

Weekly Devotional



June 27- July 1, 2011

Prayers

Monday: Pray today for those who call us enemies. Pray for your own ability to love those who are hard to love. Pray for the unity of the church.

Tuesday: Pray for all the change occurring in the Arab world, that out of the power vacuum that has been created Christians might gain a more solid footing.

Wednesday: Pray for people who have suffered loss either because of lack of joy, or some natural disaster.

Thursday: Begin now to pray for the upcoming VBS, especially as last minute details are put in place.

Friday: Pray for the July 2 music celebration. Pray for people to meet new friends, for families to have a good time, for new people to check out Glenkirk and have a positive experience.



Monday

Read 1 Peter 3:8-12; John 17



This coming weekend we are going to begin a new series called, "True: Can We Know God Is There?" The first sermon will be taken from 1 Peter 3:15-16. As we prepare for this sermon, we will take a look at the last half of 1 Peter 3.

Recently I heard a sermon on prayer where the pastor pointed out that even Jesus had unanswered prayer in His life. To say the least, the pastor had my attention. He then mentioned the three unanswered prayers of Jesus. First, His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before His death when He prayed, "Take this cup from me" (Mark 14:36). The second (implied) was on the cross when He cried out to God, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" But it was the third unanswered prayer that got my attention. In John 17 Jesus prays for His disciples, and over and over again He prays that we might be "one," that we might have unity with the Father, Jesus, and each other. The first two unanswered prayers I might have tried to explain away, but this third prayer is actually partially dependent on me. Am I seeking to live in unity in my relationships, marriage, home, family, church, and with other believers here and around the world?

Jesus said that others will know we are His disciples by our love--not by our words first, but by our unconditional, sacrificial love. A reading of First, Second and Third John will underline just how important this love and unity is. Not only are we called to love each other, but to love those who do not know Jesus, those who call us enemies. And here in 1 Peter 3:8, Peter begins with the same plea: be like-minded, love, be compassionate and humble, repay evil with good.

Recently I read that American Christians today are more concerned with whether our souls are saved than we are about loving God and loving others. Concern for our personal salvation results in a consumer-oriented religion. Jesus took care of our salvation on the cross; His concern is with our love. How are we doing? How might you "do good" to someone who has done evil to you?

Tuesday

Read 1 Peter 3:13-22; Romans 12:9-21



Our concern during this series is that people would know that what we say about Jesus is true. But what we say must first be lived out in how we act. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:43-48) Jesus calls us to love those who harm us. He reminds us that even non-believers love their friends. What sets us apart is our love for those who seek to do us harm. Today why not ask Jesus to show you if there is some disconnect between your words and actions.

Peter's belief is that if people see us loving our enemies, speaking words that are gracious, being completely above board, doing and seeking peace, others will notice. They will notice that we do not need to take matters into our own hands. They will notice that we have peace even in the midst of uncertainty and they will ask why. It is at that point we need to give them an answer.

When we share with others about Jesus, our job is not so much to tell the other person what they lack as it is to share with them the hope that is within us. Tim Keller, in his book *Kings Cross*, says that the difference between Christianity and all other religions, including no religion, is that the essence of other religions is advice; Christianity is essentially news—the good news that Jesus has opened up the door to a relationship with a loving, giving Father who is available to care, love, provide and stand in the gap for us. Our job is not to share advice, but to share the “reason for the hope that is in us.” Advice is often taken as being harsh or judgmental, but the sharing of hope allows for gentleness and respect towards another.

Where have you seen God active in your life recently? In what way have you experienced an answered prayer? How does your relationship with Jesus make a difference in the decisions you make, in your priorities, in your goals for your own life and the lives of your children? Biblical “hope” is not a wish; it is a certainty of something we know will eventually come to pass. How does the certainty of the Father's love for you make a difference in your life? Who can you share your answer with today?



Wednesday

Read 1 Peter 3:19-22; Ephesians 4:7-13

One of the phrases in the Apostle's Creed that catches people off guard is: "He descended into hell." Where does that come from? What does it mean? These two passages give us a little hint. The phrase means that in His dying Jesus took fully onto Himself the penalty for our sins. That penalty is hell. But in so doing, He conquered hell; He brought it under the jurisdiction of Father God.

When I was preparing to become a pastor, I was subjected to a number of oral exams. On one occasion I was asked, "The people who lived before Jesus—are they saved? How? They never knew Jesus." This verse in 1 Peter gives us the answer. The individuals who lived before Jesus can be saved just as we are by His dying for our sins on a cross, and He went to them after His death to bring them into the salvation that is theirs by faith. Furthermore, by descending into hell, Jesus makes known to all the angels who rebelled against Him that He alone is Lord.

However, no place in Scripture do we find God giving people a second chance for salvation after they die. But those who lived before Jesus, who lived lives of faith, striving to keep the Law of Moses, are saved as we are by the cross of Jesus. We are saved by faith, by our utter dependence on God for our lives here and now. Missionaries who discover believers amongst tribes who have never heard of Jesus tell stories that I love to hear. These believers cry out to an unnamed God, asking that He help them, that He makes His presence known.

In baptism we die from the ways of this world (hard work, perseverance, intellectual understanding, scientific advancements) and are brought back to living lives dependent fully on God, even when we do not understand His ways. In doing this, we trust that even in suffering, He is able to bring resurrections. In doing this we live seeking to make Him the center of all we are about, because we have died to ourselves.

Is there something you need to die to and live in dependence on God instead?

Thursday

Read Mark 9:14-29

I love this story. Maybe it is because I so often feel like the father crying out to God, “Lord, I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief.” Tim Keller, in his book *King’s Cross*, calls this the cry of “repentant helplessness.”

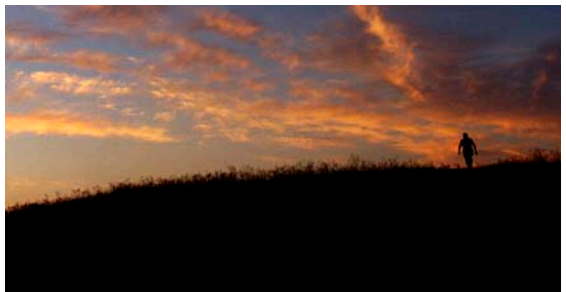
I believe that this passage points out two of our greatest problems when it comes to witnessing. First, we think we have to have it together ourselves, having all the answers. We are afraid that if we begin to tell others about Jesus, we will end up getting ourselves into a situation that is way over our heads like the disciples did in this story.

But this just points out the second and greater problem: We are afraid of being “helpless.” The problem is that this is how we are supposed to live 24-7. “Repentant helplessness” means that we come to Jesus honestly—with all our doubts, fears, inadequacies—and cry out in prayer, “Jesus, help! I can’t do it myself.”

When we step into a witnessing opportunity, we find ourselves riddled with questions and doubts. It is then that we silently cry out to God saying something like this: “Okay, I sense you want me to open my mouth here. I will probably look like a fool, but I will be obedient. Help me with my unbelief so that what I say might actually make a difference. Help me with my lack of knowledge. Holy Spirit, it is now up to you.”

Just like it is impossible for us in our power to cast out demons or heal someone who is sick, so it is impossible for us to bring someone to faith. Humanly speaking, all of these are impossible. But by prayer, by dependence on God’s Holy Spirit, by asking the Spirit to work through us, all of these are actually possible and can become a part of our lives regularly.

Jesus asked how long He needed to put up with such an unbelieving generation. Luke asks at the end of his gospel (Luke 18:8), “When the Son of Man returns, will He find faith on the earth?” Do we have the faith to respond obediently to the nudging of the Holy Spirit, recognizing that, yes, we humanly are in over our heads, but witnessing is never about our human capabilities. Witnessing is about God working through us in response to our prayers for help.



Friday

Read Luke 18:1-8; 1 Peter 3:8-22



Recently I heard a pastor tell a story about prayer. It seems that there was a bar in Texas that sought to increase the size of its building to increase its business. In response a local church began to pray against the expansion. During the week before the bar expansion was finished, lightning struck the bar and it burned down. The church began to brag about the power of prayer until the bar owner decided to sue the church on the grounds that they were ultimately responsible for the demise of the building. The church replied that it had no responsibility or connection to the demise. The judge read through the paper work presented by both sides, and at the opening of the hearing he said, "I don't know how I am going to decide this, but it appears from the paper work that we now have a bar owner who believes in the power of prayer and an entire congregation who does not."

Checking Snopes.com, I found that the story is rather exaggerated and probably not true, but it does point up a problem in our society today. Non-churched people believe in prayer and do almost as much praying, if not more, as those of us who go to church. Furthermore, do those of us who do believe do so only when it is convenient? Are we as fast to stand up for our beliefs and proudly proclaim them when doing so would result in some financial loss or some other disadvantage? Are we willing to be obedient to Scripture when it hurts?

When it comes to being a witness, we need to begin where people are at. We need to recognize what beliefs they have and then show them through our actions and love where they are misguided. But we also need to make sure we are not talking out of both sides of our mouths at the same time.

I love this parable about prayer. God answers prayer for those who both know Him and those who do not. Often I find God more patient with non-believers than the church is. Often non-believers are more true to their beliefs than believers.



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