

Devotionals from God's Daily Word Ministries

June 2006

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His Work of Art

6-1-06

Do you ever wake up and wonder if you're where God wants you? Do you ever wonder if you're really following God's plan for your life? These are normal questions and ought to be asked by every true believer in Jesus Christ. We should desire to follow His plan; and the only way to know is to ask, listen for direction, and obediently follow.

The most important part of God's plan is that we trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of sin; "He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). God wants us all to repent, turn to Jesus and receive His gift of Salvation - He wants us to step from eternal death to eternal life!

But many people receive His gift and then continue life with no real change, no new direction. This should not be! When we receive God's gift of Salvation, something wonderful occurs; "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17). When we place our life in His hands, He wipes away the ugliness of our sin and begins to grow and mature us into the likeness of His Son (Romans 8:29). This process of maturing growth is His plan!

Ephesians 2:10

"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

When we become a new creation in Christ, we become God's workmanship. The Greek word for workmanship is "poiema" - it's where we get the word poem. And though it might be difficult to think of our life as a poem, the idea being presented is that God is creating something beautiful, something almost poetic which touches the heart of God.

It might be easier to switch analogies and think of God as the Master Painter. When we give Him our life, we hand Him our old canvas - a canvas covered with the grotesque ugliness of sin. But by grace the canvas is wiped clean, and the Artist begins to paint a work of art with Jesus as the model. Every stroke of His brush is to make our canvas look more and more like Christ.

Are we where God wants us? Are we following His plan? To help find the answer, we should ask: Is the likeness of Christ beginning to form or is my canvas still filled with ugliness and confusion? Am I allowing Him to paint or am I trying to take the brush at every opportunity? Do I even trust Him with my canvas?

God really is the Master Painter, and He really does know what He's doing. If we will allow Him to finish His work, the end result will be better than anything we can imagine!! Let's give Him our canvas and allow Him to paint. Let's follow His plan and allow our life to become His work of art.

Have A Great Day!

John 5:10-13 - Lesson #51
6-2-06

We have seen Jesus choose to heal a specific man by the pool of Bethesda; "Rise, take up your bed and walk" (John 5:8). What an incredible story of the power of Christ! This ought to have been a time of rejoicing for the entire community. But when John inserts the phrase, "And that day was the Sabbath" (John 5:9), he is letting us know that the real story has just begun.

John 5:10-13

"The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, 'It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed.' He answered them, 'He who made me well said to me, "Take up your bed and walk.'" Then they asked him, 'Who is the Man who said to you, "Take up your bed and walk"?' But the one who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, a multitude being in that place."

One of the major confrontations between Jesus and the Jewish leaders was over the observance of the Sabbath. But we need to understand that Jesus most often initiated the debate. The man by the pool could have been healed on a different day if the intent was a physical healing. But the issue of interpretation and enforcement of Sabbath law was so important that Jesus set out to boldly exposed the hypocrisy.

The original Sabbath law given through Moses was, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8). The instruction for the Sabbath was to "do no work," but the rabbinic traditions had defined thirty-nine forbidden categories of work - one of which was carrying loads. These traditions became more than guidelines, they became a new law which defined "proper" observance of the Sabbath.

By the time of Jesus, the focus was on the impossible burden imposed by the multitude of traditional laws, and the true meaning of the original law and the love of the Law Giver had been completely lost. The process of trying to further define the law may have begun with good intentions but it had grown into a system which was stealing the hearts of the people away from God; "And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:9).

The evils of this system is exposed when we see that the observance of the man-made law had become more important than a miraculous healing. We see similar problems today when the Spirit of God transforms a heart, yet all we see is method, hairstyle or clothes. A great healing of the spirit takes place and we say, "It's not lawful to dress like that!" God forgive us!!

Let's take a good hard look at what we call proper and make sure we haven't created a barrier to Christ with our man-made commandments - or created false security for those who observe our new law. Let's never become so attached to what we decide is proper that we miss the miraculous power of God. Let's keep our eyes on Jesus and always allow room for God to move any way and at any moment He chooses.

Have A Great Day!

Put On The New Self

6-5-06

How does (or should) a Christian live? We might say a Christian is "made" by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and we might define a Christian as a child of God who will spend eternity in Heaven. And while these are true statements, it still seems there ought to be something about a Christian that makes them different from the rest of the unbelieving world; "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The moment we truly believe in Jesus Christ and accept the forgiveness offered through the sacrifice of His death, we are transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit and become a "new creation." But at the very instant of what we call our new birth, there is little recognizable difference between the old creation and the new. The transformation is done on our heart and there needs to be a process where we mature and allow this transformation to consume every area of our life.

Much of the letters written by Paul were devoted to this same subject. He spent most of his ministry preaching the good news of Salvation through faith in Jesus; but most of his writing was to Christians, instructing them on how they should live.

Ephesians 4:22-24

"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

These verses are part of a three chapter passage (Ephesians 4-6) which begins with "I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received" (Ephesians 4:1) and includes teaching about unity, love, humility, anger, purity, husbands, wives, parents, children, slaves, masters, and the full armor of God - all teaching about what is meant by the new self! Some find it hard to understand that a Christian must be taught and urged how to live, but Paul understood. In fact, it's clear in the original language that Paul is saying to put on the new self...and to KEEP putting it on!!

This is perhaps the most important, yet also the most neglected, teaching of the church today. We seem to have lost the understanding that the Christian life is designed to be a radical transformation which lasts all the rest of our days. The call to "come as you are" is also a call to prepare for change.

The new life we've been given is not like the old - it's "created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." Let's rise up every day and be determined to put away the old and live according to the new. Let's show the world that our walk is different - that we walk hand in hand with Jesus - that we have indeed put on the new self.

Have A Great Day!

The Privileged Gift of Holiness

6-6-06

In the message "Put On The New Self" we saw how we become a "new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17) when we place our faith in Jesus Christ. When we are brought into a right relationship with God through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, we begin a process of learning what it means to "put on the new self" (Ephesians 4:24a) and live a life of "true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:24b). But many people still struggle with the idea of holiness.

Some view holiness as an unnecessary set of rules and cling to "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Others simply don't give holy living any thought. They take Jesus to church on Sunday morning but then return Him to the shelf for the rest of their "normal" week. In either case, the point of true freedom and a loving relationship with the eternal God has been sadly missed.

Romans 6:2-4

"We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."

Salvation involves death and new life! When we truly believe in Jesus we become united with Him in His death; "our old self was crucified with Him" (Romans 6:6), and we become united with Him in His life; "count yourself dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:11).

A child of God is no longer controlled by the sinful nature; "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life" (Romans 6:22). The result of being set free is eternal life but the benefit is holiness.

How often do we recognize holiness as a benefit - a blessed gift given to all who believe? Holiness is a wonderful privilege (not a burden or obligation) and can only be accomplished by living a new life in Christ. We are no longer children of worldly darkness but children of the Light of God. When Jesus truly resides in our heart, His thoughts become our thoughts and His desires become our desires.

Without Christ, a holy life is not even possible. When Jesus says "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10), He is talking about the blessings in this present life which come through a life of purity and complete commitment. Following Jesus in all things is truly living life to the fullest!

Jesus Christ is the Creator Who gave His life so we can be restored. Let's walk with Him every moment of every day. Let's begin to truly live the new life in Christ and gratefully receive the privileged gift of holiness.

Have A Great Day!

Look Back From Eternity

6-7-06

Ruth lived in the land of Moab just east of Canaan. She was not an Israelite but she married one of the sons of Naomi who had recently moved to Moab from Judah because of a famine. After ten years, Ruth's husband died. Naomi was going to return to her homeland and thought Ruth should remain with her people in Moab. But Ruth loved Naomi and desired to stay by her side.

Ruth 1:16-17

"Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried."

Life back in Canaan was difficult for Naomi and Ruth. Without anyone to care for them, Ruth had to pick left over grain from the fields simply to have enough to eat. Fortunately, Jewish law made provisions for this type of charity to the poor. As a poor foreigner in a strange land, this was a very humbling time for Ruth.

After two harvesting seasons of faithfully gathering food for herself and Naomi, Ruth married Boaz who owned the field where she worked. They soon had a son, and Naomi was allowed to help care for the boy. Their life had suddenly, and wonderfully, improved; and though Ruth must have been relieved and pleased to have a son, imagine her amazement as she is now allowed to look back and view the results of her life from God's vantage point.

Ruth's husband, Boaz, was an Israelite from the tribe of Judah. Their son was named Obed: "He was the father of Jesse, the father of {King} David" (Ruth 4:17). From this same family line (fourteen generations later), Mary would give birth to a boy named Jesus.

Our view of God's Kingdom is VERY limited. No matter how much we desire otherwise, there are simply pieces of the puzzle we are unable to fit together. While we walk this earth and breathe this air we most likely will never see the purpose of our struggles. Yet, we must closely follow the One who leads and give ourselves wholeheartedly to each task we are given - we must trust in His plan.

A shining light will always penetrate the darkness; and though we may not see the impact we have on others, one day we will stand with our Heavenly Father and rejoice as He reveals how we were used for His glorious purpose. One day we will watch our life unfold and clearly see the use of every helping hand, every encouraging word, and even every smile we shared in the midst of our trials. Our life has great meaning and purpose - true meaning and purpose which we will joyfully witness when we are allowed to look back from eternity.

Have A Great Day!

No Shortcuts

6-8-06

In the message "Look Back From Eternity" we saw how one day, when we stand with our Heavenly Father, we will see the awesome purpose in the path we have traveled. If we continue to trust and follow God's leading, we will see how each twist and turn in His path was designed to navigate us through the jungle and keep us moving toward a closer relationship with God. "As for God, His way is perfect; the Word of the Lord is flawless" (Psalm 18:30). His way is perfect and without flaw; but, by God's sovereign will, we are given the freedom to choose whether to follow.

Many times, we see what appears to be a shorter route, and we leave His path. These perceived shortcuts are filled with weeds that entangle us and slow our walk with Christ to a pathetic crawl; "But the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful" (Matthew 13:22). All our time spent away from God's path clearly hinders our relationship and diminishes our ability to produce anything of lasting value for the Lord.

Psalm 1:1-3

"Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His Law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither."

To remain on God's path and continue to bear good and lasting fruit, we must be wise regarding the counsel we seek. Many people willingly give advice on following a "successful" path and yet ridicule any path directed by God. This counsel must be avoided since the very definition of success is in error! A truly successful path IS the path directed by God!!

Staying free of the weeds requires an active pursuit of God; "on His Law he meditates day and night." If we do not consume ourselves with the ways of God, we will, by default, become consumed by the ways of the world. Jesus made a similar statement to His disciples: "I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit" (John 15:5). Remaining in the vine is a process by which we cling to Christ and love Him with ALL our heart. Our life then becomes defined and consumed by the life of the vine - the life of Christ.

As we allow God's Word to flow through our life and truly worship Him as Lord - as we become planted by the stream of His water - we develop deep roots. These roots become a solid anchor which will not be pulled up during the storm nor dragged along by the swift currents of temptation.

God's path is perfect and His burden is light; but remaining on His path and staying free of the weeds requires commitment, perseverance, discipline, and a strong reminder that there are NO shortcuts!

Have A Great Day!

John 5:14-16 - Lesson #52
6-9-06

The Jewish system of laws had become very legalistic and created an impassible barrier to God. Jesus intentionally confronted this system by healing a man on the Sabbath - something viewed as forbidden.

John 5:14-16

"Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, 'See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.' The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath."

In one sense Jesus simply used this man to create a confrontation with the Jewish legalistic system. However, He still used this healing to teach several truths. First we learn that faith is not necessary for a miracle. Jesus acted independent of the man's faith, showing us the only requirement for a miracle is the power of God. God is never constrained by the actions of man.

Next, we learn that physical healing does not imply Spiritual forgiveness. When Jesus healed the paralytic man, who was lowered through the roof by his friends, He said, "Son, your sins are forgiven you" (Mark 12:5). But no indication of forgiveness is given in this case of the man by the pool. It is possible to be physically healed and yet remain Spiritually dead.

We are also reminded of the sad ungrateful condition of the human heart. The man was sick for thirty-eight years, and yet his total focus appears to be his new life, without any regard for the Giver of life. In fact, he reported Jesus to the Jewish leaders as soon as he learned His identity - perhaps as a way of defending himself against the charge of violating the Sabbath. Was the cost of loyalty too high? Can someone really be so self-centered that they would not give thanks for such a wonderful gift? Well, when was the last time we thanked God for the greatest gift of all - the gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus!?

Finally, we learn that this sickness was due to sin, and that something worse would happen if the man did not stop sinning. We know that not all illness is caused by sin (John 9:1-3), but we also know that many sinful activities can lead directly to terrible sickness. We also know that God can use various forms of suffering to bring about Spiritual repentance. David wrote of physical and emotional suffering after his sin with Bathsheba: "My bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me" (Psalm 32:3-4).

God remains in control and is working His plan through every situation. Let's continually come before Him with a thankful heart and seriously confront the sin in our life. Let's seek out the Healer and be determined to consistently live for Him no matter what the cost.

Have A Great Day!

When We Hear His Voice

6-12-06

In the message "No Shortcuts" we saw the importance of remaining on God's path by obediently following His leading. There will always be temptations to take paths which appear to get us "ahead" - but God's ways are flawless and He calls us to follow Him with every step.

Jeremiah was appointed God's spokesman to call the people of Israel back to a relationship filled with true worship. But despite many pleas for the people to repent, their hearts remained cold and closed to God's wonderful truth; "They go from one sin to another; they do not acknowledge Me" (Jeremiah 9:3).

After many years of living in rebellious sin, the calling ceased and Israel was taken captive by the Babylonians; "'You have rejected Me,' declares the Lord. 'You keep on backsliding. So I will lay hands on you and destroy you; I can no longer show compassion'" (Jeremiah 15:6).

God dearly loves His children: "He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). He sent His Son to die as a sacrifice for our sins and gave His Spirit to strengthen and guide us along His path. He continues to call, but constant rejection will cause our heart to harden and be subject to God's discipline.

A hardened heart has chosen to live separated from God. It can no longer hear God's call and cannot even recognize His truth. When this occurs, our Loving Father responds with great sorrow and allows the hardened heart to follow the path it desires; "Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts" (Romans 1:24). Dear Lord, do not allow us to follow our own path!

God calls us today through His Word. He calls us through those He has sent into the world to proclaim His truth. He even calls through messages such as this. Is there a tug on your heart to place your trust in the forgiveness offered through Jesus? Is there a desire for a deeper commitment, a greater worship, a life of greater holiness and purity? These desires, pulls, and tugs are all the call of God being made through His Spirit.

Hebrews 3:15

"Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion."

When we hear the call of God's voice, we must respond. He is calling us to Salvation through faith in Jesus; calling us to know Him better through His Word and prayer; calling us to serve others with love and nurture Godly relationships; and calling us to draw near through more intimate worship. His call is a wonderful confirmation of His love, but we must follow and not turn away. Today, let's answer His call and resolve to never again allow our heart to harden when we hear His voice.

Have A Great Day!

Consume The Word 6-13-06

In the message "When We Hear His Voice" we saw that despite many calls and pleas from Jeremiah, the people of Israel failed to repent of their sin and turn toward God. After many years of rejection, God finally turned them over to their own evil desires; "Even if Moses and Samuel were to stand before Me, My heart would not go out to this people" (Jeremiah 15:1).

Jeremiah was in a very lonely position. He had faithfully preached God's message to his fellow countrymen but received only rejection in return: "{I am} a man with whom the whole land strives and contends...everyone curses me" (Jeremiah 15:10). This rejection caused him to also feel rejected by God. He had lost the focus of his calling and tried to remind God of his deep devotion.

Jeremiah 15:15-16

"Do not take me away; think of how I suffer reproach for Your sake. When Your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear Your name, O Lord God Almighty."

Jeremiah hungered for God's Word and often thought of his next "meal" with the Lord. Though he was frustrated, Jeremiah loved God and desired to serve Him. God saw the devotion in Jeremiah's heart and realigned his path toward faithful service; "I will restore you that you may serve Me; if you utter worthy, not worthless, words, you will be My spokesman" (Jeremiah 15:19).

What type of devotion and hunger does God see when He looks inside our heart?

Several years ago, I had the opportunity to take an extended hiking trip with my son. We hiked 120 miles in ten days and ate mostly nuts, raisins, and peanut butter. As we hiked along the beautiful trails of Northern Maine - through woods, across streams, and over mountains - I spent many hours thinking of scripture verses. But I confess I also spent many hours thinking about pepperoni pizza with extra cheese. By the end of the trail, I had a DEEP hunger for pizza; a longing that made my mouth water; a hunger which had to be filled...immediately!

We must approach God's Word with this same anticipation and hunger. We must recognize the world's diet as being filled with empty "snacks" which ruin our appetite for real Food! The Word of God is a nourishing and satisfying meal which deserves our full attention as well as our appreciation. We ought to sit down and eagerly clean our plates - not play with our food and nibble around the edges.

Many of us are Spiritually starving and yet keep His life-giving Food sitting on the shelf! Let's pray for an increased hunger - a focused hunger which is satisfied only in our Heavenly Father. Let's commit to being a well nourished Child of God and passionately consume The Word.

Have A Great Day!

Answer The Challenge

6-14-06

Why are so many "believers" content to live a life of mediocrity in Christ - a life partially devoted to following God and partially devoted to following the ways of the world? Without question, some have only put on the face of a Christian and have never given their heart to God through a saving faith in Jesus. But others are true believers in desperate need of a Spiritual kick in the pants!

Paul's letters comprise much of the New Testament. They were written to give instruction on the Christian faith and to encourage perseverance through times of testing. Paul often wrote of the simplicity of the gospel message; "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). But he also wrote to encourage those who truly put their faith in Jesus, to live a life of service, holiness, and unity.

When we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we begin a new life. We are set free from the bondage of sin (Romans 6:22) and are called to follow Christ as we are conformed to His image (Romans 8:29). But Paul saw many believers sitting on the sidelines of the Christian life; "I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received" (Ephesians 4:1).

Paul gives encouragement by "urging" a life worthy of Salvation. This has nothing to do with earning our way to Heaven; rather, it's a life lived in holy thankfulness for the gift we have received. The word Paul used for urge can also be translated as beseech, beg, implore, exhort, or challenge. He's not giving a gentle pat on the back which says, "You're doing well, keep running a good race." Rather, Paul is presenting a firm challenge to draw nearer to God and give our lives more fully to Him. Paul used the same word in his letter to the Romans.

Romans 12:1

"Therefore, I urge {beg, implore, exhort, and even challenge} you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship."

We have been set free and made new! We are a new creation and CANNOT continue to walk with one foot on God's path and the other being allowed to tiptoe along worldly temptations and desires. These simply have no place in the life of a worshipper of the One True God!

Today, we are being challenged to trust God more; to talk with Him more and seek His presence more diligently; to not get pulled away by the lies of the world! We are being challenged to love Him with ALL our heart, soul, mind and strength (Mark 12:30). As we face this day with its multitude of struggles, let's live a life worthy of the calling we have received and forevermore answer the challenge!

Have A Great Day!

A Life of Discipleship

6-15-06

When Jesus told His closest followers, "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19), He wasn't just talking about the one-time event of Salvation; He was referring to the life-long process of "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded" (Matthew 28:20). The process of discipleship begins prior to Salvation as we are taught the truth of the gospel message, and it continues as we are "conformed to the likeness of His Son" (Romans 8:29). The need for discipleship is made clear as Jesus explains the parable of the soils.

Mark 4:14-20

"The farmer sows the word. Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop."

Praise God for those who are sowing seed! The Word of God will never be received if there are not those willing to sow into the lives of others. However, receiving the word, or even initial growth, is not Salvation! Receiving and being initially excited about the Word can occur without conviction and certainly without a change of heart. Without proper nourishment and protection - without some form of discipleship - the received word will die and never produce fruit.

Discipleship prepares the soil and leads those who receive the Word to a true understanding of words like, "Whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Discipleship then helps our roots go deep and provides water for sustained growth; it teaches how to recognize and eliminate the thorns which choke and kill; it provides the necessary nutrients to produce a crop.

We must commit to being discipled through reading God's Word, seeking Him in prayer, receiving biblical teaching, and being in fellowship with other believers. We must also search for other young plants who are beginning to grow, and disciple them as they "come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4).

A true relationship with the Living and Holy God is not a one-time event or prayer, it's a lifetime commitment. Let's reach up to our Heavenly Father and reach out to those He places in our path. The world is searching and the precious life-giving seed is being sown. Let's nurture and encourage at every opportunity. The planted seed will only produce fruit and live to bring Him glory and honor as each of us commits to a life of discipleship.

Have A Great Day!

John 5:17-20 - Lesson #53
6-16-06

When Jesus healed a man by the pool, a confrontation began regarding the Sabbath; "the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath" (John 5:16). Jesus initiated this confrontation to show how far the interpretation of the law had strayed from the original intent. However, Jesus used the opportunity to teach about His true identity and His relationship with the Father.

John 5:17-20

"But Jesus answered them, 'My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.' Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God. Then Jesus answered and said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel.'"

Jesus began His defense by saying God is always at work. While it's true that God "rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done" (Genesis 2:2), that did not mean God stopped working. The work of Creation was complete, but God continues to work through the processes of nature as well as the sovereign guidance of world events and the loving nurture of His children.

If Jesus would have just said we can work because God is still at work, the Jewish leaders would have still been angry. They could have accused Jesus of a misinterpretation of Scripture. But Jesus carefully chose His words and called God, "My Father." His statement implied an exclusive and unique relationship with God - a relationship which placed Him on an equal level as God. This bold assertion sent the leaders into a rage and they wanted Jesus to die all the more.

Many people try to attack the true identity of Jesus. One such attack says Jesus never claimed to be God. Those who make such a statement have not considered the complete meaning of scripture. We may be uncertain about what Jesus meant in saying "My Father," but the Jewish leaders who heard His words knew exactly what He meant - Jesus was "making Himself equal with God."

Although Jesus clearly claimed equality with God, He also explained the unique relationship. Jesus was equal with God and yet completely dependent on God for His actions. He had all the power of the universe and yet walked with complete submission to His Father. The Father revealed and the Son accomplished all things.

Jesus claimed to be God, and His claim is either true or He is a liar. Scripture does not allow for Jesus to be just a good and moral teacher. It is inconsistent to call Jesus just an example to follow. If we believe Jesus to be a man of integrity, then we must also give Him our life and believe that He is God.

Have A Great Day!

Enter Through The Gate 6-19-06

In the message "A Life of Discipleship" we considered our need to be continually disciplined and the vital importance of discipling others before and after Salvation. The message stated: "Receiving the Word, or even initial growth, is not Salvation." Many people are led to pray for Salvation without an understanding of the gospel message, but without the truth we are never "born again" as a new creation in Christ. Teaching the truth of the gospel is the first priority of discipleship.

Many have become over-zealous in their desire to pull people into the Kingdom of God. We should all have a passion to see those around us saved from a path of destruction. But our intense desire must never cause us to pull people "inside" without presenting the absolute truth about sin and forgiveness, or without ever challenging one another to examine what we really believe.

We in the Church have done well with creating a welcoming and comfortable atmosphere which makes people feel part of the family. But in the process, we often create the disastrous environment in which many will one day hear: "I never knew you. Away from Me, you evildoers!" (Matthew 7:23). We should all attend a local fellowship, serve one another in love, and live a life characterized by high morals; but we must never even give the appearance that these activities provide an entrance to Heaven.

John 10:1, 9

"I {Jesus} tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. I am the gate; whoever enters through Me will be saved."

If we attempt to enter the Kingdom through any other means than the gate of Jesus, we completely miss the eternal glory of God. We may think we are His sheep - we may even look and sound like His sheep - but in truth, any path other than belief in Jesus for the forgiveness of sin makes us a thief and a robber. "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6).

We never help by "pulling" someone in or allowing them to remain comfortable while on the path to destruction. We must speak the truth and point the way to Jesus as the only gate through which we may pass - the ONLY way unto Salvation.

Everyone who walks this earth must make a decision about Jesus Christ. Let's make sure we never inadvertently pull someone over the top rail of the fence without presenting the real decision. Let's minister in a loving and welcoming manner; but let's provide proper discipleship by clearly sharing the need to enter through the gate.

Have A Great Day!

The Gift of Eternal Life

6-20-06

In the message "A Life of Discipleship" we saw that being discipled is a life-long process which actually begins prior to Salvation with a clear presentation of the gospel. In the message "Enter Through The Gate" we emphasized the importance of teaching the true gospel: "I {Jesus} am the gate; whoever enters through Me will be saved" (John 10:9). As Jesus was talking with Nicodemus, He gave clear instruction on what it means to enter through the gate.

John 3:16

"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."

The moment we truly believe, our heart is transformed and we are given the gift of eternal life: "It is by grace you have been saved, through faith" (Ephesians 2:8). However, we need to consider what Jesus meant when He said, "whoever believes in Him." The prior verses help yield a better understanding: "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life" (John 3:14-15).

When Moses led the people of Israel out of Egypt, they began to complain about the lack of "proper" food and water: "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!" (Numbers 21:5). God punished the people for this sin by sending poisonous snakes. Many began to die from snake bites, so they went to Moses and said: "We sinned when we spoke against the Lord and against you. Pray that the Lord will take the snakes away from us" (Numbers 21:7).

Moses prayed and God replied: "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live" (Numbers 21:8). To be saved from the snakes, the people had to recognize their sin, repent of their sin, and understand death was certain without God's intervention. They then had to believe God's Word and act in faith: "Look at the snake and you will live."

Our Salvation "process" is the same today. We have all been snake-bit by sin! We must recognize our sin (Romans 3:23), desire to turn away from our sin (repentance), and understand eternal death is certain without God's intervention (Romans 6:23). We must then believe God's Word: "God presented Him {Jesus} as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in His blood" (Romans 3:25). His sacrifice paid the penalty for our sins! "Everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins" (Acts 10:43). We must believe the sacrifice of Jesus is sufficient for complete forgiveness and then act on that belief by submitting our life into His hands.

God gave us His Son, that whoever, by faith, enters through the gate - whoever "believes in Him" - will not perish but receive the gift of eternal life.

Have A Great Day!

The Risk of Faith

6-21-06

At the beginning of Elijah's ministry, God sent him to stay with a widow and her son. When he first arrived, Elijah asked the widow for some bread. The woman sadly said she only had enough for one final meal: "I don't have any bread - only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it - and die" (1 Kings 17:12).

The widow had completely given up on life. She believed she was preparing her last meal, but Elijah told her to trust God and make him something to eat out of the remaining flour. Elijah said it was God's plan to provide for all her needs...but she must believe.

1 Kings 17:14

"For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord gives rain on the land.'"

The widow could have used the remaining food to feed herself and her son, but she risked all she had and did as Elijah requested. Even though she couldn't see the extra food or understand how it would arrive, she had faith in God's Word and took action based on her faith. "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1).

The risk was great, but God's promise and provision were even greater: "So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the Word of the Lord spoken by Elijah" (1 Kings 17:15-16).

Taking a step of faith ALWAYS requires risk - always requires stepping into the unknown. If we could see every detail about where God was leading and how He would provide, we wouldn't need faith. But if there is any "success" to be had in the Christian walk, it will only come as we daily live by faith - as we live each and every day by first listening intently for the call of God and then trusting Him, even through our fear, as we step into what we cannot see. This is where the true blessings of God reside.

When God calls us to a place where we must be "certain of what we do not see," we must boldly step. We must overcome our fears with a faith grounded in the promises of His Word and trust Him with all our heart to never leave our side. He is always faithful and will always provide!

If we are careful to listen, we most certainly will hear the call of God; and when we do, we must be prepared to step and take the risk of faith.

Have A Great Day!

Opportunity For Action

6-22-06

In the message "The Risk of Faith" we saw the call of God is always accompanied by a perceived risk. The risk may be in terms of finances, rejection, or failure; but there will always be an element of the unknown in God's call which requires us to trust and increase our faith. We should note that when we follow God's call, the true risk only exists in our mind.

Oh, please don't misunderstand. Following God's call may require sacrifice and painful perseverance - there may even be severe trials and hardships along His path - but despite our physical circumstances, the middle of His plan is the safest and most secure place to walk. Walking in His perfect plan is safe, but it will continually call us to actively take a step of faith.

When the tax collector came for the "two-drachma" tax, Jesus gave Peter very interesting instructions on how to obtain the necessary funds.

Matthew 17:27

"Go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for My tax and yours."

With all the power of Creation at His disposal, Jesus could have produced any number of coins and made them readily available. Yet, with the tax collector waiting by the door, Peter was told to excuse himself and take a fishing line down to the lake. Why go through all this trouble with the fish?

Our walk with Christ involves continually developing and growing our faith. It would have taken very little faith for Peter to pick a coin off the table and pay the tax. He was therefore given the "opportunity" to strengthen his faith as he trusted Jesus and not his own understanding (Proverbs 3:5-6). Peter's faith grew, and therefore his closeness with Jesus, as he obeyed and cast out his fishing line.

Jesus is able to fully meet all our needs (Philippians 4:19). But He loves us enough to lead us to specific action; "faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (James 2:17). The specific actions or accomplishments are never really the issue; rather, it's the growth in our relationship with Jesus which is important. Our faith becomes alive and we grow closer every time we obey, follow, and take the step!

What is Jesus asking of us today? Many are facing some very difficult decisions. We don't understand why God is calling, and we can't see how His plan will fit together. His call is probably nothing as far fetched as the coin in the fish; but the message in His call is the same, He is saying: "Trust Me and love Me with all your heart!" When our Savior calls, we must be prepared to follow. When He calls, we will always be given the opportunity for action.

Have A Great Day!

John 5:21-24 - Lesson #54
6-23-06

Jesus answered the charge of violated the Sabbath by stating He was doing what His Father was doing. His word choice made it clear He was not just claiming a right to work on the Sabbath, He was claiming equality with God (John 5:18). Jesus continued by making even bolder claims which cannot be ignored.

John 5:21-24

"For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will. For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life."

Jesus again claims equality with God by saying He is the giver of life. He is not simply an instrument through whom God works - such as Elijah and Elisha when they raised people from the dead. Jesus gives life by His sovereign will! Again, the Jewish leaders knew exactly what Jesus was implying, for only the One True God was the giver of life. Jesus would demonstrate His command over physical life when He raised Lazarus; "Lazarus, come forth!" (John 11:43), but He also held authority over Spiritual, eternal life.

The unique relationship between Father and Son is further explained through transfer of the authority and responsibility of judgment. Abraham referred to God as "The Judge of all the earth" (Genesis 18:25), but Jesus claimed that this title had been given to Him. Why? So that all the world would honor Jesus as they would honor God, and in doing so bring glory to the Father; "that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:11).

Honoring Jesus honors the Father. The two cannot be separated! One implies the other, and rejection of one is a rejection of both: "Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also" (1 John 2:23). Jesus is much more than a great teacher.

We need to understand how Jesus is Judge and not as the one who condemns; "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17). Jesus grants life through His word which reveals the hopeless condemnation without the grace of forgiveness. Judgment comes by clearly revealing the truth and granting everlasting life to those who believe: "God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 John 5:11-12).

Jesus is to be honored as Judge and giver of life. Without Him we are dead in our sin, but with Him we have passed from death to life everlasting. Jesus is much more! Let's make Him much more in our life today.

Have A Great Day!

Learn How to Fall

6-26-06

When my daughter was just beginning to ride her bike she discovered an all-important truth. After a particularly difficult afternoon she came inside and said; "Daddy, you know the hardest part about riding a bike? It's learning how to fall!" At five years of age she had discovered that falling was an inevitable part of the riding experience; but to have a "successful" experience, she needed to learn how to fall without causing damage to her body.

When we follow the call of God and step into the great unknown, we are ALWAYS successful because success is defined as being obedient to His call - regardless of the physical results or accomplishments. We must never evaluate our walk with the Lord based on the success or failure criteria of the world, but on a faith which is lived out each day through trust and obedience.

When John the Baptist was in prison he sent his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" (Matthew 11:3). This question points to some great turmoil going on with John. John preached a message of repentance to "Prepare the way of the Lord" (Luke 3:4), and he said of Jesus; "But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie" (Luke 3:16). And when John baptized Jesus, he heard a voice from Heaven say, "This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). But now while in jail, John needed to ask: "Are You really the One?"

Matthew 11:4-6

"Jesus replied, 'Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of Me.'"

The first part of this reply is what we expect. Jesus is saying, "Of course I'm the One! Don't you see the evidence?" But then Jesus answers John's real question with "Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of Me." John was doubting because he had been sent to jail for following Christ. He had taken a discouraging fall and was questioning his chosen path. Was it possible to experience such hardship if Jesus was really the Christ?

Our walk with Christ is never promised to be easy - it's promised to be eternal! We are never promised success in the eyes of the world - we are promised the true success which only His peace and contentment can give...and also an eternal glory in Heaven! His plans and purposes are perfect and will most surely include aspects we cannot understand - include times when we appear to fall. These are times when we must fall without falling away. In falling we must fall closer to Jesus and learn to trust Him even more. We can have success even through apparent failure, but we must first learn how to fall.

Have A Great Day!

God's Chosen Instrument

6-27-06

The great and mighty Apostle Paul was once the great and mighty persecutor of Christians and destroyer of the Church. He was so zealous that he actually went from house to house and dragged believers off to prison (Acts 8:3). Paul then set off for Damascus in order to rid the land of these "misguided" Christian troublemakers. However, Jesus had other plans!

Acts 9:3

"As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him."

Jesus revealed Himself to Paul in such a magnificent manner that there was no doubt as to the truth of the Gospel; "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:5). Paul encountered the living Christ on the road to Damascus and was literally blinded from the brilliant light - but his life was forever changed.

After three days, Jesus sent a man named Ananias to restore Paul's sight. When Ananias hesitated because of Paul's destructive reputation, Jesus made it clear that Paul was now God's servant.

Acts 9:15

"The Lord said to Ananias, 'Go! This man is My chosen instrument to carry My name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.'"

Most of us will never encounter Jesus in such a dramatic fashion as Paul. One day, without any lights, voices, or great fanfare, Jesus simply meets us on the road and forever changes the course of our life. And just as Paul was called to carry the name of Jesus, we also have been called to follow the living Christ and carry His name to everyone He places along our path.

God could have chosen the rocks and trees to advance the Gospel message, but He didn't - He could have written His plan of Salvation with a fiery finger in the clouds, but He didn't - He chose us! Even with all our many flaws, jagged past, and sometimes overwhelming insecurity and fear of failure, we are still His messengers to a dark and dying world; "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us" (2 Corinthians 5:20).

As we continue on this wonderful journey, with all its glorious peaks and fearfully jagged valleys, let's commit to drawing closer to God and listening more intently to His leading. Let's be faithful to advance His message of love through the forgiveness found only in Jesus. Because in this time of great Spiritual need when the world so desperately needs to hear the truth, we are now God's chosen instrument.

Have A Great Day!

Strengthened By Hardship

6-28-06

On Paul's first missionary journey, he traveled with Barnabas to Cyprus and then up through several cities in Galatia. After preaching the gospel in Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, they returned back through the same cities so they could strengthen those who had recently placed their faith in Jesus.

Acts 14:21-22

"They returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. 'We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,' they said."

The early church was facing great persecution for simply turning to Christ; and Paul himself faced many hardships, including a recent stoning, for preaching the gospel. And though many Christians around the world face this same type of persecution for their faith, and many more face lesser hardships in their workplace, school, or with their family simply because they are a Christian, there remains a much more universal truth to this passage.

Those who have placed their complete faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sin have begun a journey which leads to the kingdom of God. Once we truly begin this journey we are a child of God and our place in God's kingdom has been reserved; "He anointed us, set His seal of ownership on us, and put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come" (2 Corinthians 1:21-22).

However, while on this journey, God has a great plan and purpose for our life; "For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers" (Romans 8:29). Every step is for the purpose of drawing us closer and conforming us to the image of Christ. And hardship is the tool which seems to best accomplish this goal. I'm sure God would prefer to shape and mold us through praise and blessings, but we seem to respond best to hardship.

It's hardship which reminds us of our dependence on God when we've begun to trust in our own abilities and understanding. It's hardship which brings us back to our knees in prayer after long seasons of silence. It's hardship which develops the character of a mature believer: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything" (James 1:2-4).

As difficult as this may be to accept and understand, the truth is that part of God's plan is for us to experience some hardship. For in our lost and fallen world where we come to God filled with pride and arrogance, hardship is the only way to humble our spirit and soften our heart. Our Father loves us enough do whatever it takes to draw us closer to His side - even when this means being strengthened by hardship.

Have A Great Day!

Without Compromise 6-29-06

King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon desired to unite his kingdom by instituting a centralized form of worship. He built a statue of gold about 90 feet tall and 9 feet wide and ordered that everyone must fall down and worship the statue whenever the royal music began to play.

A report was delivered to the King that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were refusing to worship the golden image. The King summoned these three young Jewish men and gave them one more chance to conform to his rules for worship.

Daniel 3:15

"If you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?"

These three followers of Almighty God were faced with an ultimatum; "Compromise your beliefs, or die!" They could have found a way to rationalize this false worship - they could have found a variety of excuses for compromise. But rather than fall to the pressures of their surrounding environment, the three decided to live a life of unwavering faith and unashamed devotion to the One True God.

Daniel 3:17-18

"If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and He will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if He does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

Very few will ever face a "Compromise or die!" ultimatum. But almost everyone will be tempted to push aside convictions and bow to such "golden images" as financial gain, physical pleasure, recognition, or conflict avoidance. We are also constantly tempted to "bow down" with the "entertainment" we watch, listen to, or read. Standing firm requires a determined effort to remain solidly on God's path.

Hearing God's direction for our life can sometimes be difficult; but one truth remains - God NEVER asks us to compromise His standard in order to follow His path. We can therefore be assured that ANY compromise represents a deviation from His plan.

Let's strengthen the convictions God has already placed on our heart. We need not be ashamed of, nor fear, what we know is true; and we need never doubt the perfection of His path. Let's live a life of consistent belief and trust such that what we believe is directly reflected in the way we live. Let's take a stand and live a God-honoring life without compromise.

Have A Great Day!

John 5:25-29 - Lesson #55
6-30-06

When we take the time to study the claims of Jesus, we begin to understand why the Jewish leaders became so angry and "sought to kill Him" (John 5:16). In some of the clearest words recorded in any of the gospels, Jesus sets Himself on an equal level with God.

John 5:25-29

"Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation."

Jesus draws special attention by emphasizing the truthfulness of His words and then states the dual nature of His truth. The hour has now come for life to be granted; and yet, the hour of resurrected life is yet to come.

The gift of eternal life begins the moment we believe. This is a Spiritual resurrection from the dead; "he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life" (John 5:24). Before the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, we were Spiritually dead - eternally separated from God. But when we truly believe we pass from death to life; "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1). Spiritual resurrection is something which has occurred right now for those who believe because of the life we have in Christ.

Jesus is claiming to have the same life in Him which is in the Father; "in Him was life" (John 1:4). This is the life which make us a "new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17) and frees us from condemnation; "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Judgment has been executed and we have been set eternally free.

Notice that the authority to judge is given because Jesus is the Son of Man, not because He is the Son of God. It is in His humanity that Jesus becomes our substitute on the cross. The judgment of condemnation is executed on all who fail to believe in His sacrifice because their penalty has not been paid.

And yet there remains a physical resurrection - the resurrection which is to come - in which ALL will hear His voice and be raised. Those who are in Christ will be raised with glorified bodies; "raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:52). Those who are not in Christ will be raised for the purpose of final judgment; "anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:15). Let's be certain we have heard the voice of the Giver of resurrected eternal life.

Have A Great Day!