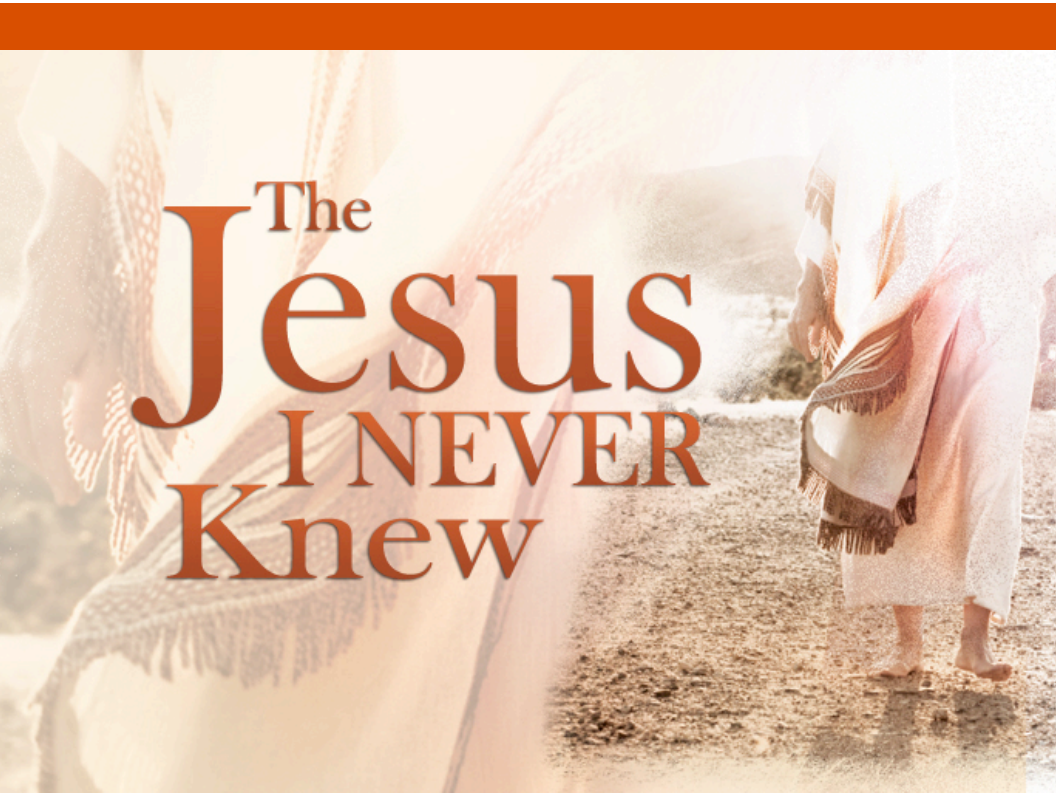


Weekly Devotional



The Jesus I NEVER Knew

October 3-7, 2011

Questions & Prayers

Please note that much of this week's material came from Philip Yancey's book, *The Jesus I Never Knew*. I also quoted commentaries by Bruce Larson (Luke) and Myron S. Augsburger (Matthew) from *The Communicators Commentary Series*.

Note Luke 18:9-14

1. To whom did Jesus tell this parable and why?
2. What motivated each man to pray?
3. What did the stance of each man reveal about how they felt about themselves?
4. What does it mean that one man was justified and the other wasn't? What principle is Jesus stressing?
5. How do we judge people according to outward appearances?
6. What does this parable teach us about our prayer habits? How do you approach God in your prayers?
7. Why does God honor the prayers of a humble person?
8. What specific steps can you take to cultivate a spirit of humility and forgiveness?

Monday: Pray for Middle East that amidst all the changes Christians will obtain more freedom.

Tuesday: Pray for the Good News Clubs.

Wednesday: Pray for Wednesday night programs at church.

Thursday: Pray for those looking for work.

Friday: Pray for those trapped in abusive situations.



Monday

Luke 5:17-26



The whole Jewish religious system was built around rules that enabled one to get close to God. Some people were in, some out. The temple had an outer court for Gentiles, then a closer court for women, then the area for men, an even closer area for priests, and finally the inner sanctuary where the High Priest would enter only once a year. On that one occasion he entered in order to make a sacrifice on behalf of the people, a sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. There were also daily morning and evening sacrifices and sacrifices prescribed to various purposes.

In this passage we have Jesus seeming to circumvent this whole system and declaring that somehow the faith of the paralytic's friends brings him forgiveness. This was radical. This made the temple and the priests expendable. This meant the whole sacrificial system was no longer needed. Who was this man?

This man was no other than God, who came to be next to us, not only as we venture into the temple, but out where we live day in and day out. This man was the One who was going to be the final sacrifice fulfilling once and for all the requirements of the law. No longer were there monthly payments to the credit card company; the complete loan was getting paid off and then some, so to speak.

This meant that the whole religious system was being thrown overboard. Jesus' response, if they had listened, would have been that the daily, weekly, and yearly sacrifices were meant to teach them the significance of His one sacrifice, but of course they would not listen. To the Pharisees it was not that Jesus was healing people, nor that He was popular, that bothered them so much. It was that He was substituting Himself for the law and all of the religious rituals.

How often do we let laws and rituals get in the way of Jesus? The laws and rituals are meant to lead us to Jesus but not replace Him. The faith of the friends released the power of God because their faith was not in actions, but in the One to whom the actions pointed. Where is our faith? In our deeds, or in the One who died for us? Oh, we know the right answer, but do our emotions, actions, and attitudes towards others prove it?

Tuesday

Luke 5:27-39



In Philip Yancey's book, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, he comments on a pattern he noticed about Jesus' life: "The more unsavory the characters, the more at ease they seemed to feel around Jesus." Social outcasts were at home with Jesus while the more respectable types (religious leaders) "walked away shaking their heads." Unfortunately, Yancey remarks, just the opposite is true today. Today the "Christian church now attracts respectable types who closely resemble the people most suspicious of Jesus on earth. What has happened to reverse the pattern of Jesus' day? Why don't sinners *like* being around us?" (p. 147)

The Gospels mention that Jesus dined socially with others eight times. Three of these are rather normal situations, but the other five broke with the social norms of His day in some way. Jesus broke with the norms of His society to reach out to those who could not help themselves, those whom others rejected or thought little of. In Jesus' day, as in ours, people were grouped into those who were acceptable and those who were not. Jesus came to break down the groupings and make everyone acceptable. He didn't care about the past, only the future, and He was prepared to alter completely the future of anyone who would let Him.

But the religious leaders were stuck in their past ways. One way was to work at being acceptable. Fasting, praying, and keeping the laws were the things that mattered. But for Jesus these were methods of the old order. The new order had come, the new world of forgiveness and new beginnings, the new order where one's shortcomings were either no longer important or they were to be woven into a beautiful tapestry. This new world was to be known by its joy, its ease of life, its forgiveness, its love, its acceptance, and its new beginnings. But those who were still trying to earn God's favor—those who were still trying to prove that they were worthy—could not change.

What about us? Are we clinging to the old? Do we try to prove ourselves worthy? Have we entered into the joy of a forgiven life? Are we celebrating with others?



Wednesday

Matthew 18:21-35

I have a younger brother. I can still remember that he broke one of my most prized childhood toys, and I was not even six yet. Currently I have a house guest living with me. When I am tired, how easy it is to see that “her chores” are not being done and to be just a little irritated. Of course, if she were not living with me, I would be doing these chores. It is easy to hold grudges. It is easy to want to put limits on others. We so often judge things according to what is good for us.

In Bruce Larson’s commentary on Luke, he stated that one day someone confronted him saying, “Larson, do you know what’s wrong with you? You judge other people by their actions and yourself by your intentions. If you could reverse that, it would change your life.’ Since then I’ve been trying to judge others not by what they do, but by what they meant to do. Try judging yourself not by what you meant, but by what you did—which is how people perceive you.” (*The Communicator’s Commentary: Luke*, p. 256)

Forgiving always costs. It is never easy. It cost Jesus His life and Father God His Son. It also costs when we forgive. But how little compared to what has been forgiven us. How little compared to the repeated times I take for granted what God has done for me. “Forgiveness means that the forgiving person as the innocent one resolves his own wrath over the sin of the guilty one and lets the guilty one go free. To forgive means that one genuinely loves, and this love can move beyond the issue to the person, and that one cares more about the person than about what he or she has done. Forgiveness liberates. Forgiveness frees the person for the options of living.” (*The Communicator’s Commentary: Matthew*, Myron Augsburger, p. 222)

In this parable “Jesus taught [Peter] that forgiveness is qualitative, not quantitative. . . . But human nature is inclined to resent rather than to release, to be demanding rather than to forgive.” (Augsburger, p. 223-224) Forgiveness involves responsibility. We have been forgiven much. We now have the responsibility not to resent another but to forgive as we have been forgiven.

Who do you find hard to forgive? Might our real problem be that we are not aware of our own need for forgiveness? Why not try out Bruce Larson’s challenge to judge yourself by what you did and to judge others by what they meant to do?

Thursday

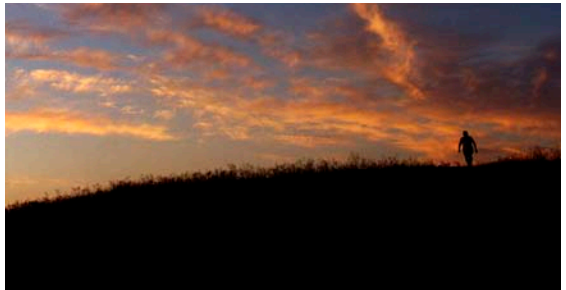
John 20:19-24

What a great privilege to speak words of forgiveness to another person. Jesus looked at the paralyzed man being lowered through the roof and declared, "Your sins are forgiven." We might not have the same power, but we do have the same authority. In Jesus, because of Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, we can look another person straight in the eyes and with all honesty declare, "In Jesus you are forgiven!"

Yancey tells the story of a woman who was shamefully using her child to support her own drug habit. When the woman was asked why she did not go to a church to seek help, her response was, "Why would I ever go there? They'd just make me feel even worse than I already do!" (p. 148) People know they are sinners. One of the reasons why people struggled with Jesus was because "He [brought] to the surface repressed sin, yet forgives any freely acknowledged sin. . . . As C.S. Lewis has said, 'Prostitutes are in no danger of finding their present life so satisfactory that they cannot turn to God: the proud, the avaricious, the self-righteous, are in that danger.'" (Yancey, p. 152)

Whenever angels appear in Scripture, the first words out of their mouths are, "Fear not!" In today's passage the resurrected Jesus appears and His first words are, "Peace be with you!" Oh, to receive peace. Why do we not have more peace in our lives? Often it is either because we are striving hard to repress or hide the truth, presenting ourselves and our situations as something different than truly is, or because we are all too aware of how much trouble we are in and rightfully feel afraid. In both situations, Jesus comes to bring peace. Jesus says to you, "You do not have to hide. I love you. I forgive you. I will provide and stand in the gap for you." Once we know this for ourselves, we can give this same peace to others.

I wonder if one of the reasons why we do not individually forgive others more often is because we do not have conversations where people share at such a level of personal failure. Might that be because we feel uncomfortable ourselves, not facing our own repressed sin? Might it be that we do not let others know how much we have been forgiven. People know they need help. What a great privilege it is to help others.



Friday

Luke 18:9-14



Many people of Jesus' day preferred John the Baptist's legalistic approach to sin. John's message was a call to repentance lest one be cut off and thrown into the fire. At least with the law, some might say, we know where we stand. With the law we have some way of gauging whether we are better than others or not (as if God graded on the curve). All too often we really are more comfortable with a God who says, "Start obeying My commands," than we are with One who says, "I've taken care of the penalty; the slate is clean" or "I am less concerned about the commands and more concerned about love." Yancey states, "Jesus [though] moved the emphasis from God's holiness (exclusive) to God's mercy (inclusive). Instead of the message 'No undesirables allowed,' He proclaimed, 'In God's kingdom there are no undesirables.'" (Yancey, p.155) In this story Jesus is "contrasting a Pharisee with a remorseful tax collector, [capturing] the inclusive gospel of grace in a nutshell. . . . Can we infer from Jesus' story that behavior does not matter, that there is no moral difference between a disciplined legalist and a robber, evildoer, and adulterer. Of course not. Behavior matters in many ways; it simply is not how to get accepted by God. The skeptic A.N. Wilson comments on Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and tax collector, 'It is a shocking, morally anarchic story. All that matters in the story appears to be God's capacity to forgive.' Precisely." (Yancey, p.155)

The Pharisee had everything except the one essential thing. The tax collector had nothing but the one essential quality—which is a sense of his own unworthiness and his need for God's grace.

"In His own social interactions, Jesus was putting into practice 'the great reversal.' Normally in this world we look up to the rich, the beautiful, the successful. Grace, however, introduces a world of new logic. Because God loves the poor, the suffering, the persecuted, so should we. Because God sees no undesirables, neither should we." (Yancey, p. 155) But do we do, don't we? Ask God for His eyes and heart today?



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