

GLENKIRK CHURCH



WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

The DEVO

AUGUST 3 - 7, 2020



MONDAY

Hebrews 1:1-3; Philippians 2:5-11; 2 Corinthians 3:14-16

“Why does God make it so hard? Why can’t He just come down, clearly show us who He is, and then we can believe?” asked my unbelieving nephew, Greg. Isn’t it interesting how skeptics often express frustration and criticism regarding a God in whom they profess disbelief? Greg was unmoved by my answer: “He already has, Greg, as Jesus of Nazareth. You can read about it in the Bible and see it in the changed lives of Christians.”

Greg’s frustration is understandable. The Savior’s life can sometimes feel mysterious even to believers. The Bible indicates that Jesus often issued hard-to-grasp, crowd-thinning teaching when gatherings swelled to include those desiring only a meal or to witness some “magic.” After Christ began speaking publicly only in parables, His disciples asked Him why. Jesus’ reply, referencing Isaiah 6:10: “... *because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand*” (Matthew 13:13). For more on Jesus’ teaching in parables, see the 9/17/18 devo: <https://www.glenkirkchurch.org/2018/09/17/september-17-21-2018/>.

Scripture indicates that God is unwilling that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9). Why, then, can it seem so challenging to get to know Him and His ways? Does God “play hard-to-get” and, if so, why?

Perhaps the answer lies partly in the bond that Yahweh desires with His own. God initiates the relationship (John 6:44), “quickenings” (reviving us from the spiritual death of our inherited sin nature) our spirits via “the wooing of the Holy Spirit.” I like this; it reinforces the intimacy that God desires as He calls “the Bride of Christ” into eternal,

close relationship. There's an attractive mystery in wooing, something in the pursuit—even for the “prize”—heightening its appeal. As well, the “effort” it takes to learn about Him is strengthening. If God sought only a superficial relationship, perhaps He would make it “easier” to know Him.

Apparently, Greg's eyes are veiled, at least for now. I wish otherwise, but all I do can is pray for him, share truth in love, and follow Christ winsomely. Like all believers, I'm responsible for faithfulness and not the results. The LORD handles the wooing and unveiling.

QUESTIONS

Why did God make it so hard, at least to some, to “find” Him? How might God's seemingly playing “hard to get” relate to the relationship He desires with us?

PRAYERS FOR LIVING STONES MINISTRIES

Pray for Living Stones Ministries (LSM), which helps families whose lives have been altered by the news of homosexuality. LSM understands their hearts' cry, stands beside these families, and offers spiritual counseling and prayer. They offer online support groups and encourage families through their newsletters.

TUESDAY

Hebrews 1:1-3; Galatians 1:6-9; Deuteronomy 4:2

Let's harken back to my nephew, Greg, and his complaint from yesterday: "Why can't God reveal more, making it easier to know Him?" Sadly, the founders of at least two false religions, one Islam and the other a cult, claim to base their beliefs on "later, special revelations of God (or Allah)" as "given by angels." These founders and their followers dismiss the Bible's stern warnings about adding nothing to the Holy Scripture (Deut. 4:2, Rev. 22:18). Today's Galatians text anticipated such corruption, likewise forewarning.

The Bible shares that, after Jesus, no more professional prophets were sent. Why? Because Jesus Christ is the final and full revelation of God, the Word of God (John 1:1, 14), "*the same yesterday and today and forever*" (Hebrews 13:8). Hebrews 1:3 (ESV) states, "*After making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.*" This reinforces Jesus' declaration from the cross, indicating the finality and sufficiency of His saving sacrifice, "*It is finished!*" (John 19:30). Likewise, the Scriptures are final and complete, the need for further vocational prophets ended.

"So, that's it?" you might protest. Appreciating the Bible's depth and richness should be a noble, lifelong pursuit—even the most knowledgeable, committed, faithful Christian Bible scholars just begin to grasp God's majesty until called home. Part of God's Good News, however, is that He provides the Holy Spirit to Christians to teach and guide us here (John 14:26). And the Son is the living Word, our Emmanuel, "God with us."

Take heart in knowing that God continues to reveal Himself in the lives of we who follow Jesus (Ephesians 2:10), in the wonder and intricate design of the universe and all creatures (Romans 1:20) and in His continuing, providential work all around us. But this remains foundational: “Know Jesus, know God. No Jesus, no God.”

Though His majesty is unfathomable, God delights in our attempts to know Him and His ways (Jeremiah 9:24). How are you growing in your knowledge of Jesus, the Messiah and returning King? When did you last have a loving, engaged conversation with another “wanting to learn more about God”?

QUESTIONS

Why were no more professional prophets sent by God after Jesus' ministry? What are some of the ways God reveals Himself to us? What role does Jesus play in the revelation of God?

PRAYERS FOR LIVING STONES MINISTRIES

Pray for God's continued direction for the ministry as it pivots and flexes due to COVID-19.

WEDNESDAY

Hebrews 1:2-3; John 8:51-59; Colossians 2:9-10

Critics of Christianity generally protest its exclusivity claims, emphasized by the Lord Himself, “*No one comes to the Father except through Me*” (John 14:6). Skeptics argue, “All religions have validity, teaching essentially the same things: love others, do good.” But is the “all religions are essentially the same” critique valid?

Jesus’ teaching itself easily debunks the “they’re all the same” notion. He claimed to be the only Way to salvation (John 14:15-16). Christ foretold that He would die so that His followers might live eternally (John 10:11, 15)—Christianity is the only faith wherein a Man could die sacrificially for others’ forgiveness. Jesus predicted His execution and resurrection (Matthew 17:22-23) and lives still (John 14:2-3)—Buddha and Mohammed remain dead, but Jesus’ tomb is empty. And Jesus claimed to be God: “*I and the Father are one*” (John 10:30). Jesus’ enemies clearly grasped His claims to deity: “... *you, being a man, make yourself God*” (John 10:33).

A compelling support for the Bible—and Jesus’ statements—is the expanse of fulfilled prophecy. No other holy book dares to prophesy as the Bible does; moreover, the biblical prediction success rate is 100%. Depending upon how one defines the details, Jesus personally fulfilled at least 44 Old Testament prophecies, up to as many as 356 (AccordingtotheScriptures.org). The odds of Jesus fulfilling just 8 (eight!) prophecies, much less 40+, are 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000. (ChristianAnswers.Net)

However, “truth bombing” your skeptical friend may not be helpful—one can “win an argument while losing a soul.” Ask them about the opinions they hold—many have unexamined views on such things. Your goal is to draw closer to them, understand, and strengthen the basis for continuing relationship and dialog. Perhaps even a simple “Why do you feel that way?” might help. You’d like to “put a pebble in their shoe” regarding flimsily-held opinions, making room for the Holy Spirit’s work.

God the Son came to seek and save the lost. He befriended and walked alongside people, listening and asking thoughtful questions to prepare them to receive truth. And He always shared the truth in love. What better Example can we follow here?

QUESTIONS

How do Jesus’ claims challenge the “all religions are essentially the same” contention? What role does prophecy play in validating the Bible’s unique professions? What’s an effective way of dialoging with an unbelieving friend, helping them examine some opinions they may hold superficially by “putting a pebble in their shoe”?

PRAYERS FOR LIVING STONES MINISTRIES

Pray for LSM’s new children’s book series countering the messages of the LGBT. This children’s series helps adults discuss sensitive issues with children. Each story unfolds offering the child to embrace who God created him or her to be.

THURSDAY

Hebrews 1:3, 10:4-18; John 19:28-30

"After making purification for sins, He (Jesus) sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Hebrews 1:3 ESV). This Scripture regarding the risen and ascended Christ fitly complements Jesus' final crucifixion declaration, *"It is finished!"* (John 19:30). But is it really, truly finished, or was Jesus play-acting for effect? Was Jesus' atoning sacrifice on the cross sufficient and absolute in securing the salvation of we who believe and receive such mercy and grace?

Muslims would say no, rejecting anyone's ability to pay for another's sins. Islam's Jesus is the second greatest prophet, subordinate only to Mohammed. Non-followers of Christ, at least those admiring Him somewhat, often label Jesus "a great teacher and moral leader." But how could Jesus be merely a revered prophet, holy man, righteous example and great teacher when saying the things that He said? "Either this Man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse." (C.S. Lewis)

Jesus' unbelieving contemporaries generally considered Him a misguided rabbi or, worse, militant blasphemer. "What's finished?" they might challenge. Jesus clashed with the Pharisees often over their works-based, manmade rules and rituals, admonishing, *"They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders ..."* (Matthew 23:4 ESV). Religious types, believing that salvation is earnable, discount Jesus' sacrifice by equating "worthiness" with meritorious works. Sadly,

whether self-professing “Christians” or otherwise, they’ve left Christ on the cross.

Even some legitimate Christian denominations feel a need to add to Christ’s finished, atoning work with notions of “purgatory” or required Saturday worship as avenues for heavenly reward. Lest we be too critical here, however, remember that Americans generally embrace merit-based recognition and rewards. These are built into our schooling and economic systems, permeating the greater culture.

Fortunately, Jesus is above all of this, coming not to start a new religion but a family. When I stumble and sin, I repent and thank Him, unburdened in knowing that “*It is finished!*” When laboring and longing for eternity, I praise God because “*It is finished!*” The empty tomb ratifies this, powerfully demonstrating God’s loving provision—rest in the peace that He alone gives!

QUESTIONS

What’s the meaning of Jesus’ final recorded declaration from the cross, “*It is finished!*”? What does “they’ve left Christ on the cross” mean regarding many people’s beliefs? What’s the significance of Jesus’ empty tomb?

PRAYERS FOR LIVING STONES MINISTRIES

Please pray for Living Stones Ministries’ support groups and their leaders. Pray for families facing journeys with a loved one identifying as LGBT.

FRIDAY

Hebrews 1:3, 7:23-27; Acts 7:54-60

Reading Hebrews 1:3 again and moving into Hebrews 7:25, the text initially flows quite smoothly. *“Who ... when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high (1:3 NKJV) ... He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him.” (7:25 KJV)* It makes sense, even with the challenges of King James English. Jesus completed the work of His first coming—thereby reconciling His followers to God—and thereafter rejoined the Heavenly Father.

But the second part of Hebrews 7:25 is puzzling, and not because of the old English: *“... seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.”* What? If Jesus fully and finally paid for our sins—*“It is finished!”* as explored yesterday—why would Jesus need to persist in interceding for us?

The standard explanation per GotQuestions.org harmonizes with other credible commentaries: *“Although Christ’s work to secure the salvation of the elect was completed on the cross ... His care for His redeemed children [continues]. ... Jesus is the Advocate for Christians, meaning He is our great Defender. ... Jesus is always pleading our case before the Father, like a defense lawyer on our behalf.”* The first half of this interpretation works for me, but I struggle reconciling it with the “pleading our case” and “defense lawyer” parts. It seems almost to portray the Son and Father adversarially. This *may* be one of those unfathomable mysteries of the Eternal, another indication of how *“[God’s] ways are higher than [our] ways”* (Isaiah 55:9).

I wonder if our temporal limitations—bounded physically and timewise—create the perceived disconnect. God is eternal and limitless; Jesus is now in heaven while also indwelling believers (Galatians 2:20). Perhaps from God’s timeless perspective, Jesus’ saving sacrifice—though it occurred nearly 2000 years ago—and its consequences continually authenticate our adoption by God. When we are “*in Christ*” (Galatians 3:26), following Him in intimate relationship, His sacrifice endures as our “family seal.”

I’ll need to “keep scratching this itch”—perhaps it will evade me until Jesus reveals it in eternity. “*Teach me Your way, O LORD, that I might walk in Your truth*” (Psalm 86:11).

QUESTIONS

If Jesus’ atoning sacrifice was complete, final, and sufficient, why would He need to continually make atonement for us with the Father? How might our temporal limitations (unlike God, we are bound by time and space) affect our ability to grasp God’s deeper truths? Is it OK not to understand everything the Bible teaches?

PRAYERS FOR LIVING STONES MINISTRIES

Please pray for Executive Director Denise Shick. Pray for God’s protection over her family as she continues faithfully in His calling on her life.

Sources:

- AccordingtotheScriptures.org's prophecies information can be found at <https://accordingtothescriptures.org/prophecy/353prophecies.html>
- ChristianAnswers.Net's information is from <https://christiananswers.net/q-aiia/jesus-odds.html>
- C.S. Lewis' quote can be found at <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/6979-i-am-trying-here-to-prevent-anyone-saying-the-really>
- GotQuestions?org's quote is from <https://www.gotquestions.org/Jesus-interceding.html>

