stars can handle our human situations also (“Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?” Jeremiah 32:27). So let God make you a “star” today!

May 9, 2018 GOD’S WONDER WOMEN

At a time in history when women were abused, misused, and excluded from “places of power” God saw fit to include the names of four women in the prestigious genealogical line of Christ (Matt 1:1-17). I call them God’s “wonder women”.

Tamar (vs 3)- She schemed to have a child by her father-in-law, Judah, in order to continue the line of promise. She was willing to give up her reputation (and possible her life!) in order to obtain what was rightfully hers.

Rahab (vs 5)- A Gentile who decided to hide God’s people and trust God’s plan; even if it meant going against her own nation. Her courage and conviction saved her (and her family) and changed a “harlot” into a hero of faith (Heb 11:31).

Ruth (vs 5)- A Moabite woman from an “outcast nation” who trusted in Naomi's God for supply and direction. Her faith led her to leave home and friends and eventually (wonder of wonders!) become part of the royal line of King David.

Bathsheba (vs 6)- Defiled by a King who then had her husband killed. Yet she rose to a place of honor and privilege to show us God can take even broken vessels and make them vessels unto honor.

Many mothers think of themselves as “plain Janes” instead of “wonder women”. But when God is in their life, and faith is in their heart, then God can do wonders through them which can be world changing!

May 15, 2018 FAITHFUL

I was recently at a church where a youth class presented an excellent program on the “Fruits of the Spirit”. It was obvious the teacher and the students had put a lot of effort and energy into their study and into this presentation. One young person talking about the spiritual fruit of “Faithfulness” stirred me to examine how faithful I was.

Here are some areas of faithfulness I considered in my own life. Faithful in conversation (“But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil” Matthew 5:37). Faithful in Conduct (“Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity” Matthew 23:28). Faithful in Charity (“If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors” James 2:8-9). And faithful to Church (“Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” Hebrews 10:24-25).

The entire youth service this Sunday was a great blessing and I am glad God was faithful to stir me to be more faithful! May I learn that lesson well.

May 16, 2018 EARTH'S HEAVENLY IMPACT

Have you ever wondered how events on earth impact heaven? I know God's attention is “divided” between Heavenly projects and His people's prayers (“the eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry” Psalms 34:15) and I know God has to make sure His bird feeder is kept full (“Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them” Matthew 6:26).

I know the glory of gospel preaching (“which things the angels desire to look into” 1 Peter 1:12) and the marvel of God using the Church to build His Kingdom are of interest to heavenly beings (“To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God” Ephesians 3:10).

I know my tears are recorded in heaven (“put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?” Psalms 56:8) and I know there is a joyful celebration when a person accepts Christ as their savior (“I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth” Luke 15:10) [Which I assume is followed by the erecting of a “new home construction” sign on heavenly boulevard (Jesus said, “I go to prepare a place for you” John 14:2)].

So your sorrow, your salvation, your church work, and your prayers impact Heaven. Remember that today.

May 22, 2018 SPIRITUAL BATTLES

The spiritual battles between God's people and Satan's non-human forces are real ("we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" Ephesians 6:12). This means you need more than human knowledge and human ability if you are to survive these battles.

Thankfully, God provided that help when He sent the Holy Spirit to "replace" Christ ("These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" John 14:25-26).

This means believer should daily walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:16) and continually be filled with the Spirit (Ep 5:18). The Spirit working in our life produces Christian character in the nine fold fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23); it provides power for evangelism (Acts 1:8) and boldness for witnessing (Acts 4:31); and it provides victory over fleshly failures (Gal 5:10).

The Holy Spirit's control of our life also provides the education of the Spirit's teaching (Jn 16:13; I Jn 2:27), the edifying of true praise and worship (Ep 5:18-20), and the effectiveness of a proper prayer life (Rom 8:27). So do not face life's battles alone. Allow the Holy Spirit in you to work through you and become more than a conqueror!

May 23, 2018 ISLAND BOOK

Several men were sitting around drinking coffee when one of them asked this question, "If you were stranded on a desert island and could have only one book with you, which one would it be?"

The first man said, "I believe I would pick the complete works of Shakespeare." The next man said that was a good choice but if he were stranded with only one book then he would want the Bible. Around the table it went as one book or another was named.

Finally, it came to the last man in the group. After a little thought he said, "If I were stranded on a desert island and I could have only one book I would want it to be a book on 'How to Build a Ship!'" Good choice. When you're stranded on an island you're not nearly as interested in the philosophy of life as you are in building a boat!

That's the beauty of Christianity. Jesus taught tremendous principles but he did so in very practical everyday situations. Jesus did not just give a lecture on caring for people's needs; He borrowed a boy's fish and bread and fed everyone lunch!

The Bible says the earth is hurtling toward destruction. You can spend your time debating the philosophy of, or excuses for, your sin or you can get aboard the Life boat God has provided. Just don't get caught with a book in your lap instead of Christ in your heart.

May 29, 2018 FAITH'S FEAR

Some people say that genuine Faith should remove all fear. They have their Bible verses mixed up (It is "Perfect Love" that casts out fear I John 4:18). Noah's Faith in God's prediction of the flood "moved him with fear" (Heb 11:7) so that he prepared an ark to the saving of his family and the condemning of the world. The Faith some people talk about would have allowed Noah to believe in the flood without making any preparations for it; and the results would have been disastrous!

Moses' Faith in God's call on his life caused him to leave the riches and security of Egypt "not fearing the wrath of the king" in order to lead God's people to the Promised Land. This same fear of God above the fear of man was used by Jesus to call people to abandon Satan's hold on their life and come to Him for forgiveness of sins ("Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" Matthew 10:28).

Thankfully, there is a Faith promise which Jesus said should alleviate future fear, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). Real Faith shows us real dangers to avoid but it also hides us in the clef of the Rock where we are safe and secure during the storms- Glory!

May 30, 2018 HE SIXTH STAGE

When faced with a tragic situation people normally go through five stages: Denial (This cannot be happening to me), Anger (Why is this happening to me), Bargaining (What can I do to keep this from happening to me), Depression (I am hopeless to keep this from happening to me), and Acceptance (I must deal with the fact that this is happening to me). Because of Christ, I add a "sixth stage" to this list: Anticipation.

Anticipation is a person arriving at the realization of God's Romans 8:28 declaration- "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." This person anticipates, by faith, that God is going to take this bad thing and combine it with other situations and circumstances to make something good come from it.

My personal example: when my wife was assaulted and almost killed I survived the first five stages but struggled with the anticipation stage as I waited and wondered about the good coming from this extremely bad "bad". But I trusted God's plan, leaned on God's promises, and, today, I marvel at the great good that has come out of this horrible bad.

Hurt really does hurt and simply accepting the hurt just dulls the hurt. Anticipating how God is going to take that hurt and "work it together" for good changes everything. A truth I know by experience.

June 5, 2018 KING COPY

And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites: And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them: That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left: to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel (Deuteronomy 17:18-20).

When God gave instructions to Israel concerning the duties of a king He listed an unusual requirement. The King was instructed to personally write a copy of the Law (Possibly the book of Deuteronomy) and then read his written copy each day in order to learn to reverence God and obey His commandments. [It is interesting to note that the favorite book of the King of kings (Jesus Christ) was Deuteronomy (He quoted more from this book than all other scripture combined)].

If you are really serious about incorporating the word of God into your memory and into your life then you might want to do a “kingly thing” and take time to write a book of the Bible and then spend time reading your copy. You will be amazed at the result!

June 6, 2018 GOOD ENOUGH IS NOT GOOD ENOUGH

Two men went to the Temple to Pray. One looked up toward God and told God what a great man he was. The other would not even lift his eyes as he called on God for mercy. Jesus said this second man was the man God approved. That is surprising when you look at the “religious” qualifications of the first man.

The first man, as a Pharisee, was good in the eyes of the average church member, good in the eyes of his neighbors, and good in his own eyes. Everyone just thought he was a “good old boy”.

Not only was he Good, he also believed in God (It is good to remember that the devils also believe in God and tremble). This belief in God caused him to pray to God, come to church regularly, tithe all he had, and even fast twice a week.

The second man (Publican) came trusting God’s Grace instead of his own Goodness when he cried out to God for mercy. The result; he got the “good stuff” while the good man got God’s condemnation.

The Pharisee was good enough to meet the standards of society and even of the church but, sadly, he found that the world’s applause does not guarantee God’s approval. Being good enough is not good enough when God calls us to come trusting His Grace.

Lesson for us- Do not get caught boasting instead of believing.

June 12, 2018 CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD MAN

“Receive us; we have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man.”
(2 Cor 7:2)

Second Corinthians is the most personal of the writings of Paul. He shares more of his heart, and his heartaches, in this letter than in any of his other writings. In the middle of this book, as he defends himself against some character accusations, he gives this short definition of the characteristics you should look for in a godly man.

1) He wronged no man- A good man does not deliberately do harm to others. He seeks to do them right instead of wrong!

2) He corrupted no man- Not only had Paul not done physical harm to others, he had never sought to lead them to live wrong. Every man (whether they want to believe it or not) is a man of influence (Bad or Good). He should be extremely careful about the attitude and actions he leads others to emulate.

3) He defrauded no man- One translation of this is “we have cheated or taken advantage of no one”. A man of character is someone you can trust. His word is his bond. He is someone you can rely on to give you the best advice, and the best price, possible. He is not out to “get you”; he wants to help you.

Do you know men of this character? Are YOU one?

June 13, 2018 PATTERN PEOPLE

Dads are “pattern people”. Many young people grow up rooting for the same sports teams as their dad, driving the same brand car as their dad, and learning to treat people the way they see their dad treat people. If I were a dad here are some “pattern people” I would want to emulate so that if my children followed my pattern things would work out well.

I would want to be a friend of God like Abraham. Can you imagine how exciting it would be to be such a close friend of God until He would not make a major decision without contacting you about it first! (Gen 18).

I would want to be near to the heart of God like David (Acts 13:22). I would want to sense the heart of God so closely until I broke forth in song and praise about Him regularly.

I would want to find Grace in the eyes of God like Noah. In the midst of a wicked world that constantly tempts and tries me I need to know that God (and my family) look beyond my faults as we work together to build a refuge from life’s storms.

Finally I would want to walk with God like Enoch. What a joy it would be to have a daily walk with God that was so close and personal until one day God would say for me to come home to His house and stay forever!

Dads, your children follow you. Who do you follow?

June 19, 2018 3 CHEERS FROM GOD

Do you need some good words of cheer today? Three times in Scripture God tells us to “Cheer up” and, in doing so, He deals with every aspect of our life.

1. Cheer up about your Past Sins—“Behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee” (Mat 9:2). The Past convicts and condemns us. Jesus proclaims, “Cheer up; I am able to forgive your sins and deal with your past.”

2. Cheer up about Present Problems –“Straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid” (Mat 14:27). Sometimes we get lonely or sick or problems beset us on every hand and we feel like our “boat” is going to sink. Jesus declares “Cheer Up; I will walk on water in the midst of your storm to get to you!”

3. Cheer up about your Future Prospects – “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Depressing news, divisive politics, and desperate times trouble us. Jesus says, “Cheer up, I’ve got this. You are on the winning side with me!”

God wants to cheer you up. Let Him!!

June 20, 2018 CAKE MIX

It didn’t work. No matter how hard I tried, it simply did not work. I tried it slow and I tried it fast but it made no difference. I even let someone else do it for me but the results were the same. Frankly, I was discouraged. Here I was putting forth my best efforts and still not achieving anything. Could it be someone had misled me?

You know what I’m talking about. Probably all of you have tried the same thing. It’s this business of baking a cake. I read the directions on the cake mix box as diligently as possible but simply reading the directions never got the cake baked!

I know that’s the way it’s supposed to work because I’ve been associated with Churches for a long time. Week after week they meet and read the directions on the "cake mix" with a great deal of enthusiasm and effort. They sing about them, study them, and even pray about them. But week after week they walk away disappointed because no matter how diligently they read the box they never get to eat cake.

Some radical person suggested actually following the directions instead of simply reading them. Didn’t he know this would produce a mess as ingredients were mixed together plus the extremely unpleasant business of putting it in a hot oven and waiting for it to bake?

No, the best course is to remain neat and trouble free. That means we stick with simply reading, talking, and singing about the directions on the box. Still, it sure would taste good to have cake sometimes.

June 26, 2018 PARKING LOT SPARROWS

“Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?” (Mat 6:26).

I was sitting in the car reading my Bible chapters while my wife did some shopping. When I paused for a minute to reflect on the verse in Matthew about how God takes care of sparrows I looked into the parking lot and saw a group of sparrows feeding among the cars. At first I thought this was just a marvelous example of what God was saying but then I began to really look at the situation.

Someone had decided they wanted to change a field or a forest into a shopping center. They cut all the trees, removed all the underbrush, put down clay as a base, and then paved over the land. Everything that could possibly be done to keep the sparrows from finding food had been done. Yet, as I looked at these sparrows pecking along on that parking lot I realized that, in spite of overwhelming circumstances, God was still taking care of them (Glory!).

Are you faced with circumstances that seem too hard for God to handle? Rest easy, God specializes in doing the impossible; “hard” doesn’t even break Him out in a sweat! If He can feed sparrows in a parking lot He can take care of you also. Trust Him today.

June 27, 2018 CHANGE THAT CHANGES

If you are tired of losing at living then you can cry about it; or make the changes necessary to live an Abundant Life. Just remember, if you do what you have always done you will get what you have always gotten. Here are some changes that, if implemented, will produce positive change in your life.

Change the way you look at God. God must be the God of your life; not just the savior, helper, and friend you pal around with and pray to. It is absolutely wonderful that God walks with us and works with us but when God made rules He always made the first rule all about Him [God’s first commandment- Have no other God before me. Jesus’ first commandment: Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,...]. When you make God GOD in your life it will change your life.

Change the way you wait on God. You are weak because your devotion time is running your mouth instead of waiting before God. Stop trying to tell God how to run the universe and spend time allowing God to tell you what a mess you are making of your life and how He can fix your life so the changes in you can help change the world!

God changes people into “new creatures” who can be more than conquerors because Jesus died for them and the Holy Spirit lives in them. It is a change that changes. Accept nothing less.

July 3, 2018 WARNING TOKENS

Sometimes Christians need to put up "warning tokens" in their life to jog their memory about the attacks used by Satan to defeat and destroy them. These daily reminders would sound the alarm about Satan the roaring lion seeking whom he may devour and enable them to keep their guard up against his attacks.

Start with a little red tongue pasted on your bathroom mirror. That will remind you that Satan is a liar; as well as the accuser of the brethren. When he attacks you with his lies or attempts to get you to help him by gossiping about other people you would remember to seek and speak the truth.

Then you could paste a little upward pointed arrow in the corner of your TV. This would remind you that Satan is constantly trying to discourage you with world news or corrupt you with the propaganda of regular programs. The upward pointed arrow would remind you to choose or change channels so you would not be tarnished by society's conversation and conduct.

Finally, put a Bible on the kitchen table. That's to remind you that God's word is more important than food. It is also a reminder that your family needs to spend time TOGETHER in the word of God each day. Otherwise, when you send them out into Satan's territory they may be ambushed by a sneak attack.

Remember it is better to build a fence at the top of the mountain that need to build a hospital at the bottom!

July 4, 2018 THIS DAY

And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations (Exo 12:14).

Today we observe the day the United States declared itself a free and independent nation. It is a day to rejoice and celebrate the freedom we have as citizens of such a great nation. Sure, we have problems in America but I have been privileged to visit many countries around the world and I would rather be a citizen of the United States than a citizen of any other country on this planet!

This is the way the Children of Israel must have felt when God gave them their "Declaration of Independence". After years of bondage and slavery in Egypt they were finally set free to start a new life in the long awaited Promised Land.

No longer would they be slaves to the whims of cruel masters. Now their work would be for their benefit and they would get to enjoy the "fruit of their labor" in peace and freedom. No wonder the Lord told them to set aside this day as a perpetual joyful memorial!

Every person needs to have a "this day" in their life; a day when Christ sets them free from the bondage and blight of sin and issues them a "passport" to the soon coming Heavenly Kingdom. A day when they receive pardon, peace, and partnership with God. A day they will joyfully celebrate for eternity- Glory!

July 10, 2018 LIFE PURPOSE

Everyone needs a life purpose to give purpose to their life. Without a purpose to guide them and a goal to accomplish, people become depressed, disillusioned, and defeated. If you do not know where you are going any road will get you there; but you may not like being there when you arrive there!

So here are a few ideas to help “kick start” your life purpose.

1) Purpose to grow your life: Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and Man (Luke 2:52). In our language, Jesus grew mentally, physically, spiritually, and socially. Do likewise.

2) Purpose to share your life: Make it your goal to make a friend and be a friend (A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: Proverbs 18:24). Built bridges instead of walls by not hiding on your phone or in your “nest”.

3) Purpose to improve your life: Live like a Child of God in all of life’s circumstances. Do not allow the conduct of the crowd to shape you. Determine to be better, talk better, and act better.

4) Purpose to enjoy your life: “God giveth us richly all things to enjoy” (1 Timothy 6:17). Do not ignore life’s problems; simply trust God to give you victory over anything so you can rejoice in everything!

He who aims at nothing has no problem hitting it! You are better than that. See how wonderful life will be when you find and live God’s purpose for your life.