

GLENKIRK CHURCH



WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

The DEVO

MAY 27 – 31, 2019

UNCOMMON

love

SERMON SERIES

April 28 – May 26

MONDAY

Ephesians 4:4-6; Deuteronomy 6:4-5; 1 Timothy 1:3-7

Has the US ever experienced a season of greater social, political, and religious divisiveness than presently? And the same might be asked of the Christian church. Depending upon the source and definitions, there are hundreds if not thousands of “Christian denominations.” Given Ephesians 4:4-6—“one body ... one Spirit ... one Lord, one baptism, one God and Father of all”—how can that be?

A byproduct of this, sadly, is that the church can be better-known (and often despised) for what it’s against more so than what it’s for. Doctrinal disputes have spurred many of the church and denominational splits in Christendom since the 1500’s. Glenkirk has its own experience with “breakups,” having left the PCUSA in 2012 and our 2016 “split.” Accordingly, it’s good to remind ourselves what we believe—“If you don’t stand for something, you’ll fall for anything”—this week’s devotional theme.

Unity is a challenge. The enemy, defeated at Calvary twenty centuries ago, does all that he can to undermine the church and believers’ ministries. Satan may have something to do with Christian denominational proliferation—“too many” choices might help the uninformed choose wrongly. Our beliefs should unify us, not divide. We should learn, teach, and proclaim our faith, the things that we’re for, which fuel our faith and joy and make the Body something other than “another social club” or self-help organization.

“The Christian faith ... is based on doctrine [principles, beliefs]. The doctrines of the deity of Christ (John 1:1, 14), the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21), the resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:17), and salvation by grace through faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-9) are absolutely essential and non-negotiable. ... [There are] other doctrines in the Christian faith that are [also foundational], such as the Trinity, the inspiration of Scripture, and the reality of the eternal state.” (GotQuestions.org)

Other matters, those which aren't the basis for salvation—baptism methods, worship styles, young-earth vs. old-earth creationism, end times understanding, governance methods, interpretations of predestination—shouldn't create combative rifts. We mustn't “major in the minors,” the stuff of loveless legalism or fringe fanaticism. The world is watching. Let's live out what we're for: the risen Savior, Jesus Christ!

QUESTIONS

Why are there so many “Christian” denominations? What is “doctrine?” What are some of the “non-essentials” that have caused disputes within churches?

PRAYERS FOR TIRZAH INTERNATIONAL

Pray for Tirzah International whose passion is seeing women and girls thrive across the globe, just as God created them to do! Local leaders train women to run their own businesses, develop leadership skills, combat violence and injustice in their families and communities, and live healthy, fruitful lives while being HIV+.

TUESDAY

Ephesians 4:4-6; Galatians 3:26-29; John 15:4-6

At a Christian conference some years ago, the host asked, “How many churches are represented here?” With thousands in the auditorium, answers started flying like “575,” “820,” etc. He gazed around and answered, “No, there’s one—the Church of Jesus Christ.” He then pulled a coin from his pocket, emphasizing, “This is valued at 25 cents, but it’s one quarter.”

Yesterday we touched upon historic Christian denominational proliferation. Some of the splits were doctrinally righteous; some, perhaps, legalistically misguided. Today’s Scriptures remind us regarding an essential, unifying truth: Jesus is the Church’s Head, the true Church, the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12). Why such strange metaphors peculiar to Christianity?

Many in the 1st century church had Jewish backgrounds. God favored ancient Israel and called it to be sanctified [set apart for purification and holy use] from Gentile nations (Leviticus 20:26) to develop her uniquely in His ways. His ultimate will was that ancient Israel be “a light for the nations” (Isaiah 49:6) and “a nation of priests” (Exodus 19:6). The Jews fulfilled this ultimately in producing the Messiah.

The Bible uses many images representing ancient Israel; among the most common were the fig tree (Habakkuk 3:17), the olive tree (Jeremiah 11:16), and a vineyard (Isaiah 5:1-2). When Jesus called Himself “the vine” (John 15:5), He reinforced the relationship of the faithful to Him while using imagery familiar and stirring to Jewish hearers. One of Paul’s favorite expressions, “in Christ” (Ephesians 1:4; 1 Corinthians 4:15, etc.), and Paul’s description of Jesus as “the Head of the church” (Ephesians 5:23) align with Jesus’ vine metaphor.

“No branch can even live, let alone produce leaves and fruit, by itself. Cut off from the trunk, a branch is dead ... [Similarly] Jesus’ disciples depend on being connected to Him for their spiritual life and the ability to serve Him effectively. ... Our source of life and spiritual fruit is not in ourselves; it is outside us, in Christ Jesus.” (GotQuestions.org) The answer to divisions within the church? Jesus Christ, the Answer. The further we get from Him, the more we stray from the Truth.

QUESTIONS

What is the unifying truth of the true church? Why did Jesus, the Divine, call Himself “the vine?”

PRAYERS FOR TIRZAH INTERNATIONAL

Pray that the Lord would provide Tirzah with a North America Director. We are actively recruiting for this position and are praying for a wonderful woman who feels called by God to this work. Pray for someone with an excellent fundraising track record and a passion for connecting people with God’s global work.

WEDNESDAY

John 3:16-17; Mark 10:42-45; Romans 5:6-11

“Gospel” means “good news,” derived from the Anglo-Saxon word *godspell*. Per Merriam-Webster, it’s “the message concerning Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation.” It’s **the** key theme of the Bible, God’s redemptive plan for humankind, which I’ll attempt to convey as follows.

God is the Source and Creator of everything created; He made us to be in loving relationship with Him. However, the present world isn’t what God originally designed; it is “fallen.” The first humans, Adam and Eve, rebelled and brought sin into the world, separating humankind from the holy, living God; each of us inherits this sin nature and broken relationship. Our sinfulness and the world’s related fallenness account for the messes around us. God hates sin’s destruction—if He didn’t love us, He wouldn’t hate that which destroys us. If God didn’t judge sin, He’d be both unjust and unloving.

God loves us so much that He came into the world as Jesus of Nazareth, fully God and fully Man, to pay the price in His perfect life and divine capacity that none of us could pay for ourselves, to help us relate to God, and to show us how to live. By sacrificing Himself upon Calvary’s cross for all who believe, Jesus fully and finally paid the price that God’s justice requires, dying in our place. By this, when

we accept Christ, He receives our sin and broken lives and we are in His righteous standing. He rose from the dead on the third day, defeating death and sin and affirming that His sacrifice satisfied God's justice.

Right relationship with God is restored when you accept Jesus Christ as both your Savior [Rescuer and Substitute] and Lord [Leader and Example]. When you do this—asking God's forgiveness and turning away from your sin—you receive the gift of eternal life, adopted into God's eternal family, not on the basis of your merit, but on Jesus' merit.

How well do you know the Gospel? Every Christ follower should grasp it fully and intimately. When did you last share it? Where and how will you next share the Gospel—with an unsaved relative, neighbor, colleague, friend or other?

QUESTIONS

What does "Gospel" mean? Why did God create us; that is, what's the meaning of life? Why must God judge sin?

PRAYERS FOR TIRZAH INTERNATIONAL

Pray for Tirzah's Global Leaders in Myanmar, Brazil, Serbia, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa, Ivory Coast, Australia, Egypt, North America and India. May the Lord strengthen and refresh them, and may He fill them with joy and wisdom and provide for all of their needs.

THURSDAY

Ephesians 4:4-6; John 1:1-5; Hebrews 1:1-4

If the Gospel is the “who, why and how” of God’s salvation in Christ, the Apostle’s Creed features many of the associated “what’s.” Let’s review it, then address some related confusion.

“I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

“I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; He descended to hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there He will come to judge the living and the dead.

“I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.”

Some discount the necessity of Jesus’ virgin birth. However, “the virgin birth explains how Christ could be both God and Man, how He was without sin, and that the entire work of salvation is God’s gracious act. If Jesus was not born of a virgin, He had a human father ... [and] the Bible teaches a lie.” (Albert Mohler) Jesus Christ needed to be fully God and fully Man. Man broke relationship with God; thus it took a

Man to die for us and provide the only means of restored relationship. Yet only God would have the capacity to live perfectly and take all of humankind's sins upon Himself.

The expression "descended into hell" has spawned doctrinal controversy. "Hell" connotes varied, often misguided images. It's more helpful to consider this "the place of the dead" (Luke 16:22, 23) before Jesus' resurrection. The word "catholic," as used here, doesn't refer to any particular denomination, but means "universal," thus applicable to the true Body of Christ.

The Apostle's Creed, unlike the Gospel, isn't essential to evangelism and outreach. However, it is important to grasping Christianity's foundations. If you struggle with any of it, ask God for related understanding.

QUESTIONS

Why is Jesus' virgin birth essential to our faith? What do "descended into hell" and "catholic" mean within the context of the Apostle's Creed?

PRAYERS FOR TIRZAH INTERNATIONAL

Pray for the women in Tirzah's global partner programs. May they know how much the Lord loves them. May they quickly learn business skills and have many customers! May they and their children enjoy strong health and may the children thrive in school.

FRIDAY

Ephesians 4:4-6; Ecclesiastes 3:9-11; John 14:15-17

Thomas Edison once described the “condition of so many people ... [as] incurably religious.” Solomon explains why in Ecclesiastes 3:11: “[God] has put eternity into man’s heart.” CS Lewis says: “If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. Earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing.”

God created us with a built-in desire for knowing Him, though it’s been hijacked and distorted by our sin nature. Accordingly, some maintain, “All religions are essentially the same—do good, be better than most, and you’ll end up in a ‘better place’ after you die.” But this week’s featured Scripture, Ephesians 4:4-6, tells us otherwise: “There is one body and one Spirit ... one Lord, one faith ... one God and Father of all.”

Religions see “salvation” as merit-based, “earned” by doing your best, more good than bad. The related inference is that God “grades on a curve.” The Bible teaches that one’s merit has nothing to do with his or her redemption; it’s available only via Jesus’ atoning sacrifice at Calvary and our corresponding surrender to God in Christ. Salvation is an unmerited gift of grace, unearnable by us and based solely

upon Jesus' merit. Christianity alone knows the God who came to earth in human flesh on a rescue mission, paying the price for our sins to satisfy God's holy justice and restore relationship between fallen people and the LORD.

Our God alone is the true and living God, Yahweh, the triune God of the Bible. Strictly monotheistic religions, particularly Judaism and Islam, along with the cults, deny Jesus' deity and cannot know the Holy Spirit. Polytheistic religions, including Hindu, teach multiple "gods." Though we're woefully limited and unable to grasp the full mystery of one God in three Persons, we're able to know God, despite our limitations, through Jesus Christ and with the Holy Spirit's help.

"Know Jesus, know God. No Jesus, no God." What unsaved people do you know, those apart from Him? Will you lovingly introduce them to your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ?

QUESTIONS

Why are people so naturally "religious," despite our fallenness? What's a critical difference between true Christianity and religions? How can we know and begin to understand the triune, true and living God?

PRAYERS FOR TIRZAH INTERNATIONAL

Pray for the Lord to provide abundantly for the work of Tirzah so that it thrives and grows for many years into the future. May the Lord bless many women through Tirzah so that they may go on to be a blessing to the many women and men and children in their communities and nations!

Sources

- GotQuestions.org quotes can be found at www.gotquestions.org
- Merriam-Webster's Gospel definition is from www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gospel
- Albert Mohler's quote is from www.ligonier.org/blog/must-christians-believe-virgin-birth
- Thomas Edison's quote is from <http://atheisme.free.fr/Quotes/Religion.htm>
- C.S. Lewis' quote is from his book, *Mere Christianity*. Publisher Geoffrey Bles (UK), Macmillan Publishers (US), and HarperCollins Publishers (US), 1952.

