

HE HAS RISEN

Weekly Devotional



May 2-6, 2011

Prayer Request

Monday: Pray for those who work for World Vision, Compassion International, and International Justice Mission.

Tuesday: Pray for those who work at the Shepherd's Pantry, especially those who are served through that ministry.

Wednesday: As the school year draws to an end, pray for our AWANA, Good News, and youth programs. Pray for our youth as they prepare for their future, especially that their relationship with Jesus would be cemented.

Thursday: Pray for those who call us enemies. Pray that we will be able to appropriately love them in ways that bring them to the light of Jesus.

Friday: Pray for the Mom's at Glenkirk. Pray prayers of thanksgiving for your own Mom and, if appropriate, prayers of blessing. Pray for those without Moms, especially for Moms who are struggling in their relationships with their children.

**I am grateful to a sermon series by John Ortberg for many of the thoughts in this week's devotional.



Monday

Read: Matthew 13:1-23



Jim's next sermon series begins May 14 and 15. Next week we will begin preparation for that series. This week we will look at some of the parables that Jesus told to instruct us how to live between His first and second coming.**

In today's passage, the question this parable asks is, "What is the condition of the soil of your life?" The seed does not change, only the soil. Why do some grow strong in Jesus and others not? The seed naturally grows; it is the soil that either allows it to take root and bear fruit or in some way chokes it out. So today do some soil analysis. What might be preventing fruit to come from your faith in Jesus?

The first question to ask is, "Is my heart soft towards what God is wanting to plant within?" So many things cause a calloused heart: bitterness, resentment, disappointment, defensiveness, unforgiveness. Plowing up the soil of our heart can be painful. Facing circumstances and letting go, or giving over to Jesus that which we carry around involving the hurts and disappointments of life is not easy. But it is necessary.

Then there is the seed that fell among the rocks. It is the seed of superficial faith, faith that fails to develop deep roots. We live in a superficial society. We trust 30-second sound bites and twitter-size communication to keep us informed about our lives and relationships. To develop a deep faith requires time, continuity, endurance, intentionality and risk.

The seed that fell among the thorns grew but was choked out by the demands of this world. The demands drained all the good nutrients out of the soil. Our lives are filled with clutter that distracts us from God. Where do we need to do some weeding?

But where our hearts are soft, our devotion is deep, and our lives are uncluttered, fruit is natural; it is completely of God. How is the soil of your heart?

Tuesday

Read: Luke 16:1-15



Some of Jesus' parables are hard even for us to understand. Here He seems to be holding up a dishonest servant as an example to be followed. In Matthew 10:16 Jesus tells us that He is sending us out like sheep among wolves and calls us to be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. This does not sound like the loving people we often hear that Christians are supposed to be. At a conference recently, Nancy Ortberg said that we have confused spirituality with terminal niceness. Jesus didn't. Question: Are you more resourceful and more strategic when it comes to your business dealings, your desire to get the attention of someone, and your summer plans than you are with sharing your faith with others? If so, this parable is for you.

Jesus is not upholding dishonesty here, but the actions that the shrewd manager took to save his skin. He faced reality. He took responsibility. He developed a concrete doable plan, and he took action immediately. When it comes to the part we are to play in the advancement of the Kingdom of God, are we just as resourceful? Do we face the reality that the eternal future of others is at stake and, to an extent, depends upon our willingness to share? Do we take responsibility for advancing God's Kingdom, or are we content to sit on the sidelines and cheer others on? Have we developed some concrete plans for saving a portion of our resources so that we might give more to missions? Do we have folks whom we are praying for and find ways to invite them to spend time with us and our Christian friends? Are we on the lookout for opportunities to have spiritual conversations? Do we have some plan about how to grow spiritually or develop Christ-like characteristics?

Often we are either lazy with our spiritual lives, or we over-spiritualize issues of day-to-day life rather than face reality. Advancing God's Kingdom is a war we have been called into. Are we on the front line, or are we content to be home "on leave"?



Wednesday

Read: Matthew 20:1-16

I cannot imagine what it must be like to stand on a street corner hoping, praying to be hired to work on a given day. The first group out must have been filled with jubilation. They were going home that day with money; there would be food on the table that night. The owner entered into a contract with them—a day's worth of work for a day's pay.

The later folks were just thankful for whatever the owner was going to give them. They went to work, not knowing what they would be paid, just trusting that the man was fair. The last group was just thankful to be able to work. How many of us would be willing to work under those conditions?

At the end of the day, everyone was paid the same amount. The man who worked one hour was paid the same as those who worked all day. As I read this story, I must admit I am drawn into the trap. I also would be expecting to get more if I was one of the first hired. But here is the catch. The issue is not about my work; the issue is about the generosity of the vineyard owner.

It is very easy to get lured into a performance-based Christianity. If I go to church every Sunday, go to a small group, help with Sunday School, work on a mission project, do my Bible study, and say my prayers, then God will bless me. He often does, but not because of what we do, but because of what He desires to do. We know we have started trying to “earn” God's favor when our response towards others is judgmental, resentful, or unforgiving. When we begin to grumble about what we don't have rather than rejoice in what others have, we are slipping into performance-based Christianity.

God is a God of grace. He gives just because He loves to give. But how often do we presume to tell Him what is fair and what is not fair. How often are we resentful of what another has rather than grateful for what we have? How often do I think I deserve more? Have I forgotten that it is not about me? It is all about God and His generous love.

Thursday

Read: Matthew 25:1-13

This is another one of those parables that on first reading does not seem to fit with what I believe is “Christian.” Are we not supposed to share? The point of the parable, though, is that there are some things that we cannot share. There are some things that cannot be borrowed.

I cannot borrow another person’s relationship with Jesus. I need to develop that on my own. I cannot borrow another person’s character. Again, I need to develop that on my own. I cannot borrow another person’s life. And one day it will be too late to change the way I live my life. One day I will be presented with a character question, and how I respond will depend on what has already been developed in my life. One day I will be asked why I believe what I believe; and if I have not given much thought to my relationship with Jesus, I will not have a very convincing answer.

While the groom is delayed, it seems that we have all the time in the world. While the groom is delayed, there are other pressing issues. No one makes a decision to waste his or her life; it just happens. Those without oil are not called evil, just foolish. If they were asked why they were not prepared, their answer probably would have been similar to the answer that I so often give when asked why I did or didn’t do something: “I don’t know; it just seemed right at the time.”

Spiritual complacency is a problem we slip into. Jesus, though, calls us to take responsibility for ourselves and for others. Today, think about one area of your life that you will someday regret if you do not change, and then make up a plan for change. Maybe it’s less time wasted on the computer or the TV. Maybe it’s not spending enough time with your children or with developing a relationship with a neighbor or co-worker. Maybe it involves your ignoring a sin or not giving more away to others. Maybe it is taking a risk. What is it for you?



Friday

Read: Matthew 25:14-46



The second of these two stories (vv. 31-46) is not set in the normal form of a parable. There is no “it will be like” or “He told them a story.” It is a matter-of-fact statement of what it will be like when Jesus returns.

The first parable (vv. 14-30) reminds us not only that we have been trusted with gifts but that how we use what God has given us will have an impact on what our future will be like. Earlier this week we read something similar when Jesus asked, “So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?” (Luke 16)

What is “worldly wealth”? It is not just money. It involves people, talents, time. Some day I will give an account of what I have done with this one life, and that accounting will be based on Kingdom priorities, not the priorities of this world. When that happens, I will realize that God does not grade on a curve and that mediocrity does not cut it with Him, neither do excuses. God will never ask about what I do with what I do not have, only with what I do have.

Kingdom priorities involve loving, giving, and helping those who cannot help themselves. But like the last of the three servants, I too often try to get out of being responsible. I too often have excuses for why I do not do the things God calls me to do. Often these involve my sense that I need in some way to take care of pressing matters in my life, with my family or at my work. I somehow feel I am responsible for “earning” a living, “working” to provide.

But we serve a God who loves to give, a God who is generous. He calls us to invest what He gives us in the lives of others; and when we do, He promises to give us more. Do I really trust God to give me all I need?



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