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July 1, 2024
Learning to Pray

Readings for today: Lamentations 1-2, Psalms 28 (video intro) (audio reading)

Most of the Christians I know struggle to some extent with their prayer life. Some feel deeply inadequate. Some feel like they just go through the motions. Some feel like their prayers bounce off the ceiling. Some feel like they don't have the right words. Some feel they are unworthy. There may be any number of feelings we associate with prayer, sadly too many of them are negative. There may be any number of reasons we give as to why our prayer life suffers, sadly too many of them are just not true. Here's the reality, friends...God loves to hear His people pray. God loves it when we babble like infants before His throne. God loves it when we tell him all the good, bad, and ugly of our day. God loves it when we come to Him like a teenager, excited about something new in our lives. God loves it when we come to Him in the midst of suffering when all our hopes and dreams have been shattered and the life we've spent so much time and energy building has come crashing down around us. God loves it when we celebrate and thank Him for the blessings He pours out on our lives. God loves it when we bring Him impossible problems and insurmountable obstacles. Most of all, God loves it when we express to Him the deepest desires and deepest sorrows of our hearts. God loves it all.

There is no one way to pray. There is no language of prayer per se. You can use whatever words you like. God is far more interested in you being real than He is in you offering up empty platitudes or cliches. Perhaps that's why I love the Psalms so much. Recently, I've taken to reading the daily Psalm out loud as a prayer. I've tried offer it almost as a closing prayer to my devotional time each day. It's been rich and fruitful to say the words out loud. To take my time and reflect on each and every phrase. To allow the Holy Spirit to direct my attention to particular words or phrases or ideas in the text. If you haven't tried it before, I invite you to take up this spiritual practice. Consider the Psalm we read yesterday...Psalm 27...

"The Lord is my light and my salvation — whom should I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life — whom should I dread? When evildoers came against me to devour my flesh, my foes and my enemies stumbled and fell. Though an army deploys against me, my heart will not be afraid; though a war breaks out against me, I will still be confident. I have asked one thing from the Lord; it is what I desire: to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, gazing on the beauty of the Lord and seeking him in his temple. For he will conceal me in his shelter in the day of adversity; he will hide me under the cover of his tent; he will set me high on a rock. Then my head will be high above my enemies around me; I will offer sacrifices in his tent with shouts of joy. I will sing and make music to the Lord. Lord, hear my voice when I call; be gracious to me and answer me. My heart says this about you: "Seek his face." Lord, I will seek your face. Do not hide your face from me; do not turn your servant away in anger. You have been my helper; do not leave me or abandon me, God of my salvation. Even if my father and mother abandon me, the Lord cares for me. Because of my adversaries, show me your way, Lord, and lead me on a level path. Do not give me over to the will of my foes, for false witnesses rise up against me, breathing violence. I am certain that I will see the Lord's goodness in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart be courageous. Wait for the Lord." (Psalms 27:1-14 CSB)

What stands out to you as you read it out loud? What words jump out at you? What phrases bring you comfort and peace? How is God speaking to you through the text? For me, I love the opening lines. Always have and always will. They remind me of God's protection when I am afraid. God's provision in the midst of difficult times. They remind me God is setting a table for me even as I dwell in the

midst of my enemies, a table full of abundance where my cup overflows. Most of all, they remind me with God on my side, there is nothing I cannot do, no obstacle I cannot overcome, no problem I cannot solve, no issue I cannot talk out, no person I cannot forgive, no enemy I cannot serve. Or consider the Psalm for today...Psalm 28...

“Lord, I call to you; my rock, do not be deaf to me. If you remain silent to me, I will be like those going down to the Pit. Listen to the sound of my pleading when I cry to you for help, when I lift up my hands toward your holy sanctuary. Do not drag me away with the wicked, with the evildoers, who speak in friendly ways with their neighbors while malice is in their hearts. Repay them according to what they have done — according to the evil of their deeds. Repay them according to the work of their hands; give them back what they deserve. Because they do not consider what the Lord has done or the work of his hands, he will tear them down and not rebuild them. Blessed be the Lord, for he has heard the sound of my pleading. The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped. Therefore my heart celebrates, and I give thanks to him with my song. The Lord is the strength of his people; he is a stronghold of salvation for his anointed. Save your people, bless your possession, shepherd them, and carry them forever.” (Psalms 28:1-9 CSB)

Do you ever feel like God isn't listening? Do you ever feel like God is deaf to your cries? Does God seem silent at times? Let God know! Pray like David! He too felt those same feelings at times and he pleaded with God to answer his cries. He lifted his hands before the holy sanctuary. He reaffirmed his trust in God's eternal nature and character. And as he prayed, God's comfort eventually came. Bless the Lord for He has heard the sound of my pleading! I don't know about you but I often find myself in this position and I have to remind myself continually to wait for God's response. It will come if I am willing to wait on Him.

Friends, prayer isn't magic. It's not about getting the words right or the inflections down or speaking in some kind of pious language that no one really can understand. It's simply about you bringing your most authentic, sinful, broken self before the Lord and letting the grace and peace that flows from His presence comfort and heal you.

Readings for tomorrow: Lamentations 3, Psalms 29

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July 2, 2024
Prayers of Lament

Readings for today: Lamentations 3, Psalms 29

(audio reading)

There are many categories to prayer. There are the praises we sing to God like the ones in Psalm 29 today. “Ascribe to the Lord, you heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due His name; worship the Lord in the splendor of His holiness.” (Psalms 29:1-2 CSB) Again, these are good words to pray out loud if you are struggling to pray or just learning how to pray. These words rightly honor God for who He has revealed Himself to be. There are prayers of confession like the one listed in Lamentations 3:40-42 CSB, “Let’s examine and probe our ways, and turn back to the Lord. Let’s lift up our hearts and our hands to God in heaven (and say): We have sinned and rebelled; you have not forgiven.” These are harder words to pray because they force us to do some honest self-reflection. They force us to come face to face with our complicity in the sin and evil of our world. They force us to understand we are not the victim; we are the perpetrator. And it’s not because God doesn’t want to forgive us for our sin, it’s because we’ve refused to confess it before Him. If we do not offer it to Him with a humble and open heart, He will not let our sin pass. There are prayers of comfort like the one listed in Lamentations 3:57-58 CSB, “You came near whenever I called you; you said, “Do not be afraid.” You championed my cause, Lord, you redeemed my life.” God is so good. He draws near to those who draw near to Him. He comes to comfort not to condemn. These are just a few of the many categories of prayer found in today’s reading.

The one I want to draw our attention to may be the hardest of them all. Prayers of lament are deep cries of grief. They almost must be wrested from the deepest, darkest places of our souls. They are prayers that arise when we are at our most vulnerable, our most desperate. Remember, Jeremiah has seen the destruction of his beloved city. He has watched his leaders ignore his warnings, resist Babylon, and pay a terrible price. He has seen the horrors of war firsthand. Think about the images we see on the news today from Gaza or Ukraine. They are almost impossible to watch. This is why Jeremiah pens the Book of Lamentations. It’s a raw, firsthand account of his own experience as he wrestles with God over why such harsh judgment had to fall. He has endured the wrath of God in all its unbridled fury. He has walked in darkness and experienced starvation and suffering on a level we cannot imagine. He has wept more tears than he thought possible. He has felt trapped and harassed and abused. He has lost all hope. This is the null point of the prayer. This is the kind of prayer you pray when you hit rock bottom. A prayer from the gut. A prayer with no filter. God welcomes such prayers.

Biblical lament doesn’t end in despair and even in the midst of Jeremiah’s pain, you can see glimpses of hope break through. However, it’s important not to make more of these than Jeremiah himself does. They bear but fleeting mention in the book. But they are important. Lamentations 3:22-26 CSB, “Because of the Lord’s faithful love, we do not perish, for His mercies never end. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness! I say, “The Lord is my portion, therefore I will put my hope in him.” The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the person who seeks him. It is good to wait quietly for salvation from the Lord.” Yes, Biblical lament acknowledges hope but doesn’t forget despair. It actually lays them side by side. And this is what makes such prayers so powerful. They fully acknowledge the desperation of the human condition and fully acknowledge the holiness and faithfulness of God’s character. In this way, they are almost “incarnational” when you stop to think about it.

Readings for tomorrow: Lamentations 4-5, Psalms 30

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July 3, 2024
Prayers of Remembrance

Readings for today: Lamentations 4-5, Psalms 30 (audio reading)

It's okay to let God know how you really feel. It's okay to recite back to God all you have gone through. Of course He knows it already but it's good for us to say out loud to Him. It's good for us to share our heartbreak and hurts with Him. God wants a dialogue not a monologue. He doesn't want to have to read your mind or rely on His omniscience to know what's happening in your life. He wants a relationship and in relationships, we share everything.

Lamentations five is a prayer for restoration and it begins with an interesting turn of phrase. "Lord, remember what has happened to us. Look, and see our disgrace!" (Lamentations 5:1 CSB) Why does Jeremiah pray for God to remember? Has God forgotten all that's happened? Is God absent-minded? Is He forgetful? Surely not, right? Of course God remembers everything. He knows everything from beginning to end. He sees all and knows all. Past, present, and future are always laid out before Him so what is Jeremiah actually praying for here? Whenever someone prays for God to "remember" in the Bible, they are actually calling on God to act. To do something in concert with His character and the covenant promises He's made to His people. Lord, remember what has happened to us. Lord, see our disgrace. And (implied in the text) do something about it. Restore us. Renew us. Make us righteous again in your sight. This is the heart of the prayer of remembrance. It's calling on God to act in accordance with His will and character.

Look at how Lamentations 5 ends, "You, Lord, are enthroned forever; your throne endures from generation to generation. Why do you continually forget us, abandon us for our entire lives? Lord, bring us back to yourself, so we may return; renew our days as in former times, unless you have completely rejected us and are intensely angry with us." (Lamentations 5:19-22 CSB) Jeremiah looks around sees all Israel has suffered and he asks God if it's enough. Have we suffered enough for our sins? Have we been punished enough for our iniquities? Have we paid for our crimes? If so, bring us back to Yourself, O God, so we may return. Renew our days as in former times. Unless it's not enough. Unless you are still righteously angry with us. Unless there is still time to be served and a price yet to be paid.

The glorious thing about these verses for Christians is that we know God has remembered. He has acted in human history to bring us back to Himself. He has acted to renew and restore us to our rightful place. The price has been paid. The time has been served. The punishment has been dealt out. All through Jesus Christ. Because of Jesus, we have nothing to fear. We are not completely rejected. God is no longer angry with us. We are at peace with Him forever.

Readings for tomorrow: Ezekiel 1-4, Psalms 31

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July 4, 2024
Meeting God

Readings for today: Ezekiel 1-4, Psalms 31 (video intro) (audio reading)

God shows up in the most unlikely of places. Though we tend to associate Him with beautiful cathedrals and magnificent churches, God makes His dwelling with the humble and lowly of heart. Ezekiel was such a man. Born to be a priest, he was carried off into exile with the other leaders of his people. He was a contemporary of Jeremiah and must have heard his preaching. Jeremiah often preached to the ruling class in Jerusalem. He may have even known the man personally. But now Ezekiel finds himself in exile. He lives with his people in a refugee camp. And he spends days down by the local water source, pondering all that happened. He must have felt the deepest of despair. He must have felt separated from God. He must have felt abandoned and alone and afraid. That's when God shows up.

It's a striking vision. One that has inspired all kinds of fantastical art throughout the centuries. Ezekiel sees a vision of God on His throne coming to be with His people in exile. And as stunning as the creatures are with their multiple heads and wheels within wheels, what would have struck Ezekiel the most is God's faithfulness. After all, Ezekiel had been trained from birth that God's dwelling place was in the Temple. The Temple was holy ground. The Holy of Holies in the Temple is where God's glory dwelled. There was no precedent for God leaving the Temple. No historical record of God coming and going from the most holy place. All of Israel assumed that if one wanted to meet with God, one had to show up physically at the Temple and have the priest intercede for them. But now Ezekiel is in the worst possible place in the world. If you haven't been to one, refugee camps are some of the worst places on earth. He's living in abject poverty on the brink of starvation. There is nothing holy about his condition. No sacred ground for him to stand on. And yet, God is willing to meet him there.

Now think about Jesus. God could have sent Jesus to be born of a virgin in a palace in Jerusalem. God could have sent Jesus to emerge bodily from the Holy of Holies at the Temple. God could have done any number of things to reveal Himself to His people but what did God do? He came to a poor couple living in a backwater town in rural Israel. He met them in a common home and his first crib was manger among the animals. His attendants were shepherds from the fields. Despite what you may have been taught, the wise men didn't show up for a couple of years. In Christ, God was willing to meet us in the midst of everyday life in the most ordinary of circumstances.

Now think about your life. If your life is anything like mine, God often shows up in the most unlikely of places. He comes at the most unexpected of times. Just when I think I've reached my limit or hit rock bottom, I find Him there waiting for me. I don't have to go to some special place nor do I have to touch some sacred relic to find communion with Him. I simply open my heart to Him. I open His Word and He speaks. I obey His commands and I sense His abiding presence.

Readings for tomorrow: Ezekiel 5-8, Psalms 32

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July 5, 2024
The Justice of God

Readings for today: Ezekiel 5-8, Psalms 32 (video intro) (audio reading)

God is just. It's a fundamental attribute of His divine character. He will not let the guilty go unpunished. He will not let evil escape judgment. He will not let those who commit crimes get off. He is fiercely committed to enforcing His Law. And, in the abstract, I think everyone expects God to be just. We want Him to judge the guilty. We want those who commit great evil to get their due. We just don't ever want it to happen to us.

God's justice is a common theme in the prophets. God's people have been stockpiling sin for generations. God has graciously withheld His righteous judgment to give them ample opportunity to repent but eventually justice must have its day. Ezekiel lives in such a time. Israel is finally going to pay for her sins. She is going to pay for all the abuse of power, arrogance and pride, violence, oppression, exploitation, and idolatry she has committed. There is no question of her guilt. God sees all and knows all. Not a single crime escapes His notice. His ledger is full and detailed. As harsh as it may seem, they've earned all they're going to get. The destruction of Jerusalem. The suffering and death of so many at the hands of the Babylonians. God refuses to relent until every last sin is paid for in full.

I recently came across a thread on social media from a well-known, very progressive rabbi. He spends a lot of time harshly critiquing the Christian faith. One of his main critiques is the lack of justice in our faith. He simply believes a God who forgives is unjust. He is not worthy of worship. Yes, he knows atonement theology. He knows we believe Jesus became our substitute and took God's judgment on Himself. He just simply cannot bring himself to believe it. In fact, he gets angry when anyone presses him on it. He believes such an act makes God unrighteous. How could a just God punish the innocent in place of the guilty? What he misses, of course, or simply cannot accept, is the fact that Jesus is God Incarnate. God Himself taking on human flesh and becoming one of us in order that He might stand in our place. God didn't just choose some random person to pay for the sins of the world. He didn't sacrifice a prophet or good, moral teacher in our place. He laid down His own life to satisfy the demands of divine justice so that He, in turn, might show us mercy. That's what the gospel is all about and it continues to be a "stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles."

I know it's not easy to read through passages like the one we read today. The blood and violence and righteous anger of God is disturbing. And yet, it should remind us yet again of the unbelievable sacrifice Jesus made on our behalf. It should fill our hearts with gratitude for all Jesus has done for us. Jesus took my place. Jesus stood in my stead. Jesus paid the price I had earned. He endured the punishment I deserved. He did this so that I might be washed clean, set free, and live with Him for all eternity.

Readings for tomorrow: Ezekiel 9-12, Psalms 33

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July 6, 2024
The Presence of the Lord

Readings for today: [Ezekiel 9-12](#), [Psalms 33](#) [\(video intro\)](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

It is hard for us to fathom the national catastrophe that befell Israel. Harder still for us to understand the depth of their pain and suffering. Living as we do in the world's most powerful nation, we cannot begin to grasp what it would be like to watch your entire way of life destroyed. However, all of that pales in comparison to the tragedy Ezekiel sees in his vision today. All the destruction. The loss of life. The famine and disease. And none of that would have even come close to touching the inconsolable grief he felt as he watched the Lord leave His Temple.

From the moment God indwelt the Tabernacle in the wilderness, Israel had never been alone. They enjoyed His protection. They enjoyed His provision. He gave them victory after victory. Established them in the Promised Land. Took up residence in Jerusalem once they built the Temple. Over time, the Israelites began to take His Presence for granted. In fact, there was a sense in Jeremiah and Ezekiel's time that the Lord was somehow "trapped" in the Temple. They believed they had the Lord caged. He had ceased to be their god and now became a pagan totem. A magic talisman that kept them from evil. This is why they stubbornly refused to leave Jerusalem when Jeremiah called them to submit to Nebuchadnezzar. They falsely believed as long as they had the Lord locked down in His Temple they could never be defeated.

Imagine their shock when Ezekiel relates his vision of the Lord leaving the Temple. Departing from the east gate. Rising above the cherubim where He normally sat. Heading out of the city that bore His name. Imagine their fear as their one hope departs, leaving them alone for the first time since their days in Egypt. It's difficult for us wrap our minds around simply because we believe God is everywhere all the time. We hold onto the promise that God is always with us. We trust He will never leave us or forsake us.

But what if the Lord is leading us into exile? What if the Lord is leading us into a season of suffering? What if the Lord is seeking to refine us and sanctify us? Are we willing to go where He leads? The reality is we often take the Lord for granted as well. We too act as if He's "trapped" in a relationship with us. As if God is "bound" by His unconditional love for us. We falsely believe our thoughts, attitudes, and actions don't matter. We falsely believe we can reject holiness as a way of life. We falsely believe God's primary goal is our personal happiness. Nothing could be farther from the truth. God does love us with an everlasting love. God does love us unconditionally. Nothing can snatch us out of His hand. Yes. Yes. And yes. But make no mistake, God is not "bound" to us. He is not "trapped" in this relationship. He is not co-dependent on us nor does He allow our whims, our feelings, our desires to shape His will for our lives. We sin at our own risk. We run ahead of God at our own peril. We stubbornly refuse to follow Him to our own detriment.

Thankfully, Ezekiel sounds a note of hope. Presumably, God could have chosen to leave His Temple and head in any direction. However, He went east. East to where the exiles lived. East to Babylon. East to find His wayward children. East to be with them in captivity. East to comfort them in their diaspora. East to provide for them and make them prosper. East to join them so they never would be alone. Friends, God's glory doesn't need a Temple or a house made with human hands or a sanctuary covered in gold. The Bible declares that we are temples of the Holy Spirit! Our hearts have become the residence of God Himself! This is why Ezekiel declares, "Therefore say, 'This is what the Lord God says: Though I sent them far away among the nations and scattered them among the countries, yet for a

little while I have been a sanctuary for them in the countries where they have gone.’ “Therefore say, ‘This is what the Lord God says: I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.’ “When they arrive there, they will remove all its abhorrent acts and detestable practices from it. I will give them integrity of heart and put a new spirit within them; I will remove their heart of stone from their bodies and give them a heart of flesh, so that they will follow my statutes, keep my ordinances, and practice them. They will be my people, and I will be their God.” (Ezekiel 11:16-20 CSB)

Readings for tomorrow: Ezekiel 13-15, Psalms 34 (No devotionals on Sundays)

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July 7 , 2024 (No devotionals on Sundays)

Readings for today: [Ezekiel 13-15, Psalms 34](#) (video intro) (audio reading)

July 8, 2024

Covenant Faithfulness

Readings for today: [Ezekiel 16-18, Psalms 35](#) (audio reading)

A few weeks ago, I stood with a couple before their community of family and friends as they exchanged their marriage vows before the Lord. I encouraged them, as I always do, to live in covenant faithfulness with each other. To build the kind of deep intimacy where nothing is hidden and everything shared. To hold nothing back and have no secrets. To be naked and unashamed before the Lord as they build their life together. Of course, we all know many marriages fail to live up to this high standard. Life in this world has a way of pulling us apart even from those we love most. Pressure, distractions, not to mention the ever present corruption of sin all conspire to separate what God has joined together. The same is true in our relationship with Him.

Ezekiel 16 is one of the rawest, most graphic chapters in the Bible. It depicts God as the faithful husband who finds His bride bleeding and broken and abandoned to die in the wilderness. He raises her. Feeds her. Comforts her. Blesses her. She flourishes under His tender loving care. Eventually, He weds her in a beautiful ceremony. Covering her nakedness with His garment of love. (Think about what we read in the Song of Solomon and compare it to this chapter.) For a time, the couple is happy. She is content with her husband. But soon, she begins to take His love for granted. Her eye begins to wander. She gets distracted. She chases after other gods. She commits spiritual adultery. The revelation Ezekiel is given in this chapter are graphic because they depict the utter heartbreak and anger of God. Like any husband, He is angry and feels betrayed by His bride's unfaithfulness. I've walked with many husbands and wives over the years through marital counseling and there is nothing quite like the betrayal of adultery. It is brutal and almost impossible to come back from. But Israel doesn't just commit adultery once. She makes a pattern of it. Going from the Egyptians to the Assyrians to the Babylonians. She offers herself in covenant faithfulness to whoever seems to be the strongest and most powerful. God, her husband, will not be mocked. He judges her for her unrighteousness. He judges her for her unfaithfulness. He judges her for breaking His heart over and over again.

Like any husband, God has every right to reject Israel forever. She has broken the covenant and He could choose righteously to walk away. But God is faithful. He is faithful to His vows even when we are not. He is faithful to His promises even when we push Him away. He is faithful to His love even when we reject it. So what does God, our great Husband, do? Listen again to His words from Ezekiel 16, "For this is what the Lord God says: I will deal with you according to what you have done, since you have despised the oath by breaking the covenant. But I will remember the covenant I made with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish a permanent covenant with you. Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed when you receive your older and younger sisters. I will give them to you as daughters, but not because of your covenant. I will establish my covenant with you, and you will know that I am the Lord, so that when I make atonement for all you have done, you will remember and be ashamed, and never open your mouth again because of your disgrace. This is the declaration of the Lord God." (Ezekiel 16:59-63 CSB) Yes, God will not give Israel a pass. He will not simply overlook her sin. But in an act of unbelievable faithfulness, He is the one who will make atonement for them. He is the one who will re-establish His covenant with them. He is the one who will bring them back into His home, back into His heart. What great faithfulness! There simply are no words.

Readings for tomorrow: Ezekiel 19-21, Psalms 36

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July 9, 2024
Quiet Time with God

Readings for today: [Ezekiel 19-21, Psalms 36](#) ([audio reading](#))

One of the first “spiritual disciplines” I learned as a Christian was how to have a “quiet time” with the Lord. I was in college. I had just come to saving faith in Jesus Christ. I was just learning what it meant to follow Jesus and some older, wiser believers taught me the importance of spending time with God every single day. When I started, I could only muster about 10-15 minutes but gradually over time that number grew to an hour or so a day. I’ve been doing it for almost thirty years at this point. Sometimes I miss a day but it’s rare. It’s become a part of my natural, daily rhythm to life much like eating, drinking, working out, etc.

Why spend time every day with God? I think the Psalmist says it best, “How priceless your faithful love is, God! People take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They are filled from the abundance of your house. You let them drink from your refreshing stream. For the wellspring of life is with you. By means of your light we see light. Spread your faithful love over those who know you, and your righteousness over the upright in heart.” (Psalms 36:7-10 CSB) We spend time with God to take refuge under His wings. When we are anxious and afraid and worried about life, God is there for us. He spreads His wings over us. He spreads His faithful love over us and we are encouraged. We spend time with God to break free of the “scarcity mindset” that has so many of us enslaved. We are reminded and actually experience His abundance. We are given an eternal perspective that helps us be grateful for all we have been given rather than focus on what we may think we lack. We spend time with God to be refreshed. To be renewed. To be restored. We drink from the refreshing stream of His Spirit. We drink from the wellspring of His life. We bask in His light.

I recently returned from vacation in Puerto Vallarta. As much as I love the mountains, I love the beach as well. Whenever my wife and I can get away, we try to go somewhere close to an ocean where it is warm and sunny. We vacation well together. We pretty much shut it down. We spend our days sleeping in, reading books, being quiet, and being outside as much as possible. The sun was out almost the whole time we were in Mexico. Every day we got to spend hours basking in its rays and I was reminded once again what it’s like to be in the light of God’s presence. We got swim in the ocean and I was reminded once again what it’s like to be immersed in God’s love. We ate and drank in abundance and I was reminded again of God’s faithfulness to us. It is endless. It is boundless. It is matchless. Perhaps most of all, I was reminded that not very many people get to do what I do and that gives me perspective. We talked to our taxi driver on the way back to the airport as we left and he told us he only gets about three to four days of vacation a year and he tries his best to spend it with family. He feels so blessed to have that time. He doesn’t feel any lack at all and his joy was contagious.

Friends, this is what it means to live your life in the presence of the Lord and a quiet time every day helps us get back in touch with this deep truth on a regular basis. If you don’t already, let me encourage you to make the time every day to just “be” with the Lord. No agenda. No checklist. No tasks. Just sitting quietly in His presence. Reading His Word. Praying. Listening. Letting yourself sit under the shadow of His wings and enjoy the fullness of His love.

Readings for tomorrow: Ezekiel 22-24, Psalms 37

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July 10, 2024
Standing in the Gap

Readings for today: [Ezekiel 22-24, Psalms 37](#) ([audio reading](#))

“I searched for a person among them who would repair the wall and stand in the gap before me on behalf of the land so that I might not destroy it, but I found no one.” (Ezekiel 22:30 CSB)

These words jumped off the page today. Perhaps it’s because I’ve been praying more fervently for our nation recently or perhaps it’s because my heart has been burdened for all the violence that exists in our world today in places like Gaza and Ukraine. Perhaps it’s because I am heading to South Sudan in a few weeks, into a community where starvation and malnutrition is rampant. Perhaps it’s because I’ve spoken to many over the last few months who feel so hopeless and helpless. Perhaps it’s because I’ve been reading the New York Times and Wall Street Journal almost every day. Whatever it is, I find myself crying out to God over all that is happening in the world today and this verse is Lord’s answer to me. God is searching for people who will work for the repair of the world and stand in the vulnerable places on behalf of the weak and oppressed and least resourced and least reached so that God’s judgment will be turned aside. God is searching for intercessors like Moses and Joshua and David and Deborah and Samuel and Ezekiel. People who will faithfully pray on behalf of those cannot for some reason. Faithfully pray for those are struggling and afraid. Faithfully pray for those who are far from God. Faithfully pray for those in positions of authority and influence in our world.

Friends, this is the role of the church. Jesus calls us the “salt of the earth.” Salt, in ancient times, acted as a preservative. It would dissolve into meat in order to keep it from spoiling. It would be used to keep things from becoming rotten. The church is called to do the same. To intercede regularly and often on behalf of the world to keep it from becoming rotten. To keep it from spoiling completely. To keep it from being destroyed by the righteous judgment of God. But far too often, the church is complicit in furthering the rot. The church blesses sin rather than confronts it. The church indulges sin rather than call it out. The church makes no distinction - just like Israel’s priests made no distinction - between that which is holy and that which is common. That which is sacred and that which is profane. And the world is suffering as a result. God calls His church a “chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a people for God’s own possession.” (1 Peter 2:9) What is the role of the priest? To stand in the gap between God and His people and intercede for them. Make atonement for them. Cry out to God on their behalf. At the same time, our role is to represent God to the people. To instruct them. Confront them. Challenge them. Encourage them. To teach and train them in righteousness.

The only hope for our communities, our cities, our nation, and our world is for the church to fulfill her high calling. She must dedicate herself to the repair of the world and stand in the gap in fervent, regular, faithful prayer on behalf of the land so that it will not be destroyed. She must engage in the honest work of self-examination, confess her own sins, and allow the Spirit to cleanse her of all unrighteousness so that she can discern between that which is holy and that which is common and lift up the sacred over the profane. God’s righteous judgment must begin at the church house before it can move to the White House or the court house or the legislative house.

Readings for tomorrow: Ezekiel 25-27, Psalms 38

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July 11, 2024
The Sin of Rejoicing at Another's Fall

Readings for today: [Ezekiel 25-27, Psalms 38](#) ([audio reading](#))

As Christians, we do not celebrate the struggles of others. We do not rejoice at their fall. We do not take secret pleasure in their pain. Ezekiel makes it clear that people who do such things will be judged. Either as individuals or as nations. The nations surrounding Israel watched them struggle and eventually fall into ruin. They rejoiced when it happened. Threw parties. Danced in the streets. They even took the opportunity to pile on for their own revenge. Ammon. Moab. Seir. Edom. Philistia. Tyre. All of them are guilty. All of them are judged. Perhaps Tyre most harshly. “Who was like Tyre, silenced in the middle of the sea? When your merchandise was unloaded from the seas, you satisfied many peoples. You enriched the kings of the earth with your abundant wealth and goods. Now you are wrecked by the sea in the depths of the waters; your goods and the people within you have gone down. All the inhabitants of the coasts and islands are appalled at you. Their kings shudder with fear; their faces are contorted. Those who trade among the peoples scoff at you; you have become an object of horror and will never exist again.” (Ezekiel 27:32-36 CSB)

Our world today is full of people who are looking to tear others down. Social media is a dumpster fire of hot takes and snap judgments and misinformation, all designed to take down those with whom we might disagree. Even Christians have gotten in on the act. There is a certain subset that seem to delight in perpetuating conflict and hate and anger. It's baffling to me. Reminds me of a small group I once led of middle school boys. It was several years ago now. We were discussing what it means to be made in the image of God. Male and female. Black, white, and brown. Rich and poor. Abled and disabled. Young and old. Gay, straight, bi, and trans. Every human being bears the signature stamp of their Creator. We talked through the implications for each of them as they started school. Many of their peer groups had already formed. They knew who was popular and who was not. They knew the kids who were struggling and the kids who were successful. The kids who had tons of friends and the kids who were lonely. We flipped over to Galatians 3:26-28 where the Apostle Paul challenges us to move beyond our social categories and divisions and embrace one another in Christ. We then discussed how we could put this into practice. Each boy gave the name of a fellow student who they struggled with. Someone hard for them to love. Someone they may have made fun of or even bullied at one point. Their homework was to approach that student and find a way to love them in the name of Jesus. Would that we could do the same.

The reality is when we rejoice in wrongdoing or celebrate the fall of others or take pleasure in another person's pain and heartbreak, we are operating under the influence of the evil one. He loves watching God's people tear each other apart. He loves creating divisions and factions. He loves to isolate and attack and devour and destroy. As Christians, we must resist this temptation. We must resist the temptation to label others as our enemies. We must resist the temptation to make fun of others at their expense. We must resist the temptation to wound and hurt and pile on when someone's down. Instead, we must lift them up. We must encourage. We must stand at their side. Show compassion. Grieve with them and for them. Our hearts must break with their hearts. This is what it means to be Christ to others. To show Christ to others. To love Christ as He has loved us.

Readings for tomorrow: Ezekiel 28-30, Psalms 39

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July 12, 2024
A Kingdom that Never Ends

Readings for today: [Ezekiel 28-30, Psalms 39](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

It is a healthy thing to reflect on the end. It is healthy to think about how fleeting life is and how quickly our days pass. It is a healthy to think about what happens after we are gone. Nothing we have is truly ours. Nothing we achieve truly lasts. Nothing we accomplish truly remains. That may sound depressing but it's true. For example, tomorrow I am heading up to western Nebraska to bury my father. He comes from a small town where our family has lived for generations. I am related on some level to almost everyone in the cemetery. We have put a lot of hours into the genealogical work and know who's connected to whom but even so, most of them are just names on a headstone. Whatever work they put in has been largely forgotten. Whatever defined their lives has been largely lost. Again, it's a humbling reminder of how quickly memories fade after one or two generations.

So why is this a good thing? It keeps us from claiming too much credit for ourselves. Consider what God has to say to the nation of Egypt in our passage today. Part of His righteous judgment against them comes because they believe too highly of themselves. They believe they created the Nile. They believe they were the masters of their own destiny. The makers of their own empire. But God confronts them and reminds them who is really in charge. As powerful as ancient Egypt was, building monuments that lasted thousands of years and establishing a kingdom that lasted several dynasties, they are barely a blip on the radar screen of history. This is why the Psalmist says, "Lord, make me aware of my end and the number of my days so that I will know how short-lived I am. In fact, you have made my days just inches long, and my life span is as nothing to you. Yes, every human being stands as only a vapor. Yes, a person goes about like a mere shadow. Indeed, they rush around in vain, gathering possessions without knowing who will get them." (Psalms 39:4-6 CSB) It helps us hold onto things loosely. It keeps us from becoming too tied to the things of this world. Even the legacy we leave should be held with open hands.

God is the only constant. God is the only Being that never changes. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever and that's a very good thing. Human beings come and go. At best, our life spans might reach eighty or ninety years. Kingdoms rise and fall. Empires may endure for hundreds of years. But all things eventually come to an end. This is why we store up our treasures in heaven. This is why we keep our mind focused on things above rather than things below. This is why we set our heart on Christ and His Kingdom for it will never end.

Readings for tomorrow: Ezekiel 31-33, Psalms 40

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July 13, 2024
Watch Out!

Readings for today: [Ezekiel 31-33, Psalms 40](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

What does it mean to be a watchman? To put it another, more ancient way, what does it mean to be my brother or sister's keeper? To watch out for those I love. Watch out for those I live among and around in my neighborhood. Watch out for those I work alongside. Watch out for those in my church family. Watch out for strangers or even my enemies. What does it mean to take up the responsibility to speak the truth in love? To call out wrong and work to set things right? To lift up the fallen? Comfort the broken? Confront the prideful and arrogant? Forgive those who hurt me? Reconcile with those I find myself in conflict with? What does it mean to fulfill God's call to speak for Him to those around me with a desire to see them turn from their self-centered ways and turn back to Christ? What does it mean to be given God's Word to speak to a specific people in a specific place and time? To be able to look out on the culture at large and see the coming judgment? To speak to it not in anger or outrage but in tenderness and compassion and love? To lay aside my natural prophetic zeal and instead kneel in sackcloth and ashes and weep over the sins of God's people? To plead with them to return to the Lord with their whole hearts?

Ezekiel was a faithful prophet. He understood his call from the Lord clearly. He was to speak God's Word to God's people. Only God's Word. Nothing more. Nothing less. Nothing else. He was to speak God's Word as boldly and clearly as possible. He was to speak with full conviction and hold nothing back. In so doing, he is creating the conditions whereby God's people might respond in repentance and humility. It's important to note that Ezekiel was not responsible for the results. He was only responsible for the warning he was given to provide. So Ezekiel's success or failure in ministry didn't ride on how the people responded. Those who listened to his words were saved. Those who rejected his words were destroyed. Ezekiel was only held responsible to speak. Truthfully. Honestly. Openly. Transparently. "As for you, son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel. When you hear a word from my mouth, give them a warning from me. If I say to the wicked, 'Wicked one, you will surely die,' but you do not speak out to warn him about his way, that wicked person will die for his iniquity, yet I will hold you responsible for his blood. But if you warn a wicked person to turn from his way and he doesn't turn from it, he will die for his iniquity, but you will have rescued yourself." (Ezekiel 33:7-9 CSB)

Tomorrow I will go to bury my dad. We will arrive in the cemetery at the graveside as a family to pay our final respects. Even as I say goodbye, I am reminded of the ways God made me a watchman for my father. How many times did I share the gospel with him over the years? How many times did I have to confront him on his selfish behavior? How many times did I suffer alongside him as he battled addiction? How many times did I forgive and reconcile with him? Thankfully, God was faithful. He used my words and my example and my encouragement to bring my father to faith near the end of his life. It was a great reminder of the power of the watchman. I wasn't responsible for my father's decision but his blood would be on my head if I did not share God's Word with him.

I think about all I see happening in our world today. There is so much anger, disdain, hatred, and fear. So much corruption and selfishness and injustice and oppression. So much frustration and anxiety and despair. What the world needs now more than ever is for the people of God to take their stand and speak God's truth in love for those who are lost and wandering in the darkness. The world needs us and God is inviting us to take our place in His great Kingdom work to bring the good news of Jesus to the ends of the earth.

Readings for tomorrow: Ezekiel 34-36, Psalms 41 (No devotionals on Sundays)

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July 14 , 2024 (No devotionals on Sundays)

Readings for today: [Ezekiel 34-36, Psalms 41](#) (audio reading)

July 15, 2024
Faithful Shepherds

Readings for today: [Ezekiel 37-39, Psalms 42](#) (audio reading)

Throughout this section of Ezekiel is the constant refrain of restoration. God promising to restore His people. He will make them one again. No longer will they be divided or fractured. He will gather them from the nations where they have been scattered and He will make His dwelling with them again. He will renew the covenant He made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He will be their God and they will be His people. He will leave none behind. He will search for them as long as it takes. He will prove Himself to be the faithful Shepherd who gives His life for His sheep. I love this about our God. He is true to His Word. He never leaves us or forsakes us. He relentlessly pursues us with His faithful, steadfast, loyal love until the day we die.

You and I are called to do the same for the people in our lives. I think about my father. We buried him on Friday in our family cemetery in a small town in western Nebraska. For decades, I pursued my father. I shared the gospel with him over and over again. I confronted him on his addiction and sin. I challenged him to surrender his life to Christ. I prayed for him regularly. I set boundaries on him when he was difficult. I refused to let him get away with manipulation or deceit. And God honored my prayers. He eventually wore my dad down and my dad gave his life to Jesus. I think of another person I am pursuing right now. A dear friend whose life has fallen apart. Divorced. Lonely. Isolated. Anxious. For months I've been pursuing this person. I've shared the gospel with them over and over again. I've confronted them on their sin. I've challenged them to repent and turn to Christ. I pray for them regularly. And though I have yet to see a change, I trust God to honor my prayers. I think of the church I serve. I feel a strong responsibility to be a faithful shepherd to the people God has entrusted to my care. It breaks my heart when some of the sheep stray or wander or leave. It further breaks my heart when some of the sheep self-destruct or engage in all kinds of self-harm physically, emotionally, mentally, and relationally. There's a part of me that wishes I could cut ties at times but that is not God's call on my life. He has called me to engage in a relentless pursuit of the sheep no matter how far they scatter or how much effort it takes to track them down and bring them back home.

I think of another shepherd I know. He was given charge over thousands of sheep. Tragically, this shepherd decided to use the sheep to feed himself. His ego. His pride. His self-image. Hundreds, if not thousands, of his sheep scattered. They were left wounded and broken and isolated and anxious and discouraged all over the face of the earth. They became vulnerable to those who would seek to prey upon them. I confronted this shepherd. I used passages like the one we read yesterday from Ezekiel 34 to help him understand his responsibility before the Lord. "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy, and say to them, 'This is what the Lord God says to the shepherds: Woe to the shepherds of Israel, who have been feeding themselves! Shouldn't the shepherds feed their flock? You eat the fat, wear the wool, and butcher the fattened animals, but you do not tend the flock. You have not strengthened the weak, healed the sick, bandaged the injured, brought back the strays, or sought the lost. Instead, you have ruled them with violence and cruelty. They were scattered for lack of a shepherd; they became food for all the wild animals when they were scattered. My flock went astray on all the mountains and every high hill. My flock was scattered over the whole face of the earth, and

there was no one searching or seeking for them.” (Ezekiel 34:2-6 CSB) Sadly, he chose not to listen and the damage he created remains in many of the hearts of the sheep to this day. The same is true with pastor after pastor across the United States who use and abuse their positions of spiritual authority. They are faithless shepherds who come under judgment.

Thankfully, God is not dependent on us to shepherd His people. Even the best among us do it imperfectly. Even the most faithful pastors make mistakes. So this is what God says He will do, “See, I myself will search for my flock and look for them. As a shepherd looks for his sheep on the day he is among his scattered flock, so I will look for my flock. I will rescue them from all the places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and total darkness. I will bring them out from the peoples, gather them from the countries, and bring them to their own soil. I will shepherd them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the land. I will tend them in good pasture, and their grazing place will be on Israel’s lofty mountains. There they will lie down in a good grazing place; they will feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I will tend my flock and let them lie down. This is the declaration of the Lord God. I will seek the lost, bring back the strays, bandage the injured, and strengthen the weak, but I will destroy the fat and the strong. I will shepherd them with justice.” (Ezekiel 34:11-16 CSB) Friends, God is at work even now to restore the fortunes of His people. He is at work even now to gather His sheep together, make them lie down in green pastures, and lead them beside still waters. He is at work even now through people like you and me to feed the sheep, tend the flock, strengthen the weak, heal the sick, bring back the strays, and seek the lost. May we, with joyful hearts and eager hands, join Him in this great work!

Readings for tomorrow: Ezekiel 40-44, Psalms 43

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July 16, 2024
A Vision of Heaven

Readings for today: [Ezekiel 40-44, Psalms 43](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

Imagine you are God for a moment. Your people are living in exile. They are defeated. Discouraged. Depressed. They desperately need their hope restored. Because you love them with an everlasting love, you have a plan to restore them to the Promised Land and return them to Jerusalem. How would you best communicate your intentions to your people? You would show them a rebuilt Temple where your glory would once again reside. You would give them a vision of renewed worship with people, priests, and princes all playing their respective roles. You would let them know your plan to dwell with them forever.

This is exactly what Ezekiel sees. He sees a vision of a new Temple restored in Jerusalem. He sees his people and their priests and their prince all serving faithfully in their respective, God-ordained roles. He is given the exact measurements of this Temple and each of its sacred spaces. He sees the glory of God as it fills the Temple once again and he falls to the ground in worship.

Historically, this passage has been notoriously difficult to interpret. Some believe Ezekiel was given a vision of a 3rd Temple that will be rebuilt on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Some take the opposite position and believe Ezekiel's vision is purely symbolic, depicting an "ideal" Temple that will never be built. Some take the position - as I do - that Ezekiel sees a vision of a heavenly Temple that will one day descend to earth and actually finds its fulfillment in John's vision of the heavenly city in the Book of Revelation. In fact, if one compares what Ezekiel sees with what John sees, there are a great number of similarities. The allusions to Eden. The river of God. The dimensions of the heavenly Temple and the heavenly city (both are perfectly square).

Of course, if one takes the eschatological view (whether you believe in a 3rd Temple being built on the Temple Mount or you believe in a heavenly Temple one day descending to earth in the New Jerusalem), you still are left to puzzle over why there would be an altar and sacrifices. After all, in John's vision there are no such things because Christ Himself has become the perfect sacrifice. Surely, there will be no more need for a sacrificial system in heaven so why would God include these in the vision He gives to His prophet?

Here one has to remember that God's revelation is progressive. He speaks to us in language and in terms we can understand. The people of Israel in Ezekiel's day had no frame of reference that would include a crucified and resurrected Messiah. Their knowledge of the worship of the Living God was limited by what they knew of the Law and what they had experienced throughout their history. God therefore gave them a vision of worship that they could understand. However, after the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the people of God were ready for a new vision. A fresh vision. A fuller picture of what is to come and so John receives his revelation which acts as the fulfillment of the vision God first gave to Ezekiel. You and I are post-resurrection people. As such, we look forward to the day when our Messiah will return and commence His reign from His throne in the New Jerusalem. There will not be any need for a Temple or a sun or a moon for that matter for the Lord God will be our Temple and our Light. We will see Him face to face and walk with Him again in perfect relationship for all eternity.

Readings for tomorrow: Ezekiel 45-48, Psalms 44

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July 17, 2024
A New Eden

Readings for today: [Ezekiel 45-48, Psalms 44](#) [\(video intro\)](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

If one had to choose a place to plant a new Garden of Eden, the Dead Sea would not be it. It's one of the most desolate places on earth. It is almost 1500 feet below sea level. It is landlocked with no outlet. It is one of the world's saltiest bodies of water. It's a harsh environment where very little can live. Swimming in the Dead Sea is quite an experience. You need water shoes because the salt crystals will tear up your feet. The density of the water is so great, you simply lay back and float. It's pretty surreal. As you look around you, there is nothing on the shore. No plants. No animals. No fish. No birds. It's crazy and yet this is where God is going to plant the new Garden of Eden.

The vision of Ezekiel at the end of his book is breathtaking. A river flowing out of the Temple down into the Arabah or Dead Sea, bringing all kinds of life to a region of death. Fish spawn. Animals forage on its banks. Trees spring up. Birds nest. It's beautiful. Listen to it again. "This water flows out to the eastern region and goes down to the Arabah. When it enters the sea, the sea of foul water, the water of the sea becomes fresh. Every kind of living creature that swarms will live wherever the river flows, and there will be a huge number of fish because this water goes there. Since the water will become fresh, there will be life everywhere the river goes. Fishermen will stand beside it from En-gedi to En-eglaim. These will become places where nets are spread out to dry. Their fish will consist of many different kinds, like the fish of the Mediterranean Sea. Yet its swamps and marshes will not be healed; they will be left for salt. All kinds of trees providing food will grow along both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. Each month they will bear fresh fruit because the water comes from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be used for eating and their leaves for healing." (Ezekiel 47:8-12 CSB) Only God would choose the most desolate place on earth to make His sanctuary. Only God would choose to make the Dead Sea come to life again. Only God would choose to plant His Garden in an area where nothing can grow. Only God.

What a reminder that nothing is beyond God! No nation is ever past the point of no return. No people is ever too sinful to save. No person is ever beyond the reach of His grace. God specializes in bringing life out of death. Hope out of despair. Restoration out of destruction. He has done it over and over again throughout human history. We actually have a written record of His miraculous acts so we can have confidence that He will do it again. Think about the challenges facing our nation today. We just had an attempted assassination of a presidential candidate. Many of our political leaders have been accused of corruption and even indicted on crimes. Many church leaders are being accused of sexual, emotional, or spiritual abuse. The divisions in our country are sharp and each side feels like their opponents represent an existential threat. It's hard to see how even God can make sense out of this mess. Think about the challenges many of us face personally as well. The relationships that are strained or broken. The financial stress and pressure. Escalating levels of anxiety, fear, depression, and other mental health issues. Again, it's hard to see how even God can make sense of our mess. But the overarching message of Ezekiel is that God can make dry bones live. He rebuilds temples that have been destroyed. He plants gardens in the desert. Trust Him. He can do the same for you!

Readings for tomorrow: Ezra 1-3, Psalms 45

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July 18, 2024
Connections

Readings for today: [Ezra 1-3, Psalms 45](#) [\(video intro\)](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

To be honest, I usually just breeze through the genealogies of the Bible. I don't spend a ton of time on them. Especially the ones located this deep in the Old Testament. Most of the names are unfamiliar. I don't feel any connection to them. I don't know who they are all related to necessarily. It's hard to draw the family tree here. But today I found myself lingering over the names. Reflecting on names like Parosh and Bani and Hashum and others and wondering who they were and why they bore mention in this list. Clearly they were names of note to the ancient Israelites. People readily recognized by those who would hear these words from Ezra or read this book. Their descendants would return to the land and reclaim their inheritance so it must have been obvious to all which tribe they came from.

Perhaps it's because I just spent a day burying my father in a small town cemetery in western Nebraska where we are related to many of the people buried there? As I walked among the graves with my children and shared how we were related to the Reslers, Arenz's, Grossbach's, and Martins, my children wanted to hear all the stories. They wanted to know what I know about these men and women. Sadly I don't know much. I don't know why my great-grandfather died in his fifties. I don't know why my step grandfather's first wife died early. I don't know Fred and Mia other than they are related to the original Dr. H.H. Grossbach. But others I do know. I know Dr. Grossbach headed west from Indiana under the Homestead Act because the community needed a medical doctor. I know Greta, his daughter, played a significant role in the community, building two of the family homes in the town. I know my dad was named after Dorsey Herman. I know I am named after my dad's brother, Douglas Craig, who tragically died in a drunk driving accident when he was 19. As we stood there, we could all feel our connection to the place. The ground was sacred. It was home in a way that our house never will be. Generations of my family lived and died in this particular area which means our ties run deep.

Now imagine you are an ancient Israelite. Your ties to the Promised Land go all the way back to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and his sons. Your history has been carefully preserved down through the centuries. You've resisted intermarriage in order to keep your family line pure as God demanded. Though you've been exiled and your home destroyed, you maintained your faith. Now God has raised up Cyrus. A new decree is issued. You can return! You can go home! You can return to your own town! Can you imagine the excitement and the joy? So a census is needed. People need to be reminded of their connections one to another. And as the rolls are read, you hear the names of your ancestors. Those who have gone before you. Those who worked so hard to give you this opportunity.

This is why genealogies are important. They remind us that we are not islands unto ourselves. For good or for ill, we stand on the shoulders of those who came before us. In the best of situations, their hard work provides us with all kinds of opportunity and wealth and privilege. In the worst of situations, their failures create all kinds of obstacles we now have to overcome. Most of our families are a mix of the two of course. Now think about yourself. What kind of legacy will you leave after you die. When your children and your children's children are visiting your grave, what stories will they share?

Readings for tomorrow: Ezra 4-7, Psalms 46

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July 19, 2024
The Path of Faith

Readings for today: [Ezra 4-7, Psalms 46](#) [\(video intro\)](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

I am fifty-one years old and as I think back over my life, I can point to many places where I faced a choice. Would I trust God or would I trust myself? Would I respond in faith or would I respond in fear? When I chose the path of fear, I ended up in a dark place. I became anxious and depressed. I didn't sleep well. I lacked motivation. I made all kinds of excuses. I blamed everyone and everything around me. My heart was full of regrets. When I chose the path of faith, I found my spirits lifted. I experienced freedom. Peace that passed all understanding. I slept well. I woke up energized every morning. I took responsibility. I owned my successes and my failures. I had no regrets. No second guessing. My life was rich and full.

Our reading from Ezra today illustrates what God's people can do when they walk by faith. Sadly, it also illustrates what can happen when God's people walk in fear. "Then the people who were already in the land discouraged the people of Judah and made them afraid to build. They also bribed officials to act against them to frustrate their plans throughout the reign of King Cyrus of Persia and until the reign of King Darius of Persia." (Ezra 4:4-5 CSB) Zerubbabel and leaders of God's people had rightly rejected the offer of help from the people of the land for the god they worshiped was not the God of Israel. The people who had resettled the land after the Assyrian Empire wiped out the Northern Kingdom of Israel were a mixed group culled from different tribes and nations. They each brought their own gods to the table and the result was a syncretized view of god that bore no resemblance to the God of Israel. If Zerubbabel allowed them to work alongside God's people as they rebuilt the Temple, there was a very real danger that the worship of God would become polluted and corrupt. The people of the land didn't take their rejection well. They embarked on a campaign of intimidation, threatening God's people with the very real consequences of opposing the might of the Persian Empire. The rebuilding work was hanging by a thread.

Thankfully, there were those who chose a different path. The path of faith. Haggai and Zechariah rose up to prophesy. Prophecy in this case had little to do with future-telling and more to do with truth-telling. They preached in the name of the God of Israel. Reminding God's people of God's sovereign power and authority. They encouraged the leaders of God's people to renew the work and trust in God's faithfulness and so the work resumed. It's important to note that the people still faced opposition. They still had to overcome all kinds of resistance. The factors that made them afraid in the first place didn't magically disappear. The difference now was that their focus was on God and not on all the obstacles standing in their way. Their eyes were fixed on God's mission rather than on all the reasons they couldn't or wouldn't be successful. Their faith gave them the strength to persevere through the challenges and setbacks rather than succumb to them.

What about you? As you think about the challenges you face in your own life, are you choosing the path of faith or the path of fear?

Readings for tomorrow: Ezra 8-10, Psalms 47

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July 20, 2024

Fasting

Readings for today: [Ezra 8-10, Psalms 47](#) ([audio reading](#))

The mission of God is impossibly large and complex. It is global. It is universal. It's reach spans the centuries. God will never rest until the gospel has been preached in every tongue to every tribe in every nation. He will never rest until all have the opportunity to come to a knowledge of His truth and be saved. He will never rest until every knee bows and every tongue confesses that He is Lord. And perhaps most amazingly of all, He entrusts this great work to His church. His people. Now, if you are like me, the task seems overwhelming. Where do we even begin? How can I even begin to marshal the resources and wisdom and strength to accomplish this mission? I am so weak. I am so small. I am so insignificant. Where can I go to find what I need to do what the Lord has called me to do?

Much like Ezra, I try to begin with fasting and prayer. "I proclaimed a fast by the Ahava River, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us, our dependents, and all our possessions. I did this because I was ashamed to ask the king for infantry and cavalry to protect us from enemies during the journey, since we had told him, "The hand of our God is gracious to all who seek him, but his fierce anger is against all who abandon him." So we fasted and pleaded with our God about this, and he was receptive to our prayer." (Ezra 8:21-23 CSB) Fasting and prayer have been part of my life for many years now. The discipline of fasting reminds me of how empty and weak I am. It reminds me of my deep need for God. It makes me hungry for more of Him. More of His Word. More of His Spirit. The discipline of prayer is my connection to God. It is the ongoing conversation between my soul and God's Spirit from which I draw so much wisdom and strength.

God has promised so much to His people. He promises to feed those who are hungry. He promises to quench the thirst of those who seek Him. He promises to give wisdom to those who ask and strengthen those who are weak. He encourages us to cast all our anxieties on Him and to lay our worries at His feet. He loves to listen to our needs and wants and desires. He is a good and loving Father who does not give a stone to those who ask for bread or a snake to those who ask for fish. He wants us to seek. He wants us to ask. He wants us to knock. And He promises He will be found. He promises He will respond. He promises He will open the door to anyone who humbly comes before Him.

Readings for tomorrow: Nehemiah 1-3, Psalms 48 (No devotionals on Sundays)

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July 21 , 2024 (No devotionals on Sundays)

Readings for today: [Nehemiah 1-3, Psalms 48](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

July 22, 2024 Social Justice

Readings for today: [Nehemiah 4-6, Psalms 49](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

God clearly cares about justice. Justice for the fatherless. Justice for the widow. Justice for the poor and marginalized in human society. These themes show up over and over again throughout the Scriptures. God cares about how we treat each other. He cares about the systems we use to set up our communities. God cares about the laws we pass to govern our towns, cities, states, and nations. If you had any doubt about that before today, our reading from Nehemiah should settle it for you.

Nehemiah was the governor of Judea. He was charged not only with rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem but also rebuilding Jewish society in an area that was overrun with people from all sorts of different tribal backgrounds. These people did not share the same convictions as the Jews. They did not have access to God's Law. They were not part of God's covenantal people. But the problem Nehemiah ran into was not with the pagan people already living in the land. The problem was with God's people who had returned. They quickly built a society where it was every person for themselves. Those who were rich got richer. Those who were poor got poorer. They were charging interest, something expressly forbidden by God's Law, and even selling their fellow countrymen into slavery. Considering their history of slavery in Egypt, Nehemiah must have felt like he was living in the Twilight Zone.

Thankfully, Nehemiah was a bold and godly leader. He understood sin must be confronted on both a personal as well as systemic level. Listen again to how he handled the situation. "There was a widespread outcry from the people and their wives against their Jewish countrymen. Some were saying, 'We, our sons, and our daughters are numerous. Let us get grain so that we can eat and live.' Others were saying, 'We are mortgaging our fields, vineyards, and homes to get grain during the famine.' Still others were saying, 'We have borrowed money to pay the king's tax on our fields and vineyards. We and our children are just like our countrymen and their children, yet we are subjecting our sons and daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters are already enslaved, but we are powerless because our fields and vineyards belong to others.'" I became extremely angry when I heard their outcry and these complaints. After seriously considering the matter, I accused the nobles and officials, saying to them, "Each of you is charging his countrymen interest." So I called a large assembly against them and said, "We have done our best to buy back our Jewish countrymen who were sold to foreigners, but now you sell your own countrymen, and we have to buy them back." They remained silent and could not say a word. Then I said, "What you are doing isn't right. Shouldn't you walk in the fear of our God and not invite the reproach of our foreign enemies? Even I, as well as my brothers and my servants, have been lending them money and grain. Please, let's stop charging this interest. Return their fields, vineyards, olive groves, and houses to them immediately, along with the percentage of the money, grain, new wine, and fresh oil that you have been assessing them." They responded, "We will return these things and require nothing more from them. We will do as you say." (Nehemiah 5:1-12 CSB) It's important to note Nehemiah not only confronts those who are perpetrating the sin, he sets up systems that will govern the region far into the future. God's people will not be sold into slavery. God's people will not charge each other interest. God's people will re-distribute their wealth to care for the poor.

It's a challenging read for us. The cultural gap between an ancient near east empire and a 21st century, capitalist democracy is massive and yet the principles remain the same. We too need to grapple with our personal responsibility for the sinful choices we make. We need to own where we have failed. Where we have allowed greed and selfishness and envy and jealousy to cause us sin against our brothers and sisters. We also need to grapple with the systems we've created that perpetuate injustice. Systems that may privilege the rich over the poor. Privilege the strong over the weak. Privilege those with influence over those who are shut out of the system for whatever reason. It's a "both/and" and not an "either/or." Most of all, we need to follow Nehemiah's example and confront sin wherever it may be found so we root it out and live as God has called us to live.

Readings for tomorrow: Nehemiah 7-9, Psalms 50

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July 23, 2024
The Power of Corporate Worship

Readings for today: [Nehemiah 7-9, Psalms 50](#) ([audio reading](#))

I remember attending a men's conference when I first became a Christian. Tens of thousands of men gathered together to sing and pray and hear some of the best preachers in the world at the time. They came from every tribe, tongue, and nation. They come from every ethnicity and socio-economic class. They came from every denominational background and church experience. Worshiping in that environment was one of the most powerful experiences of my life and I will never forget it.

Human beings are worshiping creatures. Our earliest records from the prehistoric cave paintings in places like Spain and France to the depictions on walls of temples and palaces to the written accounts we have from the ancient world show how important worship has been to the human race. There is something deep inside that seeks transcendence. Something within that is drawn to contemplate eternity. One of my favorite professors at Princeton, a leading intellectual in the science and religion debate, believed this was one of the features that made Homo Sapiens unique. We seem to be hardwired for worship.

We see this on display in our reading today. All of the families who have returned from exile in Babylon gather in Jerusalem, within the safety of her newly rebuilt walls, to worship. And what is at the center of their worship experience? The reading and preaching of the Word of God. What we read today is one of the main reasons the church still centers her worshiping life largely around preaching. We believe the "foolishness of preaching" is the primary vehicle God has ordained to advance His Kingdom here on earth. For days, the people of Israel listened to Ezra read the Law. They celebrated as it was interpreted by their leaders for their understanding. They feasted and prayed and sang together. It must have been Woodstock on steroids!

Now reflect on your own worshiping experience. How does you feel when you gather with God's people? How much do you participate or do you find yourself holding back? When the songs are sung and the prayers are prayed, are you part of it? Or do you consider yourself to be more of a spectator? And what about when the Word of God is read and proclaimed? Do you find yourself hungering and thirsting for more? Or does it barely make a mark? The most important thing you can do as a Christian is come to worship fully prepared to engage. The more you give yourself to the experience, the more you will get out of it. Furthermore, you will find yourself influencing those around you to join in as well. And the more God's people get engaged, the more the Spirit moves, transforming and changing hearts, and lifting us up into the Lord's very presence where there is an abundance of joy.

Readings for tomorrow: Nehemiah 10-11, Psalms 51

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July 24, 2024
Step of Faith

Readings for today: [Nehemiah 10-11, Psalms 51](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

There's a little story in today's reading that's often overlooked. It's lost in the middle of the mess of Israel's national sin and their massive celebration at the dedication of the wall. It's just two lines but the significance is huge. "Now the leaders of the people stayed in Jerusalem, and the rest of the people cast lots for one out of ten to come and live in Jerusalem, the holy city, while the other nine-tenths remained in their towns. The people blessed all the men who volunteered to live in Jerusalem." (Nehemiah 11:1-2 CSB) Why is this a big deal? Well, when you think about it, living in Jerusalem at this particular time, under these particular conditions, meant placing yourself in significant danger. The city was well-known to be a threat in the region. The different tribal groups surrounding Israel had already tried to stop the city from being rebuilt. Even with a new wall, it would take a while for the city to regain her fighting strength. Furthermore, basic services were non-existent and the entire local economy would have to be rebuilt. It wasn't going to be easy work. It would be much more comfortable to live out in the villages where you could cultivate your own land. Those living in Jerusalem would have to be dependent on food supplies coming in from the countryside, all of which could easily be disrupted by their enemies. So the men who volunteered to live in Jerusalem were risking their very lives. It must have been a huge step of faith.

God doesn't call us to be comfortable. The life He calls us to live requires self-denial, picking up a cross, and intentionally walking by faith, not by sight. Jesus himself says that anyone who would come after Him would have to lose their life in order to gain it. The people in the Bible face all kinds of challenges. Temptation is everywhere. Life is incredibly hard. They were subject to the same fears and anxieties that we struggle with as well. But they learned to trust God. Not perfectly. Not always faithfully. But on balance, their lives reflected a long obedience in the same direction. I love how one author - I think it was either Tolstoy or Dostoevsky - described the Christian life. "It's like a drunk man stumbling from one side of the road to the other." As crazy as it can get and as often as we fail, at least we are on the right road.

When was the last time you took a great risk for God? When was the last time God called you to do something uncomfortable, something challenging, something beyond you? When was the last time following Christ cost you something? Time? Opportunity? Some of your hard earned treasure? When was the last time you took a step of faith?

Readings for tomorrow: Nehemiah 12-13, Psalms 52

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July 25, 2024
The Danger of Compromise

Readings for today: [Nehemiah 12-13, Psalms 52](#) ([audio reading](#))

It usually starts small. A tiny step. A shift of one degree. One little compromise. We justify it in all sorts of ways. Surely God will understand. Surely God will make an exception this one time. Surely God knows we aren't perfect. But then the compromises keep coming. A tiny step turns into several larger steps. One degree turns into two degrees then three. One little compromise opens the door to other, more significant compromises and the next thing we know, we are in full rebellion against God's commands.

The last chapter of Nehemiah details a list of reforms he instituted for the people of Israel. It's a startling way to end a book. No "happily ever after." No "riding off into the sunset" for Nehemiah. His story ends in conflict. His story ends in confrontation. He even loses his temper and starts beating people and tearing out their hair! All this coming after an amazing time of worship where the entire population of Jerusalem gathered to sing the praises of God.

It is so easy for us to compromise. So easy for us to slide back into old habits. Someone once told me that humanity's ability to sin is only surpassed by her ability to justify her sin. I believe it. I see it in my own life. The people of God compromised in all sorts of ways. They allowed people of foreign descent, people who worshiped other gods, to join them in worship at the Temple. For the sake of political expediency, they gave Tobiah - one of their sworn enemies - his own room in the Temple. They neglected to care for the Levites and other Temple servants by refusing to tithe, forcing them to fend for themselves. They refused to honor the Sabbath. They married foreign women. Their spiritual leaders desecrated their priestly office by intermarrying with those who did not worship Yahweh. In each case, I can almost hear the justifications. I can imagine the rationale. Our wives promised to put away their foreign gods! We're trying to rebuild our lives and local economy and have to work on the Sabbath! If we give Tobiah a place of honor, perhaps he'll leave us alone. From a human perspective, it all makes sense.

If I am honest, I too fall into these same traps. It's easy for me to justify neglecting my time with God. It's easy for me to attend worship on Sunday mornings and make it all about me and what I get out of it. It's easy for me to justify working 24/7 without ever taking a break. It's easy for me to give in to certain people in my life simply to avoid conflict. It's easy for me to compromise my convictions for the sake of those I love. Frankly, it never ends well. Eventually all the little compromises I make start to stack up along the way, creating a burden far too heavy for me to bear. Eventually, the house of cards I build comes crashing down around me, leaving me far worse off than I could have imagined. God demands my obedience. Jesus Himself says, "If you love Me, you will obey My commands." Following Christ is not easy. Following Christ requires great sacrifice. Following Christ means dying to "Self" with all its disordered desires and unrestrained passions.

Readings for tomorrow: Esther 1-5, Psalms 53

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July 26, 2024
Strong Women

Readings for today: [Esther 1-5, Psalms 53](#) [\(video intro\)](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

I love the women of the Bible. They live in incredibly difficult times. They live in cultures where they are treated more as property than people. They are subject to all kinds of abuse and neglect. They have no rights and no legal recourse. They are prized for their physical beauty and cast aside when it fades. Their worth is determined by the number of male children they bear and they are shamed if they cannot produce. It's a brutal, harsh existence and it would be easy for the women to throw up their hands in despair. It would be easy for them to feel helpless and hopeless. Resign themselves to their lot in life and try to make the best of things. But then you read stories about women like Vashti and Esther. Women who are powerful. Fierce. Courageous. Bold. They dare to stand up to the men in their lives. They dare to be different. They refuse to accept the social and cultural restraints placed upon them.

One of the common mistakes we make when we read the Bible is to assume that because every word is "inspired" it must mean every word has God's endorsement. For example, I've seen our passage from today used to support all sorts of misogynist thinking. Rather than celebrate Queen Vashti's courage for refusing to bow down to the drunken wishes of an abusive king, they take the king's side. They worry that Vashti's example will cause all women to "look on their husbands with contempt" or they use Esther 1:22 where it talks about "every man being master in his own household" as a proof text for hierarchical notions of spiritual leadership. Such thinking is toxic and betrays a lack of understanding on how to appropriately interpret Scripture. Nowhere in the text does the king's behavior receive God's endorsement. In fact, God isn't mentioned a single time in the entire book! The reason this book is included in the Bible is to teach us how God often works behind the scenes through the courage of His people. People He strategically places in pagan culture to carry out His sovereign will. People like Esther for example. "The king loved Esther more than all the other women. She won more favor and approval from him than did any of the other virgins. He placed the royal crown on her head and made her queen in place of Vashti. The king held a great banquet for all his officials and staff. It was Esther's banquet. He freed his provinces from tax payments and gave gifts worthy of the king's bounty." (Esther 2:17-18 CSB) It's important to note the king's lecherous behavior never seems to change. He is a man driven by his unrestrained passions. As such, he is vulnerable to all sorts of manipulation. Left on his own, he would have killed all the Jews in his empire. But thankfully God was at work! Behind the scenes. Under the radar. Hidden from view. He orchestrates things in such a way that Esther is placed on the throne. And though she presumably has to endure some of the same abuse her predecessor Vashti did, she leverages her position to save her people.

We still live in a world full of abuse. A world where women are often dismissed, neglected, or ignored. A world where women are not treated as equals. They often do not receive equal pay or equal access or equal opportunity. Their rights are now being further eroded as more and more men identify as women. I know many men who are intimidated by strong women. I know many men who are afraid of strong women. I know many men who weaponize Scripture in order to subjugate women. Thankfully, Scripture itself attests to the truth that women are made in the image of God. Women are co-heirs to the Kingdom of God. Women are co-equals in the eyes of God. Furthermore, Scripture gives us example after example of women of deep faith who courageously buck their traditional cultural roles as they seek to serve and honor God. Jesus Himself affirmed the women who sacrificed everything to follow Him. They were among His first and most faithful disciples. I myself have been incredibly blessed to be married to a strong, godly woman and to be raising three strong, godly daughters.

Readings for tomorrow: Esther 6-10, Psalms 54

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July 27, 2024
The Power of One

Readings for today: [Esther 6-10, Psalms 54](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

One of my favorite movies is titled, “The Power of One.” It details one young man and one young woman’s fight against the evils of apartheid in South Africa. It addresses all kinds of different issues but the main message is the significant power each individual has to stand up for justice and make a difference in the world. Esther is such a person.

Perhaps the most famous line in the book comes in chapter four when Mordecai encourages Esther to take action by saying, “Who knows, perhaps you have come to your royal position for such a time as this.” (Esther 4:14 CSB) It’s an incredibly humbling thought. Esther’s entire life had led her to this moment. God using every decision. God shaping her through every experience. God honoring her courage and faithfulness by placing her in a unique position of influence and power so that she might prevent the genocide of her people. Esther had no idea any of this was happening along the way. She was just living her life. Making daily choices that seemed best to her at the time. She wasn’t born into a life of privilege. She was not part of the royal household growing up. She was just another nameless, faceless Jewish woman until a unique opportunity presented itself and God sovereignly acted on her behalf. Now she is the queen. The most powerful woman in the empire and the second most powerful person. She has overcome Haman, the enemy of her people. She has raised her uncle up to a position of power alongside her. She has influenced the king over and over again and proven to be the power behind the throne. It’s incredible.

And it begs an important question for each and every one of us. What are we doing to follow Esther’s example? What are we doing to stand up for justice in our own time? What are we doing to fight evil on personal as well as systemic levels? Where is God calling us to make a difference in the world? For me, it means working hard to influence those I serve to align their lives with the life of Jesus. It means modeling compassion and kindness and sacrifice for those who are marginalized or less fortunate or suffering or struggling in their life. It could be in the town where I live or on the other side of the world. Over the years, I have fought a running battle against poverty and addiction and abuse and neglect and greed and selfishness. I have fought these battles in coffee shops or at local bars as I encourage and challenge the people I know and love to follow Jesus and I have worked hard to change systems and structures in society so they might become more reflective of God’s Kingdom. It’s not easy but I’ve not even approached the sacrifices of a person like Esther. Her example continues to inspire me to this day and hopefully, she inspires you as well!

Readings for tomorrow: Daniel 1-3, Psalms 55 (No devotionals on Sundays)

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July 28 , 2024 (No devotionals on Sundays)

Readings for today: [Daniel 1-3, Psalms 55](#) ([video intro](#)) ([audio reading](#))

July 29, 2024

Testimony

Readings for today: [Daniel 4-6, Psalms 56](#) ([video intro](#)) ([audio reading](#))

Every single Christian has a testimony. The story of how they received Christ and trusted Him as Lord and Savior. For some, the testimony is of faithful parents who raised them in the faith from birth. For others, the testimony is how Christ saved them in the midst of great hardship and suffering. For still others, the testimony is how God confronted them in their sin and humbled them before His throne. No matter how you came to faith, each testimony is the story of God's great faithfulness to reach those He loves with the gospel. Every Christian is a living, breathing example of God's great desire to reach every tribe, tongue, and nation on the earth. No one is beyond His reach. No one is unworthy of His grace. No sin is so great that it cannot be forgiven. If you had any doubt about that, consider the testimony we read today from King Nebuchadnezzar.

King Nebuchadnezzar is one of the great tyrants in human history. The number of people he killed as his armies swept through the Middle East is astronomical. He brutally suppressed the nations he conquered. He drug hundreds of thousands into exile. He razed homes and temples and cities. He used terror and fear and torture and death as instruments to hold his growing empire together. He was prideful and arrogant, believing himself to be one of the gods. At the height of his power, God confronted him. He drove Nebuchadnezzar insane and he lost his kingdom. For seven years, he was lost, wandering in the labyrinth of his own crazed mind. He ate grass like cattle. He was exposed to the elements. He never cut his hair or nails. Finally, he looked up to heaven. He humbled himself before God. And his heart was changed. His mind was healed. His position and authority restored. Listen to how he describes it in his own words, "But at the end of those days, I, Nebuchadnezzar, looked up to heaven, and my sanity returned to me. Then I praised the Most High and honored and glorified him who lives forever: For his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are counted as nothing, and he does what he wants with the army of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth. There is no one who can block his hand or say to him, "What have you done?" At that time my sanity returned to me, and my majesty and splendor returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and my nobles sought me out, I was reestablished over my kingdom, and even more greatness came to me. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt, and glorify the King of the heavens, because all his works are true and his ways are just. He is able to humble those who walk in pride." (Daniel 4:34-37 CSB)

It's an incredible story. One that gives all of us hope. If God can save a man like Nebuchadnezzar, He can save anyone. If God can confront and change the heart of one of the most brutal tyrants in human history, He can change the hearts of all those who look to heaven and turn to Him. The story of Nebuchadnezzar reinforces the unconditional nature of God's love and amazing grace. Grace is God's free gift to all who humble themselves before Him.

Readings for tomorrow: Daniel 7-9, Psalms 57

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July 30, 2024

Hope

Readings for today: [Daniel 7-9, Psalms 57](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

Today we read one of my favorite passages in the Old Testament about the Ancient of Days and the Son of Man. A prophetic vision of the end times when God Himself will set up His throne on earth to bring judgment and an end to all injustice, fear, and violence. He will give His kingdom to the Son of Man who has been prepared from eternity to rule a kingdom that will last forever. No matter how strong and fearsome the principalities and powers of this world may seem, they are no match for the Son of Man. The great “beasts” of this world with all their arrogant, corrupt, oppressive, and abusive ways will be killed and thrown into the eternal fire. They will be no more. It’s a day I long for with all my heart. It’s a day I pray for with all my soul. I long for the day when the Son of Man will come again, bringing the kingdom of heaven to earth, reign and rule over all creation.

Listen again to the words of the vision of Daniel, “As I kept watching, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was white like snow, and the hair of his head like whitest wool. His throne was flaming fire; its wheels were blazing fire. A river of fire was flowing, coming out from his presence. Thousands upon thousands served him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was convened, and the books were opened. I watched, then, because of the sound of the arrogant words the horn was speaking. As I continued watching, the beast was killed and its body destroyed and given over to the burning fire. As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was removed, but an extension of life was granted to them for a certain period of time. I continued watching in the night visions, and suddenly one like a son of man was coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was escorted before him. He was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, so that those of every people, nation, and language should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will not be destroyed.”
(Daniel 7:9-14 CSB)

Our world is on fire. Beasts of all kinds rise up and create all kinds of chaos and destruction. None of us are immune. No one can escape. We live in so much fear, so much anger, so much hate. Things are so bad even the “holy ones” of God, believers in Jesus Christ, are led astray. We turn on the news and see the violence. We scroll through social media and drown in disinformation designed to incite all kinds of outrage. We listen to our leaders lie with impunity and without shame. Perhaps worst of all, we become numb to the suffering we see. It’s heartbreaking. Thankfully, we are not at the mercy of the evil in the world. Sin will not have the last word. God Himself is coming to judge. He will take His seat on the throne of this world. And though the nations of the earth rage against Him, they resist in vain. God will remove their dominion and give it to His Son. He will reign forever and ever with glory and power. Every tribe, tongue, and nation will serve Him. His Kingdom will have no end. This is our only hope.

Readings for tomorrow: Daniel 10-12, Psalms 58

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July 31, 2024
Fear and Trembling

Readings for today: [Daniel 10-12, Psalms 58](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

In my line of work, I get sent all kinds of things. YouTube videos of so-called prophets predicting the end. Chain emails suggesting I need to focus more on the end times. Free books by obscure authors telling me they've cracked the code and know the time and date of Jesus' return. One of the things that strikes me most about all of this is the utter lack of fear and trembling and humility. These modern-day prophets claim to have seen all kinds of divine visions and dreams but don't fall on their faces in fear. Rather than grieve, they seemingly take delight in calling for the destruction of the world. They arrogantly proclaim their "interpretation" and refuse to acknowledge when they get things wrong... which they always do. It's nuts to me.

When God gave visions and dreams to His prophets in the Old Testament, they all fall on their faces in awe before the Lord. They tremble in fear at His coming. They are overwhelmed by what they see and cannot comprehend what God is telling them until an angel of the Lord reveals it to them. They are humble. They grieve over the judgment they know is coming. They fast and pray until their bodies are weak from hunger. Listen again to Daniel's experience as he receives his final visions from God, "Only I, Daniel, saw the vision. The men who were with me did not see it, but a great terror fell on them, and they ran and hid. I was left alone, looking at this great vision. No strength was left in me; my face grew deathly pale, and I was powerless. I heard the words he said, and when I heard them I fell into a deep sleep, with my face to the ground. Suddenly, a hand touched me and set me shaking on my hands and knees." (Daniel 10:7-10 CSB) Now contrast his example with what we hear from those who claim to be prophets in our day and age. It could not be more different.

It's a fearful thing to receive a vision of the future from God. Such knowledge is far too wonderful and complex for our minds to comprehend. It overwhelms the senses. It forces us to our knees. It leaves us gasping for breath. Human beings simply aren't designed for such things which is why every single one of the Old Testament prophets is driven to the point of death by the experience. Even Jesus Himself claimed He couldn't know the timing of the end. He had to trust His Father for that knowledge.

Every human being worries about the future. We worry about tomorrow or the next day or the next month or the next year. We worry about our jobs. We worry about our livelihoods. We worry about our children and grandchildren. For many around the world, they worry about what they will eat or where they will find water. Many believers worry about the end. They look around the world today with all its suffering, violence, hatred, anger, injustice, and oppression and they wonder when God will return to bring these things to an end. Rather than focusing so much on trying to predict it all or figure it out, I think the final words of the Book of Daniel point us in the right direction. "But as for you, go on your way to the end; you will rest, and then you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance at the end of the days." (Daniel 12:13 CSB)

Readings for tomorrow: Haggai 1-2, Psalms 59

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