

Devotionals from God's Daily Word Ministries

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John 7:19-24 - Lesson #76
12-1-06

A crowd had gathered to listen to Jesus teach in the temple. They marveled at His knowledge of the scriptures since He had never been officially trained. Jesus responded by directing the glory to God; "My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me" (John 7:16). He then moved into a mode of confrontation by claiming to be true and with "no unrighteousness" (v. 18).

John 7:19-24

"Did not Moses give you the law, yet none of you keeps the law? Why do you seek to kill Me?' The people answered and said, 'You have a demon. Who is seeking to kill You?' Jesus answered and said to them, 'I did one work, and you all marvel. Moses therefore gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, so that the law of Moses should not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath? Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.'"

During His last trip to Jerusalem, Jesus chose to heal a man on the Sabbath. This apparent violation of Sabbath Law greatly angered the Jewish leaders and Pharisees who believed their Law was the path to being "right" with God; "For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him" (John 5:16). So Jesus began by asking how they can respect the Law if they do not even keep the basic law of "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13). He then continued by revealing their inconsistent application of the Law.

The law of circumcision was first given as a sign of God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17:10), and then included with the Law given through Moses; "And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised" (Leviticus 12:3). When the eighth day fell on the Sabbath the child was still circumcised even though the Law said to do no work.

Jesus revealed a huge flaw in the belief system of the Jewish leaders and Pharisees. They had become so attached to their detailed interpretation of the Law that they completely missed the true character of God which the Law revealed. Was it possible that God would institute a system which allowed for circumcision on the Sabbath but not complete healing? Of course not! A true understanding of the Sabbath would compel one to honor God by demonstrating His character - which Jesus did perfectly by compassionately healing. The Jewish leaders were passing judgment based on the blind outward adherence to a religious system and Jesus said to judge according to the heart of righteousness which He revealed.

The outward acceptance and compliance with religious rules and systems cannot make us right with God. Righteousness is only found in the forgiveness given through faith in Jesus, not in what we do. And when we are graciously allowed to walk in a right relationship with God, we are to reflect His character of compassion, mercy and love in all we do as we honor Him from our heart.

Have A Great Day!

The Living Word 12-4-06

In the message "God's Plumb Line" we were encouraged to build our lives upon the absolute and unwavering standard of God's Word. His Word is truth and holds the answer to every problem we will ever confront. If we search for answers and prayerfully reflect on the truth of God's Word - if we indeed consider His Word as absolute and unchanging, and apply it directly into our life - we will find the solutions have been available long before we were born.

Hebrews 4:12-13

"For the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account."

Without changing in content or meaning, the Word of God adapts to every situation. If we maintain the habit of reading and reflective study, we will find new insights in what appear to be the peeling back of multiple layers of understanding. But it is actually us who are being peeled back and laid bare by the ever present truths of His Word.

The passage, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5), will have a much different meaning after we've obediently followed God for several years. Each time adversity strikes, we will find a deeper calling in the phrase "with ALL your heart." And though we walk with God for all the rest of our days, we may never fully appreciate the words; "God demonstrated His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). How our lives would change if we could ever fully understand His love!

We do not truly "dig deeper" into the Word; rather, the Word digs deeper into us! Scriptural truths are not revealed until our hunger is so great that we are willing to place our life on the table and allow the sword of truth to cut deep inside. Do we really desire to know God, His Word, and His Spirit? Do we really want to understand the depth of God's love and the implications of His justice? Then be advised: even necessary and beneficial surgery can be painful. When our chest is opened, the condition of our heart is revealed; and that which is dark and displeasing must be cut away and burned.

But fear not! Our Heavenly Father is a skilled surgeon who can make our heart new and prepared to yield to His Spirit. The solution to our most complex problems is always found in His presence, and He has given His Word to show us how to draw near. Our lives are in need of some divine surgery today! Let's allow our heart to be cut by the truth - to be exposed and purified by the Living Word.

Have A Great Day!

He Is Risen

12-5-06

On the night before He was crucified, Jesus, while in great anguish, showed the human side of His nature and asked if there was another way for God's plan to be accomplished; "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from Me" (Matthew 26:39a). Though He knew He would be physically, emotionally, and Spiritually tormented, nailed to a cross, and hung until dead, He gave His life into the hands of the Father; "Yet, not as I will, but as You will" (Matthew 26:39b). And as sure as Jesus knew God's plan was for Him to die, He also knew He would rise again; "And on the third day He will be raised to life" (Matthew 17:23).

On the third day after Jesus was crucified, Mary Magdalene and her friends saw the empty tomb and immediately ran to tell the disciples; "But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense" (Luke 24:11). Even after Peter saw the empty tomb for himself, he was perplexed; "He went away, wondering to himself what had happened" (Luke 24:12).

The disciples had walked with Jesus and listened to Him teach about this day but they still did not understand. It wasn't until Jesus personally appeared to the disciples that the events began to make sense; "Then He opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:45).

In an instant, everything fit into place. They finally understood how all the Old Testament scripture pointed to the coming of Jesus and how He would be sacrificed for the forgiveness of our sins. They saw the predictions of His death - and of His resurrection. They finally saw Him as much more than a good teacher, much more than even a mighty king. His resurrection meant He was the Savior, the one and only Son of God!

Romans 1:4

"And who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord."

The resurrection was God's declaration to the world: "This is My Son!" The resurrection lets us know that "with God ALL things are possible" (Matthew 19:26), and it gives us the assurance that every one of His promises will come to pass; if Christ is truly risen, how can any trials of this world possibly lead to defeat?

True belief in the resurrection should fill us with awe and overwhelm us with a sense of peace and thankfulness. He died and rose again so we could live an abundant life and worship Him for all eternity. Let's place our faith in the sacrifice of Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins and live in the promise and power of His resurrection. Let's pray for our mind to be fully opened to His truth and for our life to be lived as though we KNOW He is risen!

Have A Great Day!

Paid In Full

12-6-06

In the message "He is Risen" we were encouraged to live as though we know Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. Please don't skim past this encouragement because you think all Christians know this simple fact. The challenge is not in knowing the correct answer, but in living consistent with true knowledge in terms of thankfulness and perseverance - a life of hope and power. The following courtroom drama helps us understand the implications of a risen Lord.

The prosecution is aggressively presenting the case against us. There's a parade of witnesses and a multitude of accusations flung our way. Our head hangs low - we sadly realize that no objection can be raised - every charge against us is true. Our heart sinks as the prosecution confidently concludes his case; he has demanded the maximum penalty - death!

Our defense attorney has sat silently through the entire proceeding, but now He rises. His white robe glides across the floor as He moves between us and the Judge. Stretching out His arms, He reveals deep scars on both His wrists. He looks into the eyes of the Judge and says: "Father, while they were in the midst of their crimes, I died so they may live." Without a moment of hesitation, the gavel sounds and the Judge declares: "Not Guilty!"

The verdict in God's courtroom is not dependent on the balance of good verses bad. There is no amount of good deeds and moral living which will ever cancel the charge against us; "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). And there is only one sentence we truly deserve; "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

But God has provided an Advocate, whom He has already approved by His resurrection, and who now stands ready to walk by our side; "We have one who speaks to the Father in our defense - Jesus Christ, the Righteous One" (1 John 2:1). This Advocate has only one requirement in order to present our case.

Romans 10:9

"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."

Believing in our heart means much more than simply knowing the story. It means a belief which pumps through every part of our body and gives us life! It means understanding that without Him we have no life!!

We need not live in fear! We can "approach the throne of grace with confidence" (Hebrews 4:16), because the verdict has already been determined; "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). We are free to worship Him now and for all eternity because our debt has been paid in full!

Have A Great Day!

Dayenu - Jesus is Enough

12-7-06

In the message "Paid in Full" we considered the sacrifice of Jesus as the payment for our sin. His sacrifice on the cross occurred during the Jewish Passover, a yearly time of celebration and remembrance ever since God led the nation of Israel out of Egypt.

The traditional Jewish Passover meal, or Seder, is designed to direct one's heart back to the praise and honor of God. One of the traditional Passover songs is called Dayenu, a Hebrew word meaning "it would have been enough." Each verse of this song recounts one of God's blessings and states if this was all God had done, it would have been enough - Dayenu!

If God had only led His people out of Egypt - Dayenu! But He did more! If He had only parted the sea - Dayenu! But He did more! If He had only fed them in the wilderness - Dayenu! But He did more! If He had only given His Holy Word - Dayenu! The Christian Jews add a final verse to this song which reminds them of how God saw a sinful people and yet loved them enough to give His Son.

Romans 5:6

"At just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly."

I'm often grieved by the lack of thankfulness in the world - for that matter, I'm often grieved by the lack of thankfulness in my own heart. I'm saddened by those who do not know God and fail to see His loving hand in all creation. I'm saddened by the Jewish people who have all the history of God's love but, as a group, have lost their deep reverence and worship. Even in the midst of continual fighting, God is still calling the Jewish people back to a heart of true thanksgiving.

But mostly I'm saddened by Christians who place their trust in the sacrifice of Jesus, and yet live their life with an attitude which says: What have You done for me lately? God, You must not care about me because my job stinks, or my finances are a mess, or I'm unhappy in my relationship.

Can we even begin to understand how this must sound to God? When we were still powerless - when we were dead in our sin - God sent His Son to die so we could live! We live because of His love, yet we complain and grumble because of trivial fluff. Shame on us! Shame on me!!

Through faith in the sacrifice of Jesus, we are given the ability to stand and live in the presence of a Holy God - His death and resurrection is completely sufficient! But He did even more! He gave us His Spirit to strengthen us and guide us in His truth, and He gave us His peace which surpasses all human understanding. Let's remember the blessings we've already been given. God looked down and sent His One and Only Son - Dayenu! Jesus is Enough!!

Have A Great Day!

John 7:25-29 - Lesson #77
12-8-06

Jesus began to confront those who had gathered to listen to Him teach; "Why do you seek to kill Me?" (John 7:19). Though they denied that anyone wanted to kill Him, Jesus addressed their judgment that He did not follow the Sabbath Law; "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with a righteous judgment" (John 7:24). In this, Jesus was boldly declaring the actions of the Jewish leaders to be hypocrisy.

John 7:25-29

"Now some of them from Jerusalem said, 'Is this not He whom they seek to kill? But look! He speaks boldly, and they say nothing to Him. Do the rulers know indeed that this is truly the Christ? However, we know where this Man is from; but when the Christ comes, no one knows where He is from.' Then Jesus cried out, as He taught in the temple, saying, 'You both know Me, and you know where I am from; and I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know. But I know Him, for I am from Him, and He sent Me.'"

Notice that the crowd acknowledged what they had just previously denied. They knew their leaders wanted to kill Jesus, but now they were amazed that Jesus would speak so boldly - in the temple for all to hear. Surely this would bring an immediate response from the Jewish leaders! But no one was saying anything. Had they learned something about Jesus since His last visit to Jerusalem? Was He the Christ?

But the crowd was quickly convinced that this couldn't be the Christ because they knew who He was and where He was from. The popular belief among the Jews was that when the Christ appeared He would do so mysteriously, being born in Bethlehem and then one day just appearing as the Christ. But everyone had heard about Jesus and His teaching, and they even knew where He grew up; "Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary?" (Matthew 13:55). No, this could not be the Christ!

Jesus cried out His response - probably changing His address to a larger crowd. His response should be considered more as a question, as if to say: You think you know Me and where I am from? The answer of course is that they do NOT really know Jesus or where He is from. Jesus was sent from God because; "He was in the beginning with God" (John 1:2). He came with the word of God; "My doctrine is not My own but His who sent Me" (John 7:16). And He came to seek "the glory of the One who sent Him" (John 7:18). Jesus made a clear distinction between Himself and those in the temple: I know God and you do not!

Do we really know Jesus and where He is from? Is He the good teacher, Jesus of Nazareth? Or is He "the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:31) who has "come down from heaven" (John 6:42)? We must answer this question - and then live according to all the answer implies. If He is only a good teacher then we are lost without any knowledge of the Father. But if He is the Christ, we must believe He died for the forgiveness of our sin so we can truly know God.

Have A Great Day!

His Consuming Fire

12-11-06

Ice will turn to water at a temperature just above zero degrees centigrade. We might consider the water to be consumed as it turns to steam at one hundred degrees centigrade. Wood must be heated to a much higher temperature before it's consumed and metal must be heated even more. How much heat is required to finally consume the works of our flesh and burn away all selfishness and pride?

Hebrews 12:28-29

"Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire."

When we begin to understand the Kingdom we've inherited through Christ, we dare not enter His sanctuary with anything but pure praise and worship. Whatever else we attempt to bring is born in our flesh with a spirit of pride. If we say, "Look at what I've brought You, my Lord!" He will simply burn it to ash. We might protest, "But God, look at all I've done for You!" and the heat will be turned up until all we hold is consumed.

Is our greatest ambition to impact the world for Christ? Is our motivation to be significant in the eyes of God or become a major player in the advancement of His Kingdom? Beware! Though these sound good and have the appearance of being pleasing to God, they are conceived in pride and will be consumed.

We truly can bring Him NOTHING of worth except a pure heart; "All our righteous acts are like filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6). Our greatest desire (our ONLY desire) must be to praise and worship the King through all we think, say, and do. All our striving to be obedient and produce good works - all of our "Godly" motivation and ambition - must flow simply as a direct outpouring of our worship.

If we are still trying to conquer something for Christ, we have not yet fully submitted to His leading nor found complete rest in His strength. Jesus came with all knowledge and power, and yet He walked with absolute surrender and submission; "the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what My Father has commanded Me" (John 14:31).

This is a daily challenge, one of the more subtle battles between the Spirit and the flesh. While we must strive, we must also remember that God does not need anything we produce. True fruit which pleases our Heavenly Father comes only as we "remain in the vine" (John 15:4), and love Him with all our heart.

The same fire that will one day burn all our righteous acts can be used today to cleanse our heart. Let's come into His presence and worship with pure reverence and awe. Let's allow every selfish desire and every fiber of pride to be burned away in His consuming fire.

Have A Great Day!

Never Trade The Blessing

12-12-06

When Isaac was sixty years old, his wife Rebecca gave birth to twin sons. Esau was born first, followed immediately by Jacob; "with his hand grasping Esau's heel" (Genesis 25:26). Esau grew to be a skillful hunter while Jacob stayed more around the tents with his mother.

In the days of Esau and Jacob, the firstborn son was given a special honor called the birthright. The child having the birthright received a double portion of the family inheritance as well as the eventual privilege of family leadership. The birthright could be traded, but all future birthright blessings were then lost.

Genesis 25:29-32

"Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. He said to Jacob, 'Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!' Jacob replied, 'First sell me your birthright.' 'Look, I am about to die,' Esau said. 'What good is the birthright to me?'"

Esau was a young man who lived "in the moment" and traded his birthright for a bowl of stew. He placed much greater value on immediate gratification than on future blessings; and he exaggerated his immediate need in order to justify the future loss. The mighty hunter may have been hungry - maybe even VERY hungry - but he certainly was not about to die. His decision to let go of his birthright was based on the temporary needs he could see and feel; in turn, he lost the blessings which were greater and unseen.

Similar trades are being made today. When a child leaves home in rebellion, they trade an honoring relationship with their parents for perceived pleasures of immediate freedom. When a spouse pursues a relationship outside of marriage, they have traded a God-honoring union for perceived pleasures of the flesh. And when we fail to "wait upon the Lord" with decisions about a job, a move, a major purchase, or a relationship, we have allowed our impatience to trade away the blessing of walking in God's perfect will.

What bowl of stew are we trading for today? God has promised a blessing for those who believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior, for those who trust in Him for the forgiveness of sin and walk daily in His light. He has promised to set us free to live a life of true peace, purpose and contentment, and an eternal glory in His presence when we die. ALL worldly pleasures will one day fade away; "For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18). Let's devote our lives to worship and obediently follow wherever He leads. Let's keep our eyes on the eternal and NEVER trade the blessing.

Have A Great Day!

Stay Off The Roof

12-13-06

King David gave in to temptation with Bathsheba and then tried to cover up his sin with lies and murder. How could someone described by God as, "A man after My own heart" (Acts 13:22), make such a bad error in judgment? Sin is rarely the result of a single poor choice. Most often, the actual sin is caused by a long drift away from the presence of God and several specific decisions made outside His will.

2 Samuel 11:1

"In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem."

David had become complacent about his duties as King. When the rest of his men were off at war, David stayed home with not much to do. He could have spent time drawing closer to God with prayer and study of the Word, but apparently David allowed himself to become quite restless.

2 Samuel 11:2

"One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful."

David walked out on the roof and (much to his surprise?) he saw a naked woman in a bathtub! David built this palace - he knew every detail of the architecture. David knew exactly where the bath houses were and knew the preferred times of bathing! "But each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin" (James 1:14-15).

David's sin began long before he climbed into bed with Bathsheba. It began with letting down his guard of self-discipline and wandering from God, and it continued by entering an area of compromise.

We must all recognize our roof where we become susceptible to temptation: "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). Many times, our way out is simply to not visit the place where we know temptation resides - to not allow temptation to even germinate in our heart.

Is there a restlessness which is causing us to drift from God? Are we spending time and energy on activities, in places or conversations, we know are not honoring to God? Let's remain in His presences and ask God to open our eyes to the vulnerable areas of our life; let's commit to walk the path of purity and stay off the roof!

Have A Great Day!

Two Become One Flesh

12-14-06

In the message "Stay Off The Roof" we saw how seemingly innocent beginnings can have disastrous results when we entertain even the slightest area of temptation. This becomes even more critical when we marry, when the result of temptation can cause great pain to the one given to us as a gift from God.

By the middle of the sixth day, God had created the sun, moon and stars; the land, sky, and water; the fish, birds, plants and animals - and when He looked at His creation, "God saw that it was good" (Genesis 1:25). But God's creation was not yet complete: "Then God said, 'let us make man in our image'" (Genesis 1:26), and out of the dust of the ground, God breathed life into man and put him in the Garden of Eden, "to work it and take care of it" (Genesis 2:15).

As God watched man go about his work, He saw that something was not right. Some have suggested that man looked a little sad - others have joked that man was making a big mess and kept wandering around, lost and confused. Whatever the cause, God looked at His latest creation and said:

Genesis 2:18

"It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

Adam needed more than someone to help him with his chores, he needed someone to make him complete! So God formed woman, not from the ground, but from a rib taken from Adam's side; "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Genesis 2:23).

If God gives us someone as a special gift to make us whole, they ought to be cherished and protected for a lifetime; "For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). Like pieces of a puzzle that fit neatly together, a God-ordained marriage joins and completes by making two become one.

It's sad how quickly we forget these basic truths. We continue to place our individual desires ahead of the union created by God. We "toy" with temptations without regard to the potential devastation. The result is often a civil war with years of Spiritual bloodshed and an eventual ripping apart of what God has joined. We must stop this downward spiral before it even begins.

To the MANY single parents, I pray that God would give you encouragement and strength; I pray He would be the true Helper I know you desperately need. To those who are married or planning to marry, I pray we would now and forevermore see our spouse as a true gift from God given to make us whole. I pray we would forever thank Him for joining us together and commit to the protection of the union. I pray we would always remember that God provides our most suitable helper when the two become one flesh.

Have A Great Day!

John 7:30-36 - Lesson #78
12-15-06

When Jesus first came to the feast in Jerusalem, the people were mainly debating His goodness: "Some said, 'He is good'; others said, 'No, on the contrary, He deceives the people'" (John 7:13). But when Jesus spoke in the temple He did not present Himself as simply good. Jesus consistently presented Himself such that there was no middle ground, He must either be accepted as the Christ or rejected as evil; "I know Him, for I am from Him, and He sent Me" (John 7:29).

John 7:30-36

"Therefore they sought to take Him; but no one laid a hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come. And many of the people believed in Him, and said, 'When the Christ comes, will He do more signs than these which this Man has done?' The Pharisees heard the crowd murmuring these things concerning Him, and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take Him. Then Jesus said to them, 'I shall be with you a little while longer, and then I go to Him who sent Me. You will seek Me and not find Me, and where I am you cannot come.' Then the Jews said among themselves, 'Where does He intend to go that we shall not find Him? Does He intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? What is this thing that He said, 'You will seek Me and not find Me, and where I am you cannot come'?"

Once again John shows how all events and timing were in the hands of God. Jesus would not be arrested, crucified, or resurrected until the exact time determined by God. And that time would not occur for another six months; "the hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified" (John 12:23).

We don't know what the people in the temple understood about righteousness and forgiveness, but we know that John presents only one requirement for Salvation; "He who believes in Him is not condemned: but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed" (John 3:18). Though their belief may seem shallow and based only on miracles, John's point was that there were some who believed.

This section also presents a decision point for the Jewish leaders as they decided to officially send the temple police to arrest Jesus - but His time had not yet come. Jesus spoke about His resurrection and return to the Father, but they thought He was talking about the Jewish settlements outside Palestine. They did not believe Jesus could go where He would not be found, and so they missed the opportunity to truly seek and find.

Jesus is no longer walking the earth but we are still living in a unique time: "Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near" (Isaiah 55:6). It is not too late! But there is coming a day of judgment when He will no longer be found. We cannot wait!! "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of Salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). There is much we need to understand and much resolve of commitment to which we will be called, but it must begin by opening our heart to the truth. The One sent by God has called us to believe.

Have A Great Day!

An Unsearchable Love

12-18-06

As I look back through the Scriptural account of history, I can see how God sent His Son to be born in a manger, grow and live among us, and die for our sins upon a cross. I can clearly see how the sacrifice of Jesus allows us, through faith, to enter into God's presence. I can even see the purpose of His humble birth as a permanent example of humility and service. But what I don't think I'll ever fully understand is why. Oh, sure, I know the reason is love; "For God so loved the world that He gave..." (John 3:16), but I seriously doubt I'll ever understand the amount of love required to sacrifice so much - the amount of love He had (and has)...for me!

Paul wrote his letter to the Romans with the intent of setting foundational beliefs for the church. In this letter, Paul presented the greatest amount of teaching found anywhere in the Bible. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Paul wrote on topics ranging from sin and judgement, to faith and Salvation; from the purpose of the Law and life through the Spirit, to the sovereignty of God and the future of Israel. But toward the end of the letter, Paul paused and wrote a short prayer of praise and glory.

Romans 11:33-36

"Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been His counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay Him? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever! Amen."

We almost get the feeling that Paul had reviewed the first portion of his letter and just couldn't continue writing without praising the Lord. Paul had wrestled through many difficult issues and learned a most valuable lesson: God is God, and sometimes this simple truth defies understanding.

God has a perfect plan where every piece fits neatly together, but there are many connections which our finite minds fail to comprehend. I can't always see the purpose of my trials or the lessons He wants me to learn: I get impatient and frustrated with His timing (I want to know His plan, now!). But I know His love for me gave everything; "He humbled Himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross!" (Philippians 2:8). I may not fully understand this love, but the little I know is enough to create a desire to live a life of devotion and faith. One day, I will stand before His throne and all His mysteries will be perfectly revealed. Until then I will simply continue to worship and trust.

We may never fully understand, but I pray you are drawn a little closer today. If you have never experienced His love, I pray that you will release your heart into His care. If you're feeling unloved by the world, I pray you will look to Him and see a Father who gave His Son so He could hold you for all eternity. He is an unsearchable God who has poured out, for you, an unsearchable love.

Have A Great Day!

The Gift of True Forgiveness

12-19-06

Yes, as the song says: "It's the most wonderful time of the year!" We are flooded with Christmas music, Christmas lights, and lots of Christmas "activities." And although the Christmas "fluff" is often distracting, most of us are able to see through the glitter. In spite of the world's attempt to pull us away, we generally make time to gather with family and friends and celebrate the true meaning of Christmas.

But many will find this time of year to be very painful. The memories of past hurt, which remain hidden throughout the year, are now driven to the surface. Many are required to face someone who has caused them pain - or face the memory of a past Christmas which brings the person (and pain) back into view.

Obviously, this is not the turmoil which God intends for our life - especially not as we celebrate the birth of His Son.

Ephesians 4:32

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

We cannot properly celebrate the birth of Jesus without reflecting on why He was born. Through His life He offered us a message of eternal hope, and through His death on the cross He offered us the complete forgiveness of sin. With this single act of unbelievable love, Jesus removed the sin which would otherwise keep us eternally separated from our Heavenly Father. This is the manner in which we are to love and forgive others.

Jesus told a parable about a servant who had an enormous debt canceled: "The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go" (Matthew 18:26-27). But when the servant went away, he refused to cancel the relatively minor debt a fellow servant owed him; "Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt" (Matthew 18:30).

Jesus used this parable to show that unless we completely forgive others from deep within our heart, we have failed to understand the forgiveness we have already received; "Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?" (Matthew 18:33). Any "sin" which others commit against us is small and insignificant when viewed in light of the many true sins we have committed against God! We have been forgiven sooooo much!!

During this most wonderful time of the year, let's reflect on the awesome gift we have been given through our Savior. Then, let's give to others as we have already received - let's love and give the gift of true forgiveness.

Have A Great Day!

Day of Remembrance

12-20-06

Just a few more days until December 25th - just a few more days until...until what? What exactly is December 25th? What is this day we call Christmas?

The early church didn't give much thought to the birth of Jesus. Of the four Gospels only Matthew and Luke even mention His birth, and these accounts are relatively brief. Certainly, the emphasis of the Gospels was on Jesus' ministry, death, and resurrection. And after Jesus ascended to Heaven, the focus of the church was on living for Him, sending out His message, and waiting for His return.

No one is really sure when Jesus was born. The first recorded celebration didn't occur until 200 years after His birth, and it wasn't until 330 A.D. that the birth of Christ was assigned to December 25th. Some say Jesus was actually born in September or October and others are sure He was born in March or April (in fact, a case has been made for His birth in each of the twelve months). But it's generally agreed that, due to the relatively colder weather, December was an unlikely time for the birth of our Savior. So what really is this day we call Christmas?

John 1:1,14

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us."

These verses refer to Jesus Christ as "the Word," who was with God in the beginning and at the same time was God Himself; and who left His Heavenly dwelling to begin life with us as a little baby.

Christmas is a day to remember the most profound event in the history of the world. On that first Christmas night (whenever it was), God came to earth as a baby! He was born into the most humble circumstances, grew and taught us His truths, died on a cross for our sin, and was raised to be with The Father - all so we might live with Him for eternity.

December 25th is a day to celebrate with quiet reflection, as Mary "treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19). It is also a day to celebrate with great rejoicing, as the shepherds "returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen" (Luke 2:20). The world has tried to remove Christ and insert many activities into this season which do not glorify God. But this need not hinder our worship. We have the ability to turn away the evil and embrace that which is honoring and good.

We can (and should) glorify God and celebrate the gift of our Savior every day throughout the year, but let's take the opportunity to make this season and this day special. Let's celebrate with a focused and thankful heart, and make December 25th a blessed day of remembrance.

Have A Great Day!

The First Move 12-21-06

In the message "Day of Remembrance" we saw the focus of Christmas must always be on remembering the gift given through the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. This season ought to irresistibly draw us near to God as we reflect on His gift of love.

The birth of Jesus gives great insight into the character of God. For one, we see His methods are far different from our own; "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways" (Isaiah 55:8). How many of us would bring the King of Kings into the world through two common young people in a dirty stable? But God had a purpose.

These lowest of beginnings set the example for a life of humility. Jesus Christ is the Creator of the Universe! "For by Him all things were created" (Colossians 1:16). Yet, He humbled Himself to the point of being born with the animals and continued by humbly walking all the way to the cross.

As we reflect on His humility, how can we then make prideful demands on life? How can we assume there is a standard to which we are entitled? Jesus set the standard for humility and we are now called to follow; "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5).

But perhaps the greatest insight we can learn from the birth of our Savior is simply that He came. Our sin must have been detestable and vile to One so holy, but He came to live with us...and love us! Without Jesus Christ, we have absolutely no hope - we can do nothing to save ourselves from the bondage of sin and an eternal separation from God - yet, He made the first move to set us free. He took the initiative in our Salvation by providing a way and calling us Home.

1 John 4:9

"This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him."

God clearly saw our sinful condition; and yet, He loved us enough to send His Son so we might be restored to a right relationship with Him - He sent His Son so we might live! God made the first move 2000 years ago and He continues to make the first move in our lives today. He calls long before we even recognize His voice, and He continues to call us to surrender our life and live with Him in a deeper and more intimate relationship.

If you hear His call today, please respond! It's a great privilege to hear His call. Be encouraged - but respond! His call cost Him dearly, and it represents a love we will never fully understand. Let's boldly answer and follow wherever He leads because He loved us enough to make the first move.

Have A Great Day!

The Wrong King

12-22-06

Two thousand years ago, Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem. This was the long awaited Savior of the world; and yet, very few people recognized His coming. Even when Jesus grew and began His ministry, most people had a difficult time believing He was the One for whom they were waiting. He just didn't seem to fit the description given by the prophets.

Isaiah 9:6-7

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever."

Isaiah told of the birth of Jesus 700 years before He was born. The people of Israel were looking for the One who would take the government on His shoulders, increase the kingdom, and bring a lasting peace (by force if necessary). They were looking for a mighty leader just like King David.

But David was God's earthly king who brought peace and unity through victories in many great battles. Jesus was the Heavenly King who came to establish peace through an entirely different method; "They will call Him Emmanuel - which means, God with us" (Matthew 1:23). In Jesus, the fullness of God came to dwell with man and offer eternal peace through repentance and mercy.

It's no wonder so many failed to recognize Him and believe. They had formed a picture of the King, and when Jesus didn't fit they just kept looking.

As our thoughts are focused on the birth of Jesus, let's not miss His true identity. He is King! But He didn't come to conquer those who mistreat us. He didn't come to grant us special privilege or even remove our daily trials. That day is yet to come! Rather, He came to deliver a message of truth: "You are right in saying I am a King. In fact, for this reason I came into the world, to testify of the truth" (John 18:37).

The truth that Jesus brings is, "Whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). His truth is uncompromising; "Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already" (John 3:18). And His truth expects (and deserves) absolute dedication; "Whoever has My commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves Me" (John 14:21).

This Christmas season, let's not miss the real Jesus. He came to forgive our sin - the sin that destroys and keeps us from The Father. This Christmas, let's recognize the truth, receive His forgiveness, and live to glorify His Name. Let's never make the fatal mistake of looking for the wrong king.

Have A Great Day!

All For His Glory

12-26-06

I recently visited a planetarium and came away with a renewed wonder of God's creation. I saw many pictures taken from large telescopes and even many pictures taken from space. The stars are fascinating! I've often looked into the night sky and wondered about God's promise to Abraham: "'Look up at the heavens and count the stars - if indeed you can count them.' Then He said to him, 'So shall your offspring be'" (Genesis 15:5). When Abraham looked into that dark clear sky, you can be sure he saw a LOT of stars.

But as incredible as our night sky appears, the facts of our universe quickly become staggering. During the day we see the sun - which is really just the closest of all the stars. Our sun, though it appears large, is a relatively small star located 93 million miles from Earth. This distance is about the same as traveling around the world 4,000 times. And though this distance is hard to comprehend, the next nearest star is 270,000 time further away. But that's only two of the 200 billion stars in our Milky Way galaxy - a galaxy which would take light 100,000 years to travel from one end to the other!!

But as incredible as our galaxy appears, the Milky Way is but one of billions of other galaxies within the Universe. There are estimated to be as many galaxies in the Universe as there are stars in the Milky Way.

But as incredible as our Universe appears...

Genesis 1:1

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

Just like that, and it was done, and it was good. The Creator spoke and the Universe appeared. He then selected one of the billions of galaxies, one of the billions of stars within the galaxy, and one of the many planets around this star to create a people to call His own. God's plan from before the foundations of the world was to grant us adoption, "as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will - to the praise of His glorious grace" (Ephesians 1:5-6).

We who believe that Jesus Christ died for the forgiveness of our sin become a testimony of praise to God's grace. In the same way, the immensity of the stars testify night and day; "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands" (Psalm 19:1). I can barely understand the distance to our sun - let alone the size of our galaxy or the size of the Universe - or the "size" of our God; "The heavens proclaim His righteousness, and all the peoples see His glory" (Psalm 97:6).

If we would look up on a clear dark night we might begin to see our status, as well as our problems, to be quite small. And we might begin to understand our God to be much, much bigger than we thought. We might even just shake our head, as we try to understand His love, and realize it is all for His glory.

Have A Great Day!