

# Pastors Thoughts of the Week

## Sartorial Choices

*Revelation of John 19:8: And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.*

From the moment that our primeval parents made the regrettable choice that plunged them, their posterity, and the entire creation into the throes of the curse, they needed a covering for their sin. As each of us makes our daily wardrobe selection, so they attempted to cloak their evil with fig leaves in a desperate hope to hide their nakedness from the omniscient eyes of a holy God. Such human manufacture provided only a gossamer garment and could never satisfy the One who "canst not look on iniquity". And so the shedding of innocent blood would be provided to expiate the transgression and become a fitting covering for the jeopardized couple.

So many millennia later, Jesus taught the parable of the man that dared enter the wedding feast without the provided wedding garment. Post haste the servants were dispatched and the offender cast into outer darkness. Thus shall be the fate of all those who dare approach the Almighty cloaked only in the "filthy rags" of their own self-righteousness. May the Lord help us to see the need to change our clothes. The "garment spotted by the flesh" is a sartorial choice we will regret for eternity. But what good news is this, that the Heavenly Weaver has spun us a heavenly habiliment.

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, Isaiah 61:10. Now the choice remains ours as to whether we will don this glorious apparel and enter the wedding chambers of glory or foolishly insist "we will wear our own apparel" Isaiah 4:1

Have a blessed week,

*Pastor*

*Faith cometh by hearing; and hearing by the word of God Romans 10:17*

## Corn, Cheese, Lions, Bears, and Giants

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*Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God.*

*– 1 Samuel 17:36 –*

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We are no doubt overly familiar with the account of David and Goliath. We learn it from our earliest days of Sunday School. The account is so simply relayed in 1 Samuel 17 and so rich with lessons that we perhaps miss one of the greatest of all – that David’s slaying of Goliath was not a single or mere act of courage, but rather the confluence of an obedient will, a right heart, and a bold faith, as well as the apex of a series of God-directed occurrences in the already eventful life of a ruddy youth who loved God more than anything else.

David was only here in the valley of Elah because he was obeying his father Jesse, carrying some corn, bread, and cheese to his warrior brothers (1 Sam. 17:17-18). Obedience in small matters often leads to greater opportunities to exercise a faith that glorifies God.

David did not seek the fight with Goliath, but once he heard the Philistine’s vitriolic cursing, he could not run from it. David’s heart was all for his God. All serious believers understand this jealousy for God’s honor. The Spirit that resides in our hearts is grieved when God’s name is maligned or His character impugned. Be not deceived, God is not mocked. David understood this, even when all of the armies of Israel did not.

Though young, David had already experienced God’s protective care. Faithfully caring for his father’s flocks brought him face to face with wild, ferocious danger. He could have run, but he fought. The life of the sheep was more important to him than his own. But it was not himself that he credited with these victories. “The LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the lion and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine” (1 Sam. 17:38.) God’s faithful past dealings with David in the fields prepared his soul for the present distress in this valley.

God builds the usefulness of His servants, whether David’s or ours, little by little...

Deliver the corn and cheese. Do not despise the small things. It is not beneath you. God is likely preparing you for something, or placing you where He wants you, or both.

Love God. Even when others are unmoved, be stirred. Honor Him, and He will honor you.

Protect the weak and innocent. The Lord loves such a spirit. So much so that whether lions, bears, or giants are defying you or your God, the Lord Himself will take up the fight, strengthening your arms, guiding your hands, and using you, his humble servant, to glorify His Name. -- D. Murcek

## Accepting and Changing

*And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation...*

*Acts 17:26*

It is an important life lesson to be able to discern between those things we can change and those we cannot. There are some things that God in His infinite wisdom has determined to be as they are, while there are other things that He gives us the power to change. We must make choices every day, while at the same time, there are things over which we have no control. Even our very best plans can be interrupted by something that is completely beyond our control.

In Acts chapter 17, we find the Apostle Paul in Athens debating Greek philosophers. While observing the plethora of Greek idols and even an inscription to the unknown God, Paul states that he wishes to declare to them the identity of this unknown God. He is the one and only God who made the world and all things therein. This God *hath given life and breath to all*, and cannot be worshipped with men's hands. He also hath made all nations of one blood, and has determined when and where men are born. It is for mankind to find and know the unknown God, and to find the purpose for which He has made them.

Since God has appointed the number of days that we live, it would be better for us to accept the things He has determined rather than fret over those things in which we have no say. In today's verse it is noted that we do not choose the time and place of our birth. Our family and our given name were also not our choice. We cannot determine the size of our stature, nor the God-given abilities the Great Potter has endowed to us. Sometimes we can be frustrated about our physical characteristics, or even jealous because of lacking the abilities that have been dealt to someone else.

As believers, we should accept what God has ordained for our lives, while at the same time recognizing that there are things that we can change or improve in our lives. Although certain influences have shaped our personality, that does not mean that, by God's grace, we cannot change our un-Christlike behavior. In Ephesians, we are instructed to put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts. Bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking should be put out our lives. Those things which are detrimental to our spiritual life should be replaced with kindness, patience, humility, and forgiveness. Our whole Christian life should be one of putting away the things that accompany the old life and acquiring Christlike characteristics.

Today, let's rejoice and see the purpose in the things God has ordained for us, while continuing to allow His grace to conform us to the image of our Savior.

J. Ekis

## Strength

*My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.*

*Psalm 73:26*

We do not need to look far these days for attempts to sell us something to provide strength. Advertisements abound for remedies, supplements, or eating and exercise programs to increase or prolong bodily strength. Still others appeal for treatments and programs for the faint of heart or mind, most of which build upon vain notions based on humanistic philosophies and “self-help.” Yet, even if some man-made solutions may provide temporary strengthening in some areas of life, it is inevitable that our flesh and our heart will fail at some point. There is an end to human strength, whether physical, psychological, or emotional. The psalmist realized this, even as he recognized the contradictions of his inward thoughts that had troubled him. It was at verse seventeen of this psalm where the remedy for his failing heart came, as he “went into the sanctuary of God,” and had his understanding renewed and straightened. In the presence of Jehovah, seeing and understanding life from His eternal perspective, the psalmist was reminded that God “is the strength of my heart.” And the corollary provides further confidence – that He is “my portion forever.” He does not only provide strength here and there or momentarily. When we are His, we have access to His spiritual strength both now and forever, according to His promises. For example: “Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD. (Psalm 27:14). “The LORD will give strength unto his people; the LORD will bless his people with peace” (Psalm 29.11). “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1). “Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength” (Isaiah 26:4). It matters not what this present world may bring to challenge or confound us. We can always answer, “but God is the strength of my heart...forever.” Even in this confidence the apostle could confidently pray for the believers at Ephesus: “That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man” (Ephesians 3:16). Therefore, we can confidently agree with the conclusion of Psalm 73, “But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all thy works.”

## Contradictions

*And her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the LORD had shut up her womb. And as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD, so she provoked her; therefore she wept, and did not eat.  
1 Samuel 1:6-7*

Our text describes an adversarial relationship between Peninnah and Hannah, the two wives of the man Elkanah. This occurs in the days when the judges ruled in Israel. The times of the judges were characterized by cyclic national sin, bringing the judgment of God via their enemies, then a delivering judge when the nation would turn to the Lord for help. There was no central leadership for the nation during those times after the death of Joshua. And even though the tabernacle was situated at Shiloh for the worship of the Lord, it is hardly mentioned in the book of Judges. The period is described multiple times in Judges thus: "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25).

In this national climate, the account describes faithful Elkanah going up to worship and sacrifice to the Lord yearly in Shiloh. He took his whole family to participate in the worship. In this sense, Elkanah seems to be faithful to the Lord in the midst of an apostate nation. Yet, he has married two wives, which would not have been abnormal compared to the surrounding nations, and at this point probably his own; yet it was inconsistent with the plan of God revealed in Genesis. Given the cultural climate, we might even assume that Elkanah's bigamy was not an intentional disobedience. But the rivalry naturally created by this relationship elicited strife within his household, especially as the prolific Peninnah would regularly provoke the barren Hannah.

There is no substitute for following the order of God. When God's order is violated, there are natural consequences, despite efforts to compensate in some other area of religion. As we seek to honor the Lord, even with appropriate acts of worship and service, let us not neglect to honor Him and His created order in the regular choices of life. "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:6).

# *Pastors Thoughts of the Week*

## **Thanatopsis**

Genesis 27:2: And he said, Behold now,  
I am old, I know not the day of my death

Life is a fragile equation. Uncertainty as to our expiration date has caused a great degree of consternation to those who are obsessed with ordering all the details of life. Unfortunately, death is a rude intruder that does not give polite notice as to its visitation. When God imposed death as the consequence of Adam's sin, He intentionally omitted the details of when, where, and how. There is that vague reference to "three score and ten" that the psalmist records but by no means is that a guaranteed span. Ecclesiastes 8:8 asserts: There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war.

If life is just "an unpleasant interruption to a peaceful non-existence" as Jean-Paul Sartre once sardonically wrote, then our days are evanescently spent in a vain quest for meaning in an otherwise meaningless existence and death presents the dreaded *ne plus ultra*. Torch singer, Peggy Lee distilled Sartre's musings in her lament "Is that all there is?". For the unbeliever, death wields the Damoclean Sword over their heads ready at the slightest movement to thrust its victim into the eternal realm of nothingness and by so doing give proof to their assertion that life is meaningless and absurd. Believers in contrast understand that death is a portal that leads to two everlasting paths heading in opposite directions: eternal bliss or eternal destruction.

As I approach my seventy-first year I am more reliant on my faith in Christ and less dependent on the poor powers of our human frame. Because of Adam's sin we find ourselves in mortal combat with the curse. Eventually, we will all succumb to some failure of the body and then be released to the eternal realm. My faith in Christ's finished work on the cross is my assuring hope for a far more glorious future. He has become my *plus ultra*. What a calming effect that brings to all those who have found refuge beneath His sheltering arms

Have a blessed week,

*Pastor*

*Faith cometh by hearing: and hearing by the word of God Romans 10:17*

## To the Brim

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*And Jesus saith unto them, Fill the water pots with water. And they filled them to the brim.  
– Luke 2:7 –*

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The account of the wedding at Cana where Jesus performed His first public miracle is filled with all kinds of spiritual lessons. (Note that none of them include the “Jesus drank wine” mantra that biblical illiterates and scriptural neophytes love to echo to shallowly justify the imbibing of Hell’s poison!) One of the greatest lessons emanating from the simple account is the most fundamental characteristic of true obedience.

After securing some intimation from Jesus that He was about to move, Mary advised the servants, “Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.” The servants were not privy to what Jesus was about to do, but when He spoke, they listened.

These servants wisely calculated Jesus’ directive, down to each word. “Fill the water pots with water.” Water pots were to be used – no other vessels. Check. Water was specific – no other substance. Check. But “Fill”? This is open to interpretation. Think about the servants’ alternatives in ascertaining that word. They could have not filled the water pots at all. That would be scornful disobedience. They could have filled them with a little water. That would be reticent compliance. They could have filled them to overflowing. That would be presumptuous indulgence. They could have filled them almost entirely. That would be mere obeisance. They seemed to have chosen the wisest and safest path, a simplistic and literal interpretation of the Lord’s open directive – fill the pots 100% full, wanting nothing short, wasting nothing over. It must have pleased the Lord, because He immediately continued to use the servants as the conduits of His miracle – “Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast.”

What has our Lord directed you to do? There are many things in His Word which we must interpret, but there are also things He speaks to the heart which require a careful calculus. Do not be negligent in this spiritual exercise. Obedience to the Master must be of no other character than “to the brim” – a thorough and complete execution. We may not completely understand why we must do so, but the pathway of continued blessing and usefulness lies in careful listening and full surrender. As we tread into a new year, may we resolve to give Him “to the brim” service, that He may transform our plain and ordinary means into something wholly and miraculously useful to the advancement of His kingdom until He comes. -- D. Murcek

## ***Strange Things***

*And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things today.*

*Luke 5:26*

All of us have probably had a situation in our life that goes beyond explanation. Most unusual events have some reasonable evidence for why they occurred, but in a rare moment of time we may witness something that is unexplainable. Yet when we look at the life of the Lord Jesus, what is strange to us is normal for Him.

*We have seen strange things today.* Who said this and why? In this account, there are several strange things that occurred. First, the roof of a building was opened, and a man crippled with palsy was lowered on a cot through that opening by four men and placed in front of Jesus. This could be explained because of the crowded conditions at the house. Another strange thing then happens, when the man who obviously needed medical attention was simply told that his sins are forgiven. Some could rationalize this as idle words, or as some bystanders said that Jesus blasphemed. Next, Jesus tells the paralytic man to rise up and walk, which he immediately did. The only explanation for this miracle was that Jesus was more than the teacher from Galilee. This healing should have proven to the people that the Son of man was also the Son of God and had both the power to heal the body as well as to forgive sins.

There are several things to glean from this account that can help us in our walk with Jesus. The diligence of the men carrying the paralytic man should inspire us to do what we can to bring people before the Lord. Even when there seem to be obstacles, we should look for opportunities to get someone to Jesus. The faith and compassion of those men were demonstrated by the fact that they brought their friend to Jesus for healing. Jesus then emphasized the man's greatest need by saying that his sins were forgiven. And that is true for each of us, forgiveness of sins is our most important need. Truly, Jesus did come to relieve the burdens of this life; but His main mission was to give His life as a sacrifice for sin, and to secure eternal life for all who believe.

As we progress in our Christian life, things that once seemed strange become things that we embrace and even expect. Normal Christian activities such as church attendance, prayer, hymn singing, fellowship, and Christian service will often seem strange to the unconverted but are the norm for believers. And there are those special moments when the Lord graciously allows us to see the miraculous. May He show us something strange today!

J. Ekis



## A Brief Testimony

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*I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.*

*– Psalm 37:25 –*

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My adult children often joke with me that I am an old man before my time. I “return fire” that, if that assertion is true, then they are the reason for it. Because of the gene pool, my more than reasonable expectation is that they, too, will one day be every bit an “old” forty-eight years of age, and probably more so. This brings me a smile.

While I may not truly be “old” just yet, I have walked with Jesus for nearly thirty years. Every now and then I stop and meditate, surprised at how quickly life is passing. But more importantly, I look back over the course of my days and reflect upon how faithful God has been. The psalmist said he had never seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread. This is not just a Holy Ghost inspired observation – it is and will always be the rich experience and legacy of every child of the living God.

In thirty years of walking with Christ, I have known my share of tragedies and triumphs. I can assure you, God was present in all of them. He has been on each mountain top as well as in the deepest recesses of the darkest valleys. He is the constant and steadfast anchor in the vast sea of experience and emotion. He has humbled me when necessary, has rejoiced with me in the exercise and growth of my faith, and has rushed to comfort me when I was broken. When stepping onto Heaven’s shores, I think the two things that will feel most familiar in that land of endless day will be the smile of His countenance and the brush of His gentle hand wiping away the last tears.

In thirty years of service to Christ, my heart has known seasons of full engagement as well as times of dull and stale effort. I wish I could say I have always been on fire for the Master, but if I am being honest, there is an annoying ebb and flow to zeal. I am quite sure that one day, before the Bema seat, there will be much more wood, hay, and stubble for the Lord to burn away than any gold, jewels, or precious stones left for Him to refine. Yet He has borne with my imperfect service, He has graciously accepted my meager offerings, and He has delighted to prosper at least some of His business through me. In all of my faltering, He has always remained faithful.

My Redeemer is Faithful and True. While I press for the mark, I remind myself that what He has been to this point, He will be in all of my tomorrows. He does not, cannot, and will not forsake His own. He has taken this man’s worrisome disposition and transformed it over nearly three decades into one of confident trust that what He has promised, He will also perform. It is my prayer you know and rejoice in the same wonderful God. -- D. Murcek

## Acquiescence

*Then three thousand men of Judah went to the top of the rock Etam, and said to Samson, Knowest thou not that the Philistines are rulers over us? what is this that thou hast done unto us? And he said unto them, As they did unto me, so have I done unto them.*

*Judges 15:11*

These men of Judah are a pitiable bunch. After at least twenty years of oppression by their neighboring Philistine enemies, they had evidently thrown off all hope of deliverance. The Philistine domination was a result of Israel's sin (Judges 10:6-7), in the similar pattern that runs throughout the book of Judges. In other instances, the domination of their enemies had brought Israel to at least a sorrow for their condition, if not repentance, that made them cry unto the Lord, upon which He would mercifully raise up a delivering judge. However, by this time in the narrative, when they again sin against the Lord after the rule of the last four judges (Judges 13:1), there is no mention of Israel turning to the Lord for assistance. Yet the mercies of Jehovah once more had brought the beginning of deliverance through the young Samson, who had begun to be moved at times by the Spirit of the Lord, in spite of various strange stirrings from his own spirit. Yet, after Samson had now demonstrated the fortitude and supernatural strength given him from God over the Philistines in both Ashkelon and Timnath, these men of Judah are giving no thought to the possibility of God's deliverance through this champion. Instead, they come to rebuke Samson for not joining them in their mindset of permanent defeat and acquiescence to the Philistine rule. They then proceed to bind Samson, with his permission, and willingly deliver him to the ruling Gentile enemy, just so they can remain undisturbed in their defeated state.

The *Pulpit Commentary* comments on these men: "Sorrows, brought on perhaps by misconduct, which do not send men to God in penitence and prayer only harden and depress. They produce sullenness, and they destroy the spring of hope. Men sink on to a lower platform even in regard to their fellow-men. They are not humbled, only lowered." We could compare the attitude of these men towards their captors and potential champion to the Judean rulers centuries later, who were willing to bind and deliver the Savior to their Gentile captors so as not to disturb their acquiescent comfort.

Let us not follow the examples of these men when temptation and sin attempt to bear rule over us. Instead let us remember that, as Samson went on to slay a thousand Philistines in this account, the Greater than Samson, Jesus Christ, went on to conquer sin and death in the power of His resurrection. Therefore, as His followers we remember the admonition: "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof ... For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Romans 6:12-14). Then we trust and give thanks to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:57).

# Pastors Thoughts of the Week

## Weak Things

*1 Corinthians 1:27-29: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:*

*That no flesh should glory in his presence.*

As we peruse the stories of Holy Writ, we find the Lord bypassing the worldly savants, the powerful iron men, the celebrated orators, and the affluent elites and choosing instead His seemingly weak servants to accomplish His eternal purposes. This runs counter to the existential wisdom of this age that rewards the intelligent, the powerful, and the beautiful while eschewing the dull-witted, the feeble, and the homely. Ah, yes thankfully, there is hope for us who have such limited abilities and such poor powers to persuade for God has deigned to use the "weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty".

How often in those awkward early years did we feel the sting of rejection from those who were considered the "in crowd". Perhaps we were rejected by a would be suitor or were shut out of the clique of the popular socialites. We failed to make the team or secure the role in the high school play and never considered to occupy the throne as Homecoming Queen. The National Honor Students breezed through the abstruseness of calculus while we struggled to barely obtain a passing grade. While others were enshrined in the yearbook as "The Most Likely To Succeed" our names would have found their notoriety in the phrase "The Least Likely To Be Remembered". As difficult as that rejection may have been at the time, this all could have worked together for good. For the One who was known as the Man of Sorrows, who was despised and rejected of men because there was no beauty that He should be desired, has been touched with that same infirmity and is not ashamed to call us brethren. "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you." John 15:18

Moses loses the inheritance of Egypt and with it all of its requisite erudition, opulence, and dominion and becomes a stuttering keeper of sheep so that God would then raise him up as the architect of the exodus. Consider Ruth, an impoverished widow with no dowry and little expectation of remarriage who is used of God to give genealogical issuance to the Kingdom of God. There was David, the runt of the family of Jesse, who rises to the throne of Israel. Elijah, and John the Baptist who would follow, were persona non grata but both gave eloquent witness to the transformative power of God. Mary and Josep, the unlearned and simple peasants of Nazareth, whom God chose to give home to His Son. Behold the apostle Paul who suffered the loss of all things and was "made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things" and yet used of God to bring the gospel to the heathen world. These are but a few of the weak things that were made mighty through God. That miracle is replicated and repeated through the centuries of time and gives hope to all of the outcasts of the world. To God be the glory.

Have a blessed week,

*Pastor*

*Faith cometh by hearing: and hearing by the word of God Romans 10:17*

## Lessons from Mount Gilboa

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*Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, neither let there be rain upon you, nor fields of offerings: for there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away, the shield of Saul, as though he had not been anointed with oil.*

*– 2 Samuel 1:21 –*

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Saul and David forever stand as representatives of two types of believers – the carnal and the spiritual, the half-hearted and the fully devoted, the self-centered and the God-honoring. They both prophesied. They were both chosen and anointed as King over God's people. They both began so well. But here the similarities cease. Saul would take the foolish path of self-promotion, self-preservation, and self-service, whereas David would follow the road of self-renunciation, self-deprecation, and self-sacrifice.

Saul early lost God's favor with his incomplete obedience and his presumptuous pride. When a believer willfully disobeys God, the peace of the Lord departs. He begins to isolate himself from his Master. Unless quick repentance is executed, every fleshly inhabitant begins to gnaw away at the soul. As Saul witnessed God's blessing upon Jesse's son, envy would drive him even to the extreme absurdities of paranoia and mental instability. And his spiral would affect not only himself, but others. No man lives or dies to himself. From David to Ahimelech to his own son Jonathan, Saul's self-infatuation proved a menacing tormentor to the innocent.

David, on the other hand, found the secret of the Lord. While in no wise perfect, he was always striving and ever conscious of the spiritual pitfalls that awaited him if he would surrender to his natural emotion. Resolve to honor God and restraint in matters of the flesh would prove to be his best friends. While being hunted like a dog by Saul, he refused to execute vengeance on multiple occasions, even when it appeared that the opportunity was divinely bestowed. (Such tests mark all our paths). Like the Savior he foreshadowed, when reviled, he reviled not again, but committed his soul to Him that judgeth justly.

These two believers, then, both speak to us from Mount Gilboa...

Here at Gilboa, Saul reaped the whirlwind. A tumultuous man met a violent end. A haughty soul was remarkably disgraced. A selfish life at the last could preserve neither self nor progeny. A believer with so much potential was jettisoned into eternity to give an account in the thread-bare rags of his own conceits.

And here at Gilboa, David showed us God's heart – a heart that genuinely loved his enemy, blessing him that cursed him, doing good to him that hated him, and praying for him that spitefully used and persecuted him. And God brought beauty from the ashes.

Let us listen carefully to the lessons from Mount Gilboa. God is not mocked. The heart matters. What a man sows, that shall he also reap.

-- D. Murcek

## Our Profit and His Glory

*Thus saith the LORD, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; I am the LORD thy God which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go.*

*Isaiah 48:17*

Much of the Old Testament chronicles the development of the nation Israel and their relationship with their God. Throughout their history there were times of blessing coupled with spiritual prosperity, and times of trials and declension. Man's selfish choices and the resulting curse seem to dominate Israel's history. Israel would not heed God's law which He gave by His servant Moses. With the leadership of a few good kings, God's people experienced a few seasons of peace and refreshment that did not last long. God then sent his prophets to steer the nation in the right direction. The prophet Isaiah was sent to warn the people and call the nation to repentance.

Our Lord's first coming was primarily to give His life as a ransom, but He also gave us a profound example of the way the Heavenly Father meant for us to live. In today's text we see that His teachings are for our well-being and to guide us through life. When the Lord's eternal truths are applied, our lives are filled with purpose and contentment. Just as a good parent knows what is best for their children, so the Lord knows what is best for us. Treating others as we would like to be treated can help maintain healthy relationships. Jesus taught that instead of holding grudges, we should forgive. His warnings about the dangers of materialism should inspire us to lay up treasures in heaven. Knowing that He cares for the sparrows and clothes the lilies of the field, our worries and anxieties are diminished. He is the Good Shepherd who knows His sheep by name; how personal our Lord is! His warnings about the hypocrisy of the religious leaders should cause us to examine our own level of spiritual integrity. Some of Jesus' short statements such as: *He that is not with me is against me*, or *He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone*, or *he that humbleth himself shall be exalted*, and *if we lose our life, we will find it*, should speak to us and encourage us to follow our Lord more closely.

Remember that any instruction from the Lord is always for our profit and betterment and redounds to His glory.

J. Ekis

## Which Value System?

*... but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.*

*Luke 16:15*

We have all received surveys asking us to rate something on a scale of one to ten with one being the least and ten being the greatest. It can range anywhere from a medical form that needs to be filled out to a sales inquiry about our interest in a product. Using that same scale, how would we rate the eternal value and importance of the things in our own life? Do the things that we highly esteem have any eternal value to them? Today's text reminds us of the vast difference between the value systems of God and man.

Since the fall of man, covetousness has plagued mankind. From Achan desiring a wedge of gold and a Babylonian garment (Joshua 7:21) to Judas's betraying Jesus for thirty pieces of silver (Matthew 26:15), greed for material possessions has been the ruination of many. In Luke 16:13, Jesus warns that "No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon (riches)". When the Pharisees heard this, they derided Jesus. The Lord then states that God has a different value system than man.

The world's value system has permeated many levels of our culture. Money usually is the driving force behind much of what the world values. Other value systems have also been misplaced. Physical appearance seems to have more value than character. College diplomas are acquired while many of the recipients have lived a decadent lifestyle while at college. Wealthy people are given great respect, while the hardworking laborers are often thought to be ignorant. Christians and their beliefs are ridiculed while the evolutionist and atheist are honored. We should remember that the values of this world are often contrary to what God values.

As Christians, we should be pursuing the things in this life that God values. By God's grace and power, breaking away from the carnal encumbrances of this world liberates us in many ways. By seeing the empty peer pressure of the broad road that leads to destruction, we can freely choose to follow the narrow path that leads to true life. As we travel the narrow path, the highly esteemed things of this life are seen for what they are: temporary and unfulfilling. With our sights fixed on the values outlined in God's word, let us press forward in the Lord's service.

J. Ekis

## Spiritual anger

*And the Spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard those tidings, and his anger was kindled greatly.  
I Samuel 11:6*

A rare connection is made here in the experience of king Saul, as the Spirit of God came mightily upon him and made Saul's anger to burn vehemently. There is no incongruity in this situation. As Saul had recently been anointed by Samuel and the people to be the first king of Israel, not having any previous model of a king, he had gone back to tending the herd. As he came from the field, and heard the messengers from Jabesh-Gilead tell of the extraordinarily evil threat of the Ammonite king upon the men of their city, the Spirit of God enabled him to view the situation as God saw it. Not only had Nahash the Ammonite come against them with his army, but his response to their request for conditions of surrender was extreme, that he would thrust out all their right eyes as well. The Spirit had previously come upon Saul, when Samuel had first secretly anointed him, to cause him to prophesy, sharing God's truth among men. Now the Spirit was allowing Saul to share the vehement anger of God against the cruelty of evil men. This was a righteous anger, which resulted in Saul's fast response to the desperate request from the men of Jabesh for help. He raised an army, even with threatening terms, to come to their defense within a few days, and they routed the enemy.

Unfortunately, the ongoing account of king Saul will describe other occasions of his anger being kindled, but not by the Spirit of the Lord. It will in fact be aroused by an evil spirit upon Saul, in his envious rage against young David, his faithful servant. It will become so egregious that he will curse and seek to harm his own son Jonathan for trying to protect David (I Samuel 20:30-33). Thus we see that, although there is clearly such a thing as righteous anger that can come to men based on God's perspective, it does not take long for the nature of men to degrade the force of anger into a self-serving and evil emotion and attitude.

As a result, we see the New Testament warning: "Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil" (Ephesians 4:26-27). Even a righteous anger left to the nature of man can degrade, either from pride, or selfishness, or both, if not acted upon properly. So let us keep any anger in check, first with a diligence to test its legitimacy. If legitimate, let us act in a timely fashion with whatever power we have to bring the situation to resolution, or to relinquish it to the will and hand of God. If not, let us take it in repentance before the Lord, seeking His power for humility, confession, cleansing, and peace-making.

# Pastors Thoughts of the Week

## Moral Regression

*Jeremiah 6:16: Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein.*

A flurry of TV ads produced by Progressive Insurance Company has recently flooded the airwaves with a tough-love lecture by "Dr. Rick", who helps millennials and Gen Xers avoid "becoming like their parents" Their sarcastic message employs humor to mock the supposed outdated idiosyncrasies of the older generation. In a not-so-subtle way, these commercials try to rescue the progressive generation from the antiquated mores of their parents, as though that would be a dismal fate. The ads portray Dr. Rick's group participants as obsequious dim wits who have unthinkingly adopted their parent's characteristics and (subtly implied) their values as well. Keep in mind that Progressive Insurance has a long history of contributing to liberal politicians and secular organizations such as the ACLU and Planned Parenthood. Progressive liberals have long believed that the old-fashioned biblically principled people have thwarted the advances of societal evolution. These supercilious social architects want to tear down the innate respect that children have for the values of their parents and forefathers and build a less restrictive, amoral world based on philosophical relativism.

With each generation, there is the existential threat of the erosion of our moral ethos. One need only consider the moral decay that has plagued our nation in the last 50 years. Progressives are relentless in tearing down existing taboos and pushing the envelope of indecency until there are left no boundaries with which to restrict the corrupt nature of man.

In the biblical model, respect for elders is sacrosanct. Leviticus 19:32: "Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God: I am the LORD". The Old Testament punishment for a rebellious son was death by stoning (see Deuteronomy 21:18-21). Conversely, the child who obeys and honors his parents is guaranteed a long life. (see Ephesians 6:2-3).

Postmodernity has spawned "a generation that curseth their father, and doth not bless their mother" Proverbs 30:11. The scorning of those time-tested "old paths" of which Jeremiah speaks are rapidly being torn down. It did not end well for the nation Israel and it will not end well for those who refuse to learn from the past. are "accepted in the beloved".

Have a blessed week,

*Pastor*

*Faith cometh by hearing: and hearing by the word of God Romans 10:17*



## Burning Bridges

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*Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.*

*– Acts 19:19 –*

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There is a temptation for believers in every age to entertain worldly wisdom. The pressure is a direct result of the juxtaposition that occurs the moment we trust Christ. When we make that eternal decision, the world is crucified to us, and we to the world. We are now strangers and pilgrims on earth.

But the devil loves to exploit our minority position. He begins earnestly enticing us to believe that we ought not wander too far from our terrestrial moorings. “Remain open minded,” he whispers. “After all, you don’t want to be so heavenly minded that you are of no earthly good.” This devilish stratagem is hell’s weapon of choice in the modern church. We somehow erroneously believe that we can only relevantly engage the culture by becoming part of it, or at least by being educated about it. (Open-mindedness may be a virtue to many in modern Christendom, but is nowhere canonized as such in the Bible!)

The believers in Ephesus teach us that there is nothing of any intellectual value to hold on to from the old life. Once they found the truth through the gospel, they severed the cords to pre-conversion thinking, fully and completely. Imagine us modern believers trying to explain to these Ephesian converts that they were being a bit too zealous – that there could have been some good gleaned from those expensive sorcery materials they so hastily incinerated. The notion is as ridiculous as it is sad. We know by the Spirit that this bridge burning is exactly what God delights in, yet we somehow fool ourselves that such acts of zeal are outdated or closed-minded.

The prince of the power of the air owns the airwaves and is the master of the arena of ideas in this fallen world. He does not fear well-meaning, “open-minded” believers wanting to play therein. What he does recoil from, however, are Christ-loving zealots who know that this world and all of its sophistry is hopelessly empty, and who are fearless to pronounce it so.

Let us resist the temptation to entertain worldly wisdom. We have Christ. In Him are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Our minds have been renewed, so they need not be open to the devil’s rot. Let us cut the cords from all worldly philosophy and influence. If we do this collectively, perhaps revival awaits us around the corner.

-- D. Murcek

## Spiritual IQ

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding. ~Proverbs 9:10*

A formal definition tells us that *IQ stands for intelligence quotient and, in short, it is a measure of a person's reasoning ability. An IQ test is supposed to gauge how well someone can use information and logic to answer questions or make predictions.* In today's world, much emphasis is placed on intelligence, and although it is important to be able to assess information to make proper decisions, God places a higher value on wisdom.

Solomon, the inspired author of the Proverbs, was divinely endowed with wisdom that he might be an effective leader. In verse ten he states that true wisdom begins with fear of the LORD. The word *fear* usually has a negative connotation, yet in this case it is seen as positive and extremely beneficial. It is true that God is infinitely loving and kind, but we must never forget that He is also the One and Only eternal God who is Holy and reigns in righteousness. In the Amplified Bible, today's verse reads as follows: *The reverent and worshipful fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight and understanding.* Clearly, having this worshipful fear is the foundation of true wisdom. Though God did condescend to us when He took on flesh and became a man, we should never expect that the Lord should conform to what we desire Him to be. He is the Lord God who changes not! Acquiring godly wisdom enables us to allow Him to guide us as we apply His Word in every aspect of life and He conforms us to the image of His dear Son. Any wisdom we gain from God's word will be hindered if we lose sight of the fear of the Lord. Acquiring Biblical knowledge can develop into spiritual pride if it is not tempered by the fear of the Lord. Fearing God can keep us mindful of the consequences of our thoughts and actions. Proverbs also enlightens us about the benefits of this fear. It helps us to depart from evil, it prolongs our days, it is a fountain of life, it tends to life, it helps us to hate evil, and is the source of true riches, honor, and life.

Proverbs also states that we are to be in the fear of the LORD all the day long. Standing in the fear of the Lord while we search the treasures of His Word and commune with Him, let us all endeavor to increase our spiritual IQ.

J. Ekis

## Affection

*If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.  
Colossians 3:1-2*

Affection is defined in Noah Webster's 1828 dictionary as "a permanent bent of the mind, formed by the presence of an object, or by some act of another person, and existing without the presence of its object," as well as "desire; inclination; propensity, good or evil; as, virtuous or vile affections." When we dig a little deeper into our text, we find that the phrase "set your affection" is translated from one Greek verb. Setting the affection is a command to be carried out by those whose spiritual position is described as "risen with Christ." The action works in tandem with the preceding command to seek. The object of both verbs is the same: things above. A traveler sets his mind upon his destination, so that all of the activities surrounding his journey are influenced by the final destination. In a similar manner, followers of Christ recognize that their spiritually risen position is united with the final destination, which is to be with Christ in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6-7; Revelation 3:21). So in verse four of this chapter Paul says: "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." With this understanding, we are called to make the permanent bent of our mind in the spiritually upward direction, which should then cause us to seek those things that complement our final destination. John clarifies this when he reminds us that when we see Him, we shall be like Him, and therefore, if we have this hope in Him, we will purify ourselves because He is pure (I John 3:2-3). So, as Paul expands this discourse to the Colossians, he describes the earthly things to put off (vv. 5-9) and the heavenly things to put on (vv. 12-17) as we journey toward our destination. As a result, as our affection and desire are more fully trained upon what He saved us to be, what a greater fulfillment, and thus reward, will be ours in the final destination.

## OJT

*David said moreover, The LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.  
I Samuel 17:37*

As young David was in the process of trying to convince king Saul that he was able to fight the giant Goliath, of whom Saul and his army were completely frightened, he recounted his previous experiences with dangerous encounters. He described how he, apparently alone and in some part of the conflict barehanded, had slain both a lion and a bear in defense of his father's sheep, and he equated their defeats with his prediction of the end of the uncircumcised Philistine Goliath. While this had the appearance of self-assertive boasting, as personal examples often exhibit, David was quick to attribute the reason for Goliath's expected demise to his defiance of the armies of the living God, and not to David's own prowess. In our text, David concludes that, since the power of the Lord delivered him from ferocious beasts, it would be the power of the same Lord that would deliver him from Goliath.

We may pass by this description in our reading of this familiar account, as we admire David's faith demonstrated in his miraculous defeat of Goliath. But we dare not miss the application that the faith exhibited by David as he ran toward the giant with his sling and stones was not borne of that provided only for this special occasion. It was in fact the faith that he cultivated by exercising it in his everyday job of leading and guarding sheep. While we may be tempted to view the feats of Bible heroes as temporal infusions of extraordinary faith from the Spirit of the Lord, which is not without grounds for many examples that could be cited, we must also observe that the character of such faith is often formed by the exercise thereof throughout the daily experience of life. For David, it was on-the-job training (OJT). It seems to also be so for the patriarchs, like Abraham, for prophets such as Daniel, and for Daniel's three companions. The exercise of faith in the power of the Lord through the ebb and flow of daily circumstances was the training ground for more challenging events. So why should it not be for us as well? As we may pray for great faith in our great God for those yet unknown daunting circumstances, which may or may not come, let us also ask for the same as we work and walk with Him daily.

# Pastors Thoughts of the Week

## With The Sound of Trumpets

*Numbers 10:2: Make thee two trumpets of silver; of a whole piece shalt thou make them: that thou mayest use them for the calling of the assembly, and for the journeying of the camps. And when they shall blow with them, all the assembly shall assemble themselves to thee at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.*

During the arduous journey in the wilderness of Sin, the children of Israel had to be ready, at a moments notice, to pull up their tents, pack up their belongings, and meet at the door of the congregation, prepared to advance to the next location. They were a nomadic people who were called to endure an itinerate existence, though all the while clinging to the hope of one day entering into the unseen environs of a promised land. Each time they heard the sound of the trumpet, expectation filled their hearts as they imagined this might signal the end of their peripatetic wanderings in the inhospitable desert of Sinai.

The divine mind of our omniscient God, carefully laid out, in typological fashion, what would ultimately be fulfilled in the ages to come. The sounding of the silver trumpets in the text above is a foreshadowing of the gathering of His saints in the return of the Lord in the air. In the prophetic texts of the New Testament we see that repeated imagery of the sounding of the trumpet just ahead of the assembling of the redeemed. Follow this thread as evidence:

*Matthew 24:31: And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*

*I Thessalonians 4:16-17: For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:*

*Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*

*I Corinthians 15:52: In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.*

*Revelation 4:1: After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.*

The New Testament believer must understand that we are, likewise, wandering in a hostile wilderness, a strange land in which we are merely pilgrims awaiting the sound of the trumpet of assembly. We will gather at the door of the heavenly tabernacle and end our brief journey in our Wilderness of Sin. *James 5:9 Behold, the judge standeth before the door.*

Have a blessed week,

*Pastor*

*Faith cometh by hearing: and hearing by the word of God Romans 10:17*

## Waxing Cold?

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*And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.  
– Matthew 24:12 –*

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For the follower of Jesus Christ, this text is alarming. God's love, which is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given to us, is the constant and abiding witness, both internally and externally, that we are the children of God. In this do all men know that we are His disciples, when we have love one toward another. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. Our Lord's warning, therefore, that a day is forthcoming (or has arrived?) when iniquity is so prevalent that our love could wane to the point of icy stillness should indeed alarm us, causing us to pause and check our temperature before the throne of grace.

Iniquity in our day is certainly abounding. It is difficult to imagine it gaining additional velocity, yet day by day it appears to do just that. Those things which were once done in the darkness are now shamelessly performed in the light and proclaimed upon the rooftops. Moral abominations and perversions of all varieties have become normative "lifestyles", with continuing initiatives actively underway to further stretch the bounds of decency. The occult has been popularized in the modern psyche through various means of entertainment, and the overwhelming majority of the masses do not even recognize the Satanic influence. Within the church of Jesus Christ, pulpits have taken great pains to be relevant, becoming timid or downright silent when it comes to denominating and denouncing sin. The resulting whirlwind is an irrelevant church and a societal conscience that is seared with a hot iron.

In days such as these, when iniquity abounds, Christ's warning remains clear – our love can very effortlessly wax cold. The easy thing to do is to become mute, to retreat, to isolate. This would no doubt please the powers of darkness. But we are clearly called in His Word and comprehensively compelled by His Spirit to militantly love each other as well as lost souls. As hell works overtime to redefine "love", only the people of God possess the truth and therefore the antidote to undo the confusion that has been sown in so many hearts and minds. We must engage the devil at his game, shoving it back at him. It is an arduous task that must be accomplished one-on-one, one-by-one. Yet this is exactly why our Lord has left us here, and has equipped us with His Spirit to so occupy.

Let us resolve to fan the flame of His love within, and actively exercise toward everyone in our sphere of influence the wonders of His love. -- D. Murcek