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March 2, 2020
WAITING ON GOD

Readings for today: [Numbers 6-9](#)

One of the hardest things to learn as a follower of Christ is how to wait. We are always in such a hurry. We rush around in the morning to get off to work and school. We rush around all day at work trying to get things done. We rush around in the evenings to different activities and events. Then we wake up the next day to do it all over again. Furthermore, we live in a world of instant gratification. We get what we want when we want it and woe to anyone who cannot deliver on our timeline! Patience is no longer a virtue in our world. Waiting is considered a waste of time.

The Bible is clear that “waiting” is a key skill for any disciple. Patience is a fruit of the Holy Spirit’s presence in our lives. Long-suffering is something God’s people know intimately. Consider what we read from Numbers today. “On the day that the tabernacle was set up, the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the testimony. And at evening it was over the tabernacle like the appearance of fire until morning. So it was always: the cloud covered it by day and the appearance of fire by night. And whenever the cloud lifted from over the tent, after that the people of Israel set out, and in the place where the cloud settled down, there the people of Israel camped...At the command of the Lord they camped, and at the command of the Lord they set out. They kept the charge of the Lord, at the command of the Lord by Moses.” (Num. 9:15-17, 23) The passage tells us that sometimes they camped for days in one location. Sometimes for hours. The point is Israel didn’t move until God moved. Israel didn’t break camp until God broke camp. Israel was learning how to wait on God.

I’ve been in ministry now for almost twenty years. Over that time, I’ve spent hundreds if not thousands of hours in my office counseling people through all sorts of different seasons in their lives. One of the most common issues I have to address is impatience. It makes total sense. People in crisis want out of crisis as soon as possible! So I get it. However, in their rush to get out of crisis they often jump from the frying pan into the fire. Refusing to wait on God, they prematurely end their marriage. Prematurely cut off a relationship. Prematurely make a professional decision. Prematurely rush into what they think is a solution only to find their supposed “cure” worse than their disease.

God wants us to wait on Him. His time is not our time. His ways are not our ways. His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. So often when we wait on God, we don’t understand. I am sure there were moments when Israel looked around and said, “Really God? This is where you want us to camp? This is where you want us to settle down for a few days?” I’m sure there were other times when they found wonderful pasture and plentiful water only to have the pillar of cloud rise the next morning, taking them onward. They had never seen the Promised Land. They had no idea where they were headed or what it would look like when they got there. They simply had to trust God. They had to wait on God. They had to look to God.

Where is God calling you to trust Him in your life today? Is it with a professional decision? Is it with your children’s future? Your marriage? Is it with your finances? Or perhaps your aging parent’s health? Maybe it’s your college choice? Or a career decision after you graduate? What does that look like for you and how are you learning to wait on God to reveal His will?

Readings for tomorrow: Numbers 10-13, Psalms 90

March 3, 2020
THE LEADERSHIP BURDEN

Readings for today: [Numbers 10-13, Psalm 90](#)

A few days ago, an old article began reappearing in my Twitter feed. Written for Forbes, it lists the nine toughest leadership roles in our culture today. Pastors come in at #5. “Being a pastor is like death by a thousand paper cuts.... You’re scrutinized and criticized from top to bottom, stem to stern. You work for an invisible, perfect Boss, and you’re supposed to lead a ragtag gaggle of volunteers towards God's coming future. It's like herding cats, but harder.” Now I am not sure my job is any harder than anyone else’s but I do sympathize with the sentiments of the article. Leadership is hard. The burden is heavy. The struggle is real. No matter what sphere of life you are called to lead in – and I truly believe all of us are “leaders” in one sphere or another - it comes with a lot of stress. How one responds to the stress often determines the success or failure of the leader.

Moses felt the stress of leadership. Listen to what he says to the Lord after what seems like the umpteenth time the people of Israel complained. "Why have you dealt ill with your servant? And why have I not found favor in your sight, that you lay the burden of all this people on me? Did I conceive all this people? Did I give them birth, that you should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a nursing child,' to the land that you swore to give their fathers? Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they weep before me and say, 'Give us meat, that we may eat.' I am not able to carry all this people alone; the burden is too heavy for me. If you will treat me like this, kill me at once, if I find favor in your sight, that I may not see my wretchedness." (Numbers 11:11-15) Think about all Moses had accomplished up to this point. At eighty years of age, he had returned to Egypt where he was wanted for murder to confront Pharaoh. After levying plague after plague, he successfully secured freedom for the people of Israel. He leads them out with great wealth and possessions. He parts the Red Sea. Feeds them in the wilderness. Brings water from a rock. He performs miracle after miracle and yet Israel remains so ungrateful. They continue to grumble and complain. At the first sign of hardship, they start whining about going back to Egypt. They criticize and attack his leadership. They come after his family. They question his ability. Can you imagine how frustrating this must have been?

So Moses asks God to kill him. He’s tired. He’s weary. He’s depressed. He’s anxious. He’s come to the end of himself. He’s on empty. He’s got nothing left. Ever felt like that? Interestingly enough, the toughest job Forbes lists in its article is parenting. Staying at home to raise the kids. Anyone who’s ever been a parent knows the struggle of watching your kids grow up. The joy and the sorrow. The excitement and the anxiety. The pride and the fear. It’s quite a roller coaster. Moses sees himself as a kind of parent to Israel. Like God put him in charge of raising hundreds of thousands of children. Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Did I nurse them as they grew? How am I going to feed them? How am I going to provide for them? How am I going to raise them to maturity? The burden is simply too great so he cries out in anguish and despair.

Look at how God responds. “Then the Lord said to Moses, "Gather for me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them, and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you. And I will come down and talk with you there. And I will take some of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them, and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you may not bear it yourself alone.” (Numbers 11:16-17) God doesn’t leave Moses alone. He provides friends and colleagues to share the load. It is not up to Moses to do this on his own. This project doesn’t rise or fall with Moses. Seventy elders are raised up by God

to help lead and guide the people. They are filled with the same Spirit. They are given some of the same gifts. They will lighten the load.

Why is leadership so hard? Because we too often go it alone. I've known too many pastors who crash and burn because they have no friends. No colleagues to share their burdens with. I've known too many moms and dads who refuse to let others come alongside them and help. I've known too many business leaders who think their business cannot survive without them. Too many teachers who believe the success or failure of each child rests on them.

Friends, leadership is a gift to be shared. I know I would not be where I am today without a phenomenal wife who stands by my side. Four great kids who are learning to take responsibility for themselves. Elders in our church who prayerfully seek the mind of Christ and are eager to share the burden. A staff team that truly loves and supports one another. It is awesome. Who has God put in your life to share the load? Who has God raised up to carry the burden with you? Don't be afraid to ask God for help! Ask Him to do for you what He did for Moses.

Readings for tomorrow: Numbers 14-16, Psalm 95

March 4, 2020
TREASON

Readings for today: [Numbers 14-16, Psalm 95](#)

One of the hardest ideas to get our minds around when we read Scripture is to remember our position before God. God is God. He is the Creator. The Ruler. The Sustainer of all things. He holds complete and total authority over life and death. His will is perfect. His character is holy and righteous. His desires are always pure. He is not a man that He should lie. He is not a man that He should change His mind. He is not given to fits of emotion nor is He ruled by His passions. He is not like us. He is wholly other. His ways are not our ways. His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. As far as the heavens are above the earth so far is God's understanding beyond our own. He dwells in unapproachable light. He exists outside time and space. He lives in a dimension all His own. He cannot be questioned. He cannot be challenged. To disobey Him is to invite judgment. The very fact that He doesn't just wipe out all creation and start over is an act of pure mercy and grace. Nothing more. Nothing less. Nothing else.

I love how pastor and theologian, Jonathan Edwards, once put it, "The bow of God's wrath is bent, and the arrow made ready on the string, and justice bends the arrow at your heart, and strains the bow, and it is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, and that of an angry God, without any promise or obligation at all, that keeps the arrow one moment from being made drunk with your blood." It's a sobering reality when we stop to think about it. It rightfully engenders fear in our hearts. The righteousness and holiness of God's justice should cause us to fall on our faces before God in humble submission and deep gratitude for the mercy that stays His hand.

God is faithful. He delivered His people out of Egypt. He rescued them from slavery. He provided for them in the wilderness. He guided them right to the brink of the Promised Land. And there...standing on the brink of the fulfillment of all God's promises...they rebelled. They turned away. They refused to go in. Not only did they refuse to go forward, they actually made a plan to go backwards. Back to Egypt. Back to slavery. Back to bondage. They rejected Moses. They rejected Aaron. They wanted a new leader. A new direction. A new vision that didn't include God. It's heartbreaking to read. And it rightfully stirs God to righteous anger. The reality is the people of Israel were walking the razor's edge. Putting God to the test. Would He remain true to His nature and character in the face of their persistent and stubborn rebellion?

Thankfully, God is faithful. It's critical to note that when Moses makes intercession, he makes no excuse for the people. Instead, he calls on God to be faithful to Himself. "And now, please let the power of the Lord be great as you have promised, saying, 'The Lord is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but he will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, to the third and the fourth generation.'" (Numbers 14:17-18) And God answers Moses' prayer. He pardons His people but by no means clears the guilty. They will fall in the wilderness. None of them shall see the Promised Land. An entire generation shall die in judgment. But God is also merciful. He will take their children into the Land. They will possess it. They will see the fulfillment of God's promise.

Friends, it is hard to come face to face with God's righteous judgment. Hard to see His wrath on display. Hard to watch as His people suffer the consequences for their rebellion. Hard because it reminds us of the harsh reality of our sin. Sin is not just a small mistake. It is not just an error in judgment. It is not just a poor decision. To commit sin is to commit treason against our divine King and Master. And the penalty for treason is always death. This is the judgment all of us have earned by our

action and inaction. None of us is righteous. All of us have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. None of us is worthy of salvation. And yet God still loves us. He is steadfast. Loyal. Faithful. True. Nothing can separate us from His love and He seals this promise with His own blood. Returning to the Edwards quote above, God turns the arrow towards Himself. Shoots it into the heart of His only begotten Son. Jesus takes the punishment we deserved. Jesus endures the wrath we rightfully earned. Jesus pays the price for our treason. Thanks be to God for the gift of His Son!

Readings for tomorrow: Numbers 17-20

March 5, 2020
BLAME SHIFT

Readings for today: [Numbers 17-20](#)

As a pastor, I do a lot of counseling. One of the most common issues I face is something called “blame shifting.” Basically, a person commits a wrong and when confronted on it, “shifts” the blame to someone else. This can be their spouse. Their children. Their parents. Even their pastor! ;-) I cannot tell you the number of times I have counseled a couple on their marriage only to have them blame me for their eventual separation and divorce. Never mind the fact they were unwilling to put in the work. Unwilling to do the homework I assigned. Unwilling to change any of their unhealthy behaviors. Unwilling to engage each other at a different level. At the end of the day, because the counseling didn’t “work”, it must be my failure as a pastor.

We see this same dynamic in play in Moses’ relationship with Israel. How many times do they accuse Moses of failing to lead them well? How many times do they blame him for not providing water, food, or getting them to the Promised Land? Never mind their own sin. Their own lack of faith. Their own fear. Their worship of false gods. “And the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Would that we had perished when our brothers perished before the Lord! Why have you brought the assembly of the Lord into this wilderness, that we should die here, both we and our cattle? And why have you made us come up out of Egypt to bring us to this evil place? It is no place for grain or figs or vines or pomegranates, and there is no water to drink." (Num. 20:3-5) Over and over again, we hear this refrain. Let’s go back to Egypt. Let’s go back to slavery. You brought us out here to die. You brought us out here to suffer. It would be truly baffling if I didn’t see it everyday.

Jesus addresses “blame-shifting” in the Sermon on the Mount. “Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.” (Matt. 7:3-5) Essentially, we have to be humble enough to acknowledge our own fears and failures and struggles and sin before we dare to confront someone else on their issues. We have to be willing to look ourselves in the mirror and honestly confront our own faults before we point out to others where they fall short. In my experience, there is plenty of blame to go around in just about every broken relationship. It’s always a two-way street.

We live in a highly critical world. A quick glance through Twitter or Facebook reveals how quick we are to blame others. We blame the system. We blame the government. We blame the church. We blame liberals. We blame conservatives. We blame Republicans. We blame Democrats. We blame our leaders. We blame teachers. We blame coaches. We blame absentee fathers. It’s like “blame-shifting” has become the national pastime. What you don’t see is anyone taking responsibility for why they find themselves in the position they’re in. You rarely find anyone acknowledging the ways they failed and how that contributed to their pain and suffering and heartache. No, it’s always someone else’s fault which makes us the “victim.” And there is great power in our culture today in casting ourselves as “victims” for it means we don’t have to take responsibility for our actions. We set ourselves beyond accountability. No one then gets to confront us and we are safe. Or so we think. The sad reality is when we avoid confrontation, accountability and responsibility; we never grow. And because we never grow, we tend to experience only more loneliness, pain, and heartache. It’s a vicious cycle.

So where do you find yourself today? Are you the kind of person who takes responsibility for your failures? Is confessional prayer a regular part of your life? Do you find it easy to apologize and ask for forgiveness? When confronted, do you listen and receive what the other person is saying? Or do you get defensive? Do you blame shift? Do you take their criticism personally? In Christ, we are set free from the need to be perfect. In Christ, we are set free from the need to perform. In Christ, we have nothing to fear and no need to blame. In Christ, we can accept the reality that we are sinners in desperate need of grace.

Readings for tomorrow: Numbers 21-24

March 6, 2020

THE DONKEY THAT SPOKE

Readings for today: [Numbers 21-24](#)

When I was in college, I used to go to lunch at Daddy's Bruce's Pit BBQ. It was a little hole in the wall place near the campus run by one of the most godly men I have ever met. "Daddy Bruce" - as he was affectionately called - was a larger than life African-American man who loved Jesus with all his heart. His father - the original Daddy Bruce - had become famous in Denver for serving the homeless a turkey dinner each year for Thanksgiving. The Daddy Bruce I knew followed in his father's footsteps, often serving those in need alongside paying customers. The first time I met Daddy Bruce, he found out I was a Christian. From that point forward, every time I showed up I had to have a Bible verse memorized in order to get my food. Daddy Bruce taught me to love the Scriptures. He told me story after story from the Bible. I am convinced he had most of it memorized. As I would sit at his little bar and eat my BBQ, he would get more and more wound up. He'd start preaching up a storm and the whole restaurant would stop to listen. It was amazing. Daddy Bruce had a way with words. He was a gifted orator. Steeped in the rich black preaching tradition, his preaching was verbal art. I still remember him introducing me to the story of Balaam. "Doug", he said in his thick southern accent, "when you come in here I don't want to hear no Footprints in the Sand. I don't want to hear 'bout some Prayer of Serenity. Tell me about the donkey that spoke! Now that's in the Bible!" Oh, how I miss that man!

The story of Balaam is a significant one in Scripture. Believe it or not, it becomes a sort of cautionary tale that is referenced throughout the Old and New Testaments. Over and over again, God's people are warned to avoid the sins of Balaam. And what are those sins? Divination. Sorcery. Fortune-telling. Balaam was a hired gun. He would bless or curse others for money. He was an ancient witch doctor with a powerful and fearsome reputation in that part of the world. So when Israel comes up out of Egypt and threatens Moab, the king sends for him. "Come now, curse this people for me, since they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them from the land, for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed." (Numbers 22:6) The idea being that Balaam will fire the first salvo in the coming battle and weaken Israel so Moab might prevail. Shockingly, the Lord speaks to Balaam through his pagan rituals, warning him off. But Balak knows Balaam's greedy reputation so he sends more princes and more money and Balaam relents. This stirs the anger of the Lord. So He essentially tells Balaam, "Thy will be done" and sends him on his way. However, the Lord isn't finished. He's not going to let Balaam off the hook quite yet. Under no circumstances will Balaam be allowed to curse Israel. So God sends an angel to oppose Balaam. To stand in his way. To humble Balaam. And thus we have this strange conversation between Balaam, his donkey, and the angel of the Lord.

Sometimes God uses the "foolish things of this world to shame the wise." I can think of many times over the course of my life where God has used my children to teach me things I was too proud to see. I can think of many times over the course of my life where the simple faith of desperately poor men and women showed me things about Jesus that I - a trained theologian - had forgotten. I can think of many times over the course of my life where God has confronted me in my pride, privilege, relative wealth and power. In each case, He used something simple. Something weak. Something the world might easily dismiss to show me the error of my ways. No, my dog has never spoken to me! But God forbid I ever get to the place where he would have to! Instead, I pray daily for the humility to not think more highly of myself than I ought or less of my self than I ought but simply to think of my "self" less.

Readings for tomorrow: Numbers 25-28

March 7, 2020
WHOLE-HEARTED DEVOTION

Readings for today: [Numbers 25-28](#)

Baal is the Canaanite fertility god. Worshiped by the tribes occupying the Promised Land, he will continue to entice the people of Israel to abandon the true worship of the Living God. The Moabites and the Midianites (nomadic tribesman who wandered frequently much like the Bedouin's today) worshiped Baal through sex and gluttony. They would hold massive parties where they would eat and drink to excess. In the midst of the drunkenness, they would engage in all kinds of sexual activity. All in an effort to show Baal how faithful they were to him so he would make their crops grow and their flocks multiply and open the wombs of all the women so they would bear children. So when Numbers 25 talks about the people of Israel "whoring" with the daughters of Moab, it is speaking literally. They were engaging in the worship practices of Baal and this was an abomination before the Lord. One of them even took it as far as bringing a Midianite woman before the Tabernacle and having sex with her in front of Moses and the whole congregation. It was a brazen act of defiance against God.

If we don't learn anything else from this passage, we must understand how serious God is about worship. Not just what we do on Sunday mornings for an hour but the worship we give Him every single day. God demands our single-minded devotion. God will not tolerate us worshiping other gods. God will not allow our love to be divided. It's black or white. You either love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength or you don't. There really is no gray area. This doesn't mean we will be perfect and God, in His graciousness, provides for our weaknesses. But the trajectory of our hearts must be set. God must be our North Star! God must be the sole object of our devotion! God alone is worthy to be praised!

It is critical to think about this passage in context of what we read yesterday. Balaam was paid by the king of Moab to curse Israel. Several times, he makes the attempt only to have God intervene. God will not allow Israel's enemies to curse her. He will protect and guard His people. But what about when Israel curses herself? What about when she brings judgment down on herself for her actions? What Balaam could not do, Israel did to herself by worshiping Baal at Peor and this incident becomes proverbial in the national life of Israel. It will show up again and again throughout the Old Testament. Deuteronomy, Joshua, Psalms, and Hosea all refer back to this moment in time when Israel broke the first commandment and abandoned her God. In fact, it shows up in the New Testament as well when the Apostle Paul references it in chapter ten of his first letter to the Corinthians.

We aren't so different, are we? Over and over again, God protects us. Provides for us. Guards us and keeps us. He rescues us from the curse of sin. He breaks the power of the devil. He overthrows death itself. But then we chase after other gods. We pursue success. We pursue wealth. We pursue comfort. We pursue safety. We make idols out of our children. Out of our health. Out of our professional careers. We even bring these idols with us to worship and ask God's blessing upon them! (I think of the picture that went viral a few years back of the religious cult in Pennsylvania asking God's blessing on their AR-15's! Crazy!)

Unfortunately, this temptation is common to us all. I cannot tell you the number of people I have married over the years who engaged in premarital sex but then wanted God's blessing on their relationship. I cannot tell you the number of people over the years who shared with me God told them to get divorced. I cannot tell you the number of people who told me they felt God blessed their adultery. And it's not just sex. I've heard the same arguments from parents who try to justify putting

their child's activities above everything else in their life, including their marriage and the worship of God. I've heard the same arguments from individuals who justify their climb up the corporate ladder, no matter the cost to their family and friends. And I've heard similar arguments from addicts who justify their dependence on pills or alcohol or pot or some other drug that numbs all their pain. We seem so eager and willing to sacrifice everything on the altar of self-gratification, self-indulgence, and self-promotion. It's like we're still worshiping the Baal of Peor!

Friends, God will not be mocked! God will not tolerate our sin. We cannot pretend there won't be consequences for our rebellion. It may not be Phineas with his spear but it could be much, much worse. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." (Matt. 7:21) What sin are you indulging in your life right now? What thoughts do you entertain? What feelings are you holding onto? What activities are you engaging in that will bring down God's judgment? A man by the name of H. Richard Niebuhr once argued that too many Christians want to believe in a "God without wrath bringing men without sin into a Kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a Cross." If you have fallen for this lie, you need to repent. If words like "judgment", "sin", "wrath", etc. have fallen out of your vocabulary, you are in danger of missing out on the heart of the gospel. Yes, God is love. But because God is love, He hates our sin. Because God is love, He sent His Son to die. Because God is love, He bore the wrath we deserved. Paid the price we owed. Satisfied the judgment we earned. God's love is not some warm fuzzy. It is fierce. Jealous. Loyal. Steadfast. True. And it will not tolerate any rivals.

March 9, 2020
HOLY WAR

Readings for today: [Numbers 29-32](#)

Holy War. Jihad. Violence sanctioned by God Himself. In Numbers 31, God directs Moses and Israel to attack Midian. "Avenge the people of Israel on the Midianites. Afterward you shall be gathered to your people." Who was Midian and what had they done to Israel to cause God's judgment to fall on them in such an extreme fashion?

Midian was a son of Abraham and his servant Keturah. While Abraham was still living, he sent Midian away so that there would be no competition for Isaac's inheritance. Midian presumably thrived over the years becoming a great tribal nation. Abraham's great-grandson Joseph was sold to Midianite traders as they made their way to Egypt. Moses fled to Midian to escape Egyptian justice and actually married a Midianite woman. As Moses learned to lead the nation of Israel, he leaned on his father-in-law, a Midianite priest, for advice but Israel's close association with Midian would come back to haunt them as they began to intermarry with them and co-mingle their worship practices. This results in judgment as God pours out His wrath on Israel through a plague which is only stopped when Phinehas kills Cozbi, daughter of a Midianite chief named Zur, and her husband Zimri who was the son of a Simeonite chief. Furthermore, the Midianites had allied themselves with the Moabites, setting themselves in opposition to Israel, and called on one of their prophets - Balaam - to come and curse the people of God.

You may remember the 2nd Commandment. "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me," (Exodus 20:4-5) God is jealous for His divine name. Jealous for His divine glory. Jealous for His relationship with His people. He makes clear over and over again throughout the Scriptures that He will tolerate no rivals. So when Israel begins to worship the Midianite gods, God takes action. First, he punishes Israel as I mentioned above. Then He calls for holy war. He commands His people to attack Midian and "execute the Lord's vengeance." Vengeance not in the sense of God losing control and lashing out but vengeance in the sense of the righteous execution of God's justice. Israel is successful. They kill all the males that come against them. They take the women and children hostage. They plunder their possessions. Then they go one step further. As an act of ritual purity, they kill all the male children and any women who is not a virgin. It is brutal. It is horrifying. It is judgment. The women were just as guilty as the Israelite men in the sin of idolatry at Peor and their guilt conveys to their male children as well who - if left alive - might seek their own revenge against Israel in the future. (Blood feuds between tribes and clans were common in ancient times and could last generations.)

This is scary stuff. Especially for the 21st century American reader. It doesn't square with our culturally notions of a loving God who always shows mercy and grace to the sinner. When we read passages like this, we think of modern-day terrorists. Suicide bombers. Religious extremists like ISIS and we cannot understand how our God could ever act in such ways. This is where we come face to face with God's holiness. God's righteousness. God's justice. The stark reality is this...evil makes God angry. Idolatry is an offense. He does not let it go. He does not overlook our sin. He does not turn a blind eye to our rebellion. This is why the cross is itself so brutal and horrifying. There God pours out the full measure of His righteous wrath and judgment on His Son. Satisfying the demands of divine justice through Jesus' suffering and death. On the cross, the truly innocent One dies in our place.

So what is our response? Repentance. Repentance is the only appropriate response of the creature when confronted by the Creator and this is the lesson we must all take away. God will not be mocked. Not back then. Not now. Not in the future. God is a God of love and mercy and grace but He is also a God of holiness and righteousness and justice. He is quick to forgive the sin of those who repent but He is also faithful to judge those who persist in their rebellion. Humble yourself before the Lord before it is too late. Embrace the Son and what He has done for you. Give your life to Christ that you might be saved from the coming judgment.

Readings for today: Numbers 33-36

March 10, 2020
THE RIGHTS OF GOD

Readings for today: [Numbers 33-36](#)

I read a news report this morning out of St. Louis about a family who ignored a quarantine to go shopping, hit the gym, and get their nails done. It seems their daughter had recently returned from Italy where she was exposed to the coronavirus. But instead of following the directions of the CDC, this particular family believed they had the right to go where they pleased. The result is a potential outbreak that could result suffering and death for certain, immunocompromised members of their community.

Sounds about right, doesn't it? Americans as a general rule believe we have been given certain freedoms. Inalienable rights. Guaranteed us by our Constitution. Among those are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The freedom of speech, assembly, press, and religion. In short, we believe no one has a right to tell us what to do or where to go or how to act. If we ever feel those rights are being threatened, we take action. We fight back. We sue. Nothing, it seems, will stop us from pursuing our own self-interest.

Can you imagine what would happen if God chose to do the same? After all, His rights were violated the moment Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit. His rights are violated every time a human being engages in sin and breaks His law. His rights are violated when we worship idols and images of our own making. Ascribing to created things the glory due our Creator.

One of the real challenges in reading Scripture is to keep in mind the rights of God. God has the right to literally wipe out the entire universe and start over. God has the right to kill every man, woman, and child on the earth for their sin. God has the right to judge the nations and destroy them for their greed and lust for power. God has the right to do all this and more. So what stays God's hand? His endless mercy. His amazing grace. His unconditional love. His great faithfulness.

We are nearing the end of the Torah. The great story of the formation of God's people. The birth of a nation. God has rescued them from slavery in Egypt. He has exposed the emptiness of the idols of the greatest empire on earth. God has utterly broken Pharaoh who set himself up as a god. God is demonstrating His power and authority over all He has made and He is about to do the same as Israel enters the Promised Land. God is faithful. He will not let this world go. He will have His way among us. He will have the glory He deserves. He will make Himself known to the pagan nations of the earth. This is why God commands Israel to "drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you and destroy all their figured stones and destroy all their metal images and demolish all their high places. And you shall take possession of the land and settle in it, for I have given the land to you to possess it." (Numbers 33:52-53)

God has a right to our worship. God has a right to our total allegiance. God has a right to our faithful obedience. He wants nothing more than our whole hearts. Nothing less than our full devotion. Nothing else but our very souls. Turn and embrace the God who loves you so much, friends! Give Him the glory He is due! Humble yourself before His throne! Submit yourself to His sovereign authority over your life! Trust Him with all that you are and all that you have! He is faithful. He is true. And He loves you with an everlasting love.

Readings for tomorrow: Deuteronomy 1-3

March 11, 2020
ONE LAST SERMON...

Readings for today: [Deuteronomy 1-3](#)

You finished Numbers! Great job! Another book down! Some would say you've just made it through one of the toughest stretches of the Bible. Pat yourself on the back as we dig into Deuteronomy.

The Book of Deuteronomy is a sermon. In fact, it is Moses' final sermon to God's people. His last will and testament as it were. His final chance to encourage. Challenge. Confront. Comfort. He's now led Israel for decades. And he was no spring chicken when he got started! He's led them out of Egypt. Led them through the wilderness. Led them through the ups and downs of the wilderness journey. He has personally witnessed the miracles of God. Delivered the Ten Commandments. Issued the Law. Under the mighty hand of God, he has created a system of worship, governance, economics, and military organization that will long outlast him. It is a remarkable accomplishment.

Now he's at the end of his life. He's not going over the Jordan. He will not set foot in the Promised Land. What would you say in Moses' position? Given one last chance to address God's people, what would be on your heart and mind? What would you want them to know moving forward? What lessons would you hope they learned?

One of my favorite speeches of all time was delivered April 3, 1968 by Martin Luther King Jr. on the eve of his assassination. He sounds a lot like Moses in my mind. "Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like any man, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people will get to the promised land. And I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord." I think at the end of the day Moses, like King, was happy. He knew he couldn't go over to the Promised Land but he died knowing his great work was finished. He had witnessed the salvation of God's people. He had seen the glory of the Lord.

When you finish your life, how will you feel? When you look back at all you've experienced. All you've accomplished. All you set out to do. When you think about your family. Your children. Your grandchildren. What will you want them to know about you? Say about you? Remember about you? Will it have anything to do with your faith in Christ?

Readings for tomorrow: Deuteronomy 4-7

March 12, 2020

THE GREAT COMMANDMENT

Readings for today: [Deuteronomy 4-7](#)

Deuteronomy 6:4 contains the single most important prayer in all of Israel. "'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.'" It is the prayer known as the "Shema" (pronounced Sh'ma). Jews are required to recite this prayer twice a day. It is the first prayer they teach their children. It is the last prayer they pray before they die. It captures the essence of their monotheistic faith. Praying this prayer twice a day reminds the Jewish people of the personal relationship they have with God and His Kingdom. They are His chosen people. They are His royal priesthood. They are His holy nation. Set apart by God Himself to declare His glory to the nations of the earth. To fulfill the great promise once made to Abraham. "For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations," (Deut. 7:6-9)

Because God has chosen them. Because God has set His love on them. Because God has delivered them from bondage and slavery in Egypt. Israel is to return His love. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." (Deut. 6:5) This is the second part of the Shema. The commitment of the believer to honor God in every facet of their lives. We are to love God with all our heart. All our affections. All our feelings. He must love Him first above all other things. All other people. All of our accomplishments, dreams, and visions. We must love Him with our souls. From the depths of our beings. From the deepest recesses of who we are. To love God with our "soul" is to literally love Him from our bowels. From our gut. From a place deeper than our minds. Deeper than our hearts. The very core of our beings. We must love God with all our might. All our physical strength and activity should be dedicated to the glory of God. All our work. All our play. All our relationships. All our physical labor. All of it is to bring glory to God. This is what the Apostle Paul is referring to in Colossians 3:17, "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

There is a lot packed into today's reading. So many reminders of God's great faithfulness to His people. Despite their sin. Despite their grumbling. Despite their complaining. God remains steadfast. This is the essence of the covenant of grace God has made with His people. Fast forward a few thousand years to Jesus. A lawyer challenges him one day to identify the greatest of the commandments. Jesus goes right back to the Shema. "And Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." (Matt. 22:37-40) Not only did Jesus place the Shema at the center of His life but He demands His followers do the same.

How are you seeking to love God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength? What does that practically look for you in your life? If you do not know, let me challenge you to memorize Matthew 22:37 and ask God to give you the wisdom to know how to place the Shema at the center of your life like Jesus.

Readings for tomorrow: Deuteronomy 8-10

March 13, 2020
SPIRITUAL ALZHEIMER'S

Readings for today: [Deuteronomy 8-11](#)

“Remember.” “Lest you forget.” “Do not forget.” The Book of Deuteronomy is filled with references to memory. Filled with warnings about forgetting the mighty works of God. Filled with encouragement to never losing sight of the faithfulness of God. Moses is keenly aware of a condition we all suffer from...spiritual alzheimer's.

My family has a history of Alzheimer's. It hit my paternal grandfather in his late thirties. It hit my paternal grandmother in her seventies. It hit my aunt in her late fifties. It hit my maternal grandmother in her eighties. And I expect it will hit me at some point in time. Alzheimer's is a terrible disease. It robs one of their most precious memories. As our memories fade, our personalities change. We say things we wouldn't normally say. We do things we wouldn't normally do. We almost become different people. My paternal grandmother was one of the most outgoing and energetic people I have ever known. She was bold. Courageous. Didn't care about social convention. She was eccentric and weird in a funny, unique way that made her beloved to those who knew her. When she lost her memory, she became withdrawn. Fearful. Scared. Insecure. I would visit her often in the care facility where she was staying and it was incredibly hard to watch her decline. Or I think about my maternal grandmother. She was beautiful. Dignified. Brilliant. She could play Bach and Beethoven by ear. When she lost her memory, she eventually declined into a catatonic state that was heartbreaking.

We all suffer from this disease on some level. It is so easy for us to forget all God has done. Despite all the miracles. Despite God's provision in the wilderness. Despite God's protection and deliverance and the many ways He declared His love for His people...Moses knew Israel would forget. He knew they would get into the Promised Land and begin to prosper. They would build homes and plant vineyards. They would harvest crops and raise their herds. They would conquer cities and lay claim to the territory once promised to Abraham. And in the midst of all this success, they would forget God. “Take care lest you forget the Lord your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, who led you through the great and terrifying wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock, who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end. Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.’” (Deut. 8:11-17)

We have to work hard to remember. We have to incorporate spiritual rhythms into our daily lives so we do not forget. By reading God's Word and humbling ourselves before Him in prayer and participating in corporate worship every week, we remind ourselves of the most important truth of our lives...we are not our own! We are not our own! It is God who gives us the power to get wealth. (8:18) It is God who gives us victory over our enemies. (9:1-3) It is God alone who is righteous. It is God alone who is holy. To God belongs the heavens and the earth and all that is in them. And the only reason we are not destroyed along with the rest of the nations is because God made a decision in eternity to love us and set us apart for Himself. “Yet the Lord set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day.” (Deut. 10:15)

This is why we walk in the ways of the Lord. This is why we keep His commandments. By following the Law of God, we are constantly reminded of His great goodness towards us. Reminded of His great love for us. Reminded of His great faithfulness. God demands our obedience not because He needs it. Not because He's controlling or manipulative or demanding or insecure. God demands our obedience because He wants to preserve in our hearts our memory of Him. "And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord, which I am commanding you today for your good." (Deut. 10:12-13)

Readings for tomorrow: Deuteronomy 12-15

March 16, 2020
THE TEST OF LEADERSHIP

Readings for today: [Deuteronomy 16-19](#)

I'm watching a press conference from the White House and reflecting on the reading from today. As we read, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen— just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.' And the Lord said to me, 'They are right in what they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.'" (Deuteronomy 18:15-18) Please understand I am not suggesting our president is God's prophet nor Dr. Fauci nor anyone else in particular for that matter. But I am thinking about how godly leaders seem to rise to the moment. They rise to the crisis. They become the mouthpiece of God. They speak the words God gives to them. And I am thankful for our leaders and the way they are handling themselves in this unprecedented hour.

Now more than ever we need God's prophets. We need godly leaders who will spread calm in the midst of our crisis. They will be voices of reason in the midst of all the hysteria. They will be measured and thoughtful and wise in their approach. They will resist panic. They will resist stoking fears and anxieties. They will seek real solutions and good outcomes and privilege good information over bad. Data over feelings. Truth over lies. Most of all, I hope and pray they seek God's guidance for this cultural moment. We are living in unprecedented times. This is a unique crisis requiring a unique response and we need God's wisdom if we are to make it through. Thankfully, God promises to give wisdom generously to all who seek Him and I am praying for our president, vice-president, senators, congressmen and women, governors, and political leaders up and down the spectrum.

But I am also praying for each one of you. Each one of us is a leader of some kind or another. The question we have to ask ourselves is will we be God's prophet? Will we seek and speak His truth? Will we be guided by His Spirit? Will we act in accordance with His will? Will we do our best to spread the peace of Christ? To be calm in the midst of this crisis? Will we lead our families well during this time? Will we lead our churches well? Our businesses well? All those who fall under our influence well?

How does one do this? Well, one has to start with one's own heart. One has to be at peace with Christ to spread the peace of Christ. One has to be calm in order to spread calm. One has to be wise in order to spread wisdom. This is where our personal spiritual disciplines come in. How much time are we spending before the Lord in prayer? How much time are we spending in God's Word? Now is a great time to begin journaling simply to process what you are feeling and perhaps hearing from the Lord. Make sure to spend time in silence. Turn off your device. Refrain from too much social media engagement. Get outside if you can. Take a walk. Get more rest. Get more sleep. Do what you can to care for yourself and to let the Lord fill your tank in this season. We do not know the future, friends, but we can be confident in the One who does!

Readings for tomorrow: Deuteronomy 20-23

March 17, 2020
ANCIENT WISDOM

Readings for today: [Deuteronomy 20-23](#)

Good morning! If you are just joining us...welcome...but what a day to jump in on! All kinds of confusing stuff in today's reading from Deuteronomy. Holy war. Jihad. The massacre of innocents. Strange regulations regarding unsolved murders and intermarriage with female prisoners. Inheritance rights. What to do with rebellious children. And then a whole string of random laws governing livestock, agriculture, and fashion. Followed by an extended section on sexual immorality and ritual purity. Then another string of random laws governing slavery, banking, and sacred vows. It's enough to make one's head spin!

What do we make of it all? Well, first and foremost, we must acknowledge many of these laws are specifically directed at ancient Israel and therefore have no real application for today. They are designed specifically for a cultural context with which we have no familiarity. They may seem barbaric at times and odd at other times but they held real purpose for an ancient people who were just getting started as a nation. However, this doesn't mean we have nothing to learn from this section of text. God is communicating something about Himself to us through these ancient words. For example, purity. Notice how God restricts the sowing of two different kinds of seed or the mixing of fibers in clothing or forbids cross-dressing. God is clearly concerned with keeping things distinct and orderly and "according to its kind" much like He did in the creation narrative in Genesis 1. Second, holiness. Why does God demand Israel kill everything in the pagan cities they conquer? He's concerned anyone or anything left over will become a snare for Israel. He's concerned they will be tempted to worship other gods. He even says as much in Deuteronomy 20:18, "that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices that they have done for their gods, and so you sin against the Lord your God." This sounds incredible harsh and unyielding and unfair in our ears but God will not tolerate any rivals for our affections. He is serious about the sin of idolatry. And for those who might be tempted to dismiss the Old Testament God in favor of the New Testament God, please remember Jesus' words about the final judgment. God will separate the believers from the unbelievers. Heaven and hell are eternal realities. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Reading this text today can expose our natural bias. We typically come to the text with a "hermeneutic of suspicion." Which is to say, we come to the text demanding that it prove itself to us. Prove it's worth by giving us something to apply to our lives. We have this natural tendency to want to turn the text into a self-help manual. A roadmap to our best life now. We want the text to speak to our cultural moment. We want to "rub" the text like a lamp and treat God like a genie. Instead, texts like the one for today demand something from us. Demand that we take God seriously. Demand that we treat the text on its terms and not our own. It forces us out of our cultural arrogance and chronological snobbery as we come face to face with the holiness of God.

Does that mean it's all doom and gloom? Does that mean there is nothing here for us to hold onto for hope? Quite the contrary. We just have to keep digging. Keep praying. Keep seeking. Keep searching. Dig down deep enough below the surface regulations and what do we discover about God's nature and character? He loves His people. Fiercely. Loyal. Stubbornly. He does not want to see them fall into temptation. Our God is a God of reconciliation and forgiveness and atonement even in situations where justice cannot be served because the murderer cannot be found. Our God is a God of mercy and compassion which is why He graciously welcomes those women captured in battle - who in ancient times were often treated brutally - as part of His people. He orders society for the good of all,

protecting property and inheritance rights. Protecting the poor from predatory lending and providing for them by allowing them to glean in the fields. He is concerned about the pain and suffering that comes from rampant sexual immorality so He places protections around the sanctity of marriage between a man and a woman. All of this is in the best interest of His chosen people. All of this to set them apart from the rest of the pagan world.

Now consider our current cultural moment. How are we set apart as Christians? How are we acting in alignment with God's character and nature? Are we acting with love and grace? Are we seeking to build up rather than tear down? Are we spreading the peace of Christ amidst all the fear? Are we taking daily steps of mercy and compassion to those around us who may be in need? Bringing it down to brass tacks...will we share from our abundance with those in need? (Yes, even our beloved toilet paper!) Will we submit to our government and pray for our leaders out of a desire to honor God? Will we resist the temptation that comes during a time like this to give into hate or anger or violence? Are we using this time to build up our marriages and families and to deepen our relationships with those we love?

Readings for tomorrow: Deuteronomy 24-27

March 18, 2020
ECONOMICS OF A PANDEMIC

Readings for today: [Deuteronomy 24-27](#)

By now, the news is beginning to settle in. The stock market is plunging. Jobs are being lost. People are being laid off. The economy is bracing for a deep recession. And while we are all praying for a quick resolution to the national crisis we face, experts like Francis Collins are telling us it could be June before things begin to calm down. I don't know about you but that feels like an eternity to me. Reports are trickling in from my own congregation and the people they are connected to regarding the financial vulnerability of so many. It's scary. And it's tempting to turn inward. To hoard. To become selfish.

Perhaps that's why I love the words from Deuteronomy today to a people who were no strangers to hardship. To a people who had experienced plague and famine and drought and disease without the resources we enjoy in the 21st century. As the people of God prepare to enter the Promised Land and establish a new way of living, God directly addresses the economy.

"When you make your neighbor a loan of any sort, you shall not go into his house to collect his pledge. You shall stand outside, and the man to whom you make the loan shall bring the pledge out to you. And if he is a poor man, you shall not sleep in his pledge. You shall restore to him the pledge as the sun sets, that he may sleep in his cloak and bless you. And it shall be righteousness for you before the Lord your God." (Deut. 24:10-13) God is concerned with the dignity of a person. Fortunes rise and fall and so much of what we go through economically depends on forces outside our control. What is in our control, however, is how we treat one another. And God wants us to be as merciful and gracious as possible with those who are facing hardship.

"You shall not oppress a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your brothers or one of the sojourners who are in your land within your towns. You shall give him his wages on the same day, before the sun sets (for he is poor and counts on it), lest he cry against you to the Lord, and you be guilty of sin." (Deut. 24:14-15) God is a God of justice. He is a God of righteousness. He demands that we treat one another well. He will hold us accountable for how we treat one another. Especially the poor in our midst. He will also honor the sacrifices we make on behalf of those who are under-resourced or less fortunate than us.

"When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over them again. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not strip it afterward. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this." (Deut. 24:19-22) God stands against greed. God stands against hoarding. God stands against price gouging. God stands against those who would use this time for their own economic gain rather than look to assist the needs of others. The people of Israel were to be intentionally generous. They were to remember their plight in Egypt and, as a result, make sure to play their part in making sure everyone had what they needed to survive.

It begs the question, doesn't it? What can we do to bring relief for those who need it most in the midst of our current crisis? What can we do to relieve the financial burdens so many bear? Are we able to provide rental assistance? Make a grocery run? Help with a few bills? Are we checking on our

neighbors to see what they need and doing all we can to help out? What about our food service workers who've been laid off? Or those in the entertainment or sports industry? I've been so thankful that so many companies are making huge sacrifices to keep their employees on the payroll. I believe God will honor such decisions and I'm praying their example inspires all of us to help out in whatever way we can.

Readings for tomorrow: Deuteronomy 28-30

March 19, 2020
BLESSINGS AND CURSES

Readings for today: [Deuteronomy 28-30](#)

The difficulty with today's readings is how we tend to "externalize" them. We read through all these blessings and curses and almost immediately jump to the conclusion that they are not fair. They are not right. They are arbitrary and capricious. Our baseline assumption is that human beings are generally good people who occasionally make bad decisions and we question what right God has to judge us so harshly.

But what if understood these blessings and curses to be more like logical consequences than the actions of a volatile deity intent on our destruction? What if these blessings and curses are really God letting us know what will happen as a result of our actions in this world? For example, consider our current crisis. If we will obey the government and abide by the social distancing regulations there is a fair chance our healthcare system will not collapse and we can slowly get on top of this virus. However, if we choose to ignore the social distancing restrictions and do our own thing - see the videos of college students on spring break - the disease will spread and more lives will be lost. This is the logical consequence when human beings fail to love their neighbor as themselves.

So perhaps the judgment of God is less about Him flying into a rage and laying waste to humanity and more about Him simply withdrawing His protective hand? Perhaps it's God withdrawing His protection and giving us over to the logical consequences of our decision-making? Consider another real-life example. I was in southern Ethiopia two years ago with a team. They were suffering from a drought. Crops were dying. Herds were dying. People were suffering tremendously. This broke the hearts of the members of our team. I remember speaking with one of them as we began our long journey back home. "How can God allow such suffering?" She asked. "Can I respond to your question with another question?" I said. "Sure," she replied. "Why are we so quick to pin this on God? The World Bank estimates it would take 150 billion to bring clean water to the world. The World Economic Forum suggests it would take 267 billion to end world hunger. These are very realistic goals if human beings simply would follow the words of Jesus and love their neighbors as themselves." Add to this the fact that the United States uses 25% of the world's energy so we can live in large homes and drive SUV's and fund relatively extravagant lifestyles. One can easily see how the natural propensity human beings have for selfishness directly contributes to the suffering of the least resourced in our world.

So what's the answer? Global communism? The Socialist Green New Deal? The destruction of capitalism? Corporate or political give-aways? No. Again, human sin will always corrupt even the most idealistic of social programs. The answer is Jesus Christ. Only through Christ are we given a new heart. And with a new heart comes a fresh desire to glorify God and serve our neighbor. Only Jesus can solve the most fundamental problem we face in the world today...the total depravity of the human condition. And thankfully, God offers His Son freely and graciously to all who would place their trust in Him.

Readings for tomorrow: Deuteronomy 31-34

March 20, 2020
BE STRONG AND COURAGEOUS

Readings for today: [Deuteronomy 31-34](#)

“Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.” (Deuteronomy 31:6)

Put yourself in Joshua’s sandals. You’ve grown up in Egypt. Felt the sting of the whip on your back. Lived under brutal oppression. You’ve walked through the Red Sea. You’ve eaten the manna from heaven. You’ve drunk water from the rock. You’ve seen Mt. Sinai burst into flame. You’ve heard the thunder of God’s voice. You’ve seen firsthand the miracles of God performed by this amazing man named Moses who’s become your mentor and spiritual hero. And you’ve been faithful as well. You’ve served Moses most of your adult life. You were one of the faithful spies who brought back a good report. And now the time has come for you to lead. Moses is dying. The torch is passing. The mantle is falling on your shoulders.

The burden of leadership had to be heavy. You are being called to lead the conquest of the Promised Land. A land filled with tribes of pagan people who worship others gods and who will not go quietly. Furthermore, you know the fickle hearts of the people you lead. You’ve watched them shrink from God’s call time and time again. You’ve endured their grumbling on so many occasions. You know their hearts are easily stirred to fear. Your only hope is to trust in the promises of God. To be strong and courageous as you look to Lord. To trust in His abiding presence. To know He will never leave you or forsake you.

It’s actually not all that hard to imagine in our current crisis, is it? I think of the doctors and nurses and other healthcare workers I know who are working long hours in the fight against the coronavirus. I think of the sanitation workers who are cleaning the streets, washing down the operating rooms, wiping down everything from door knobs to tile floors to toilet seats to public garbage cans all in an effort to keep us safe. I think of the business owners - large and small - who are doing all they can to keep people employed. I think of the staffers in capital buildings across America working on local, state, and federal levels to implement plans to slow the virus down. I think of the decision-makers. Our president and congressional leaders. Our governors and mayors and town council leaders. The burdens they carry are enormous and every decision has a ripple effect on so many levels. It cannot be easy. I’m praying they place their trust in the promise of God.

And then I think of you. I think of the burdens you must be carrying. Homeschooling children. Upending your life to work at home. Wondering if/when the layoff might come. Maybe some of you know someone who is sick. A loved one. A friend. A neighbor. A co-worker. Maybe you have friends and family who are engaged on the front lines of this fight and you worry for their safety. Maybe this self-quarantine has exacerbated some underlying issues in your marriage or family that have now burst out into the open. This promise from God is for you as well.

Be strong and courageous, friends. When a plague strikes without warning. When the economy begins to shut down. When schools close. When a shelter in place order is given. Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid. Do not dread for God is with us! He never distances Himself from us! He will never leave us nor forsake us!

Readings for tomorrow: Joshua 1-2, Psalms 105

March 21, 2020
WAITING FOR SPRING

Readings for today: [Joshua 1-2](#), [Psalms 105](#)

March 19th marked the first day of spring. It was a surreal day in a lot of ways. Here in Colorado, snow was falling. Almost blizzard like conditions. Meanwhile, orders went out in New York and California requiring residents to “shelter in place” as the nations battles the coronavirus. The fight got personal for me as I got news that people I love in different parts of the world had contracted the disease. So what is normally a day of hope. A day of joy. A day to celebrate because winter has passed and new life is emerging fell flat for me. It feels like I’m caught in a bit of a time warp. Like I’m experiencing the same day over and over again. Like nature hit the “snooze” button and we’re in for a few more weeks of winter this year.

Winter is not all bad, of course. Despite appearances, winter is not a “dead time.” It is simply a time where life goes dormant for a while. Trees that may look dead on the outside are churning on the inside as life gets ready to burst forth again. I think the same is true for us. As we self-quarantine and socially distance, there is a churning inside. A growing hunger for connection. A growing desire for face to face relationship. And I imagine once the immediate danger of the virus passes, new life will burst forth more glorious than ever before!

So how can we best use the time we’ve been given? How can we prepare for that great and glorious day when the quarantine is lifted and restrictions are loosed and we are set free? I love what Joshua 1:8 says, “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.” The reality is we’ve all been given a kind of Sabbath. A rest from our normal activity. Like it or not, we’ve been forced off the hamster wheels on which we were running and now have plenty of time slow down. We have plenty of time to spend with those we love and this includes God. God is waiting for us in this time to turn to Him. To meditate on His Word. To talk to Him in prayer. To share all the fears and anxieties of this season with Him. This situation didn’t catch God by surprise. As “novel” as this virus may be to us, it is not new to God. God is still sovereign. God still reigns from His throne. God is at work even now through the creatures He made in His image to bring an end to this deadly strain.

How can we be sure of such things? Listen to Psalms 105. Look at what God has done! Remember His mighty acts! Remember His saving ways! God is deliverer. God is rescuer. God is savior. God will never leave or forsake His people. God will never distance Himself from our pain. God has a “Promised Land” ready for all those who call on His name. This is the truth of the gospel, friends! And it forms the foundation of our hope in these fearful and uncertain times.

You know, I imagine Joshua felt much the same way we do today. As he stared across the Jordan River into the Promised Land, he knew there were no guarantees. He knew the future would be hard. He knew the people of Israel simply didn’t have the strength or the fortitude to make it on their own. Their only hope was God. Their only path to victory was with God. Their only way forward was to trust God. So he pointed them to their history. Drew on the experiences of their forefathers and mothers. Encouraged them with the testimonies of God’s goodness from their past. And this gave them the courage to face the challenges of their day. As you consider the current challenges we face in our time, what brings you hope? What testimonies do you lean on during these difficult times? How are you turning to God’s Word to find courage and strength as we wait for spring?

March 23, 2020
BEAUTY FROM ASHES

Readings for today: [Joshua 3-6](#)

“And Joshua said to them, "Pass on before the ark of the Lord your God into the midst of the Jordan, and take up each of you a stone upon his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the people of Israel, that this may be a sign among you. When your children ask in time to come, 'What do those stones mean to you?' then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it passed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. So these stones shall be to the people of Israel a memorial forever." (Josh. 4:5-7)

When you think back on your life, where have you seen God at work? Where have you seen His finger touch down? Where have you witnessed Him working a miracle on your behalf? How do you remember such things? How do you mark such occasions? Some nations build monuments. Consecrate hallowed ground. Celebrate an annual holiday. Israel built altars. They would take uncut stones and stack them together to remind themselves of God’s great faithfulness. As we get deeper into the Old Testament, it will soon feel like the landscape just gets dotted with these altars. It’s like you can’t travel anywhere in Israel without stumbling over an altar they’ve made! Altars were significant. Especially in an oral culture where many of the stories were not being written down as they happened but instead told from father to son, mother to daughter. Passing by an altar was an opportunity for the family to pause and remember and re-tell the tale of God’s great love and miraculous deliverance for His people. These altars formed something like a “scrapbook” or “Instagram” account for ancient Israel. A place they could go to be reminded of their most precious memories of God and His deliverance.

I wonder what “altars” we will build when this pandemic passes? Will we name the vaccination after the scientists who discover it? Will there be a wall with all the names of the healthcare workers who gave their lives carved in stone? Will there be special days or special seasons where we will step back to mark the time for future generations? And what about the young people living through this cultural moment? Will this be their version of the “Great Depression” or “World War 2?” Will it have that kind of profound effect on them and shape how they live their lives?

What about the church? How will she respond? Will this finally break us of our dependence on buildings and programs? Will we finally lay hold of the biblical pattern to carry out discipleship in every home? Will we stop investing so much in ourselves and instead seek to give all we have away for the sake of the world?

This feels like a paradigm-shifting moment for us all. As the days turn into weeks and the weeks turn into months, I don’t see us every going back to the way things were. Instead, I believe God is calling us to chart a new future. One where life truly is centered around community. Where relationships become the highest value and time the most precious currency. I believe God using this cultural moment to slow us down. To enforce a Sabbath rest. Please note, I did not say God created this virus or caused this plague to happen. COVID-19 is simply the product of a fallen world. I simply believe God’s promise from Romans 8 to use all things for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. That includes hardship and suffering and pain and yes, even death. For death is not the end to God but merely a new beginning. So let’s all commit to letting the old life die with all of its built in stress and anxiety and exhaustion and let’s look to God as He brings beauty from the ashes.

Readings for tomorrow: Joshua 7-10

March 24, 2020
IN GOD WE TRUST

Readings for today: [Joshua 7-10](#)

“At that time Joshua built an altar to the Lord, the God of Israel, on Mount Ebal, just as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded the people of Israel, as it is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, "an altar of uncut stones, upon which no man has wielded an iron tool." And they offered on it burnt offerings to the Lord and sacrificed peace offerings. And there, in the presence of the people of Israel, he wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written. And all Israel, sojourner as well as native born, with their elders and officers and their judges, stood on opposite sides of the ark before the Levitical priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, half of them in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, just as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded at the first, to bless the people of Israel. And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law. There was not a word of all that Moses commanded that Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, and the women, and the little ones, and the sojourners who lived among them.” (Joshua 8:30-35)

Times of national crisis often lead to times of national repentance. Periods in history where the people of a nation come to the end of their own strength. The end of their own resources. The end of their own abilities. And come face to face with God. It involves a recognition that unless the Lord is with them, their efforts will be in vain. Unless the Lord fights for them, their chances of victory are nil. Israel has experienced this truth over and over again. They have watched much larger and stronger tribes fall before the power of God. They have just seen the walls of one of the strongest cities in southern Israel fall with a shout. They realize they do not have the power to conquer the Promised Land. The people are too great. Their power too much. They feel like grasshoppers in the face of giants. (Numbers 13:33) But they also believe the Lord is with them. They believe the Lord has made them a promise. They will conquer and occupy this land. God will be faithful to the covenant He first made with Abraham to give him the Promised Land. So here they now stand. They've crossed the Jordan. They've won their first few battles. The generation who left Egypt and heard God's voice at Sinai and wandered in the wilderness has fallen. A new generation rises. And before they begin the hard work of carving out a new nation, Joshua brings them face to face with Lord once again. To renew the covenant.

We are living in a time of national crisis. The hopes of an early end to the viral pandemic have faded and we are now facing really hard choices. The wave of infections is increasing exponentially, threatening to overwhelm our healthcare system. Our economy is tanking as more and more indefinite shelter-in-place orders are given. Businesses are failing. Jobs are being lost. People are getting sick. Some are dying. It's a no-win scenario. There literally is no way for us to meet this crisis in our own strength. We are rapidly running out of resources. We are rapidly running out of time. We are in a battle against an unseen enemy that strikes fear in all our hearts. So how will we respond? Will we respond like Israel and seek the Lord? Will we stop worrying about whose political side wins and instead get on the Lord's side? Will we trust in His promise to be with us? To give us the wisdom we need to fight this deadly disease? Most importantly, will we wake up and realize this world is not our home? America is not the Promised Land? This life is not all there is! In fact, God has promised us an eternal life with Him in a home He's created with His own hands in preparation for His people.

Friends, here me clearly, I am not trying to diminish the very real sufferings of this life. The struggles of this world are real. Disease. Plague. Famine. Drought. Joblessness. Homelessness. Hardship of every kind. These are realities we are now coming face to face with each and every day. Sickness. Death.

Despair. Depression. Hopelessness. These are signs we are coming to the end of ourselves. These are signs the harsh reality of this life is setting in. And such national grief and mourning hopefully leads us to repentance. Puts us on our knees before the Lord. Brings us to a place where we renew our cries to Him. One day this will be all over. The virus will pass. People will recover. The economy will come back. But there will be a significant cost. One that will be felt for years to come. My prayer is that in the midst of all our fear and anxiety, we will capture this moment to humble ourselves before the Lord as a people. As a community. As a state. As a nation. May the words of our national motto, "In God We Trust", be more true now than ever!

Readings for tomorrow: Joshua 11-14

March 25, 2020
PERSPECTIVE

Readings for today: [Joshua 11-14](#)

It's about this time every year in my Bible reading that I start to get weary. Worn down by all the bloodshed and violence. Worn down by all the God-sanctioned religious warfare. Worn down by the thoughts of men, women, and children dying in these cities as Israel conquers the Promised Land. I am worn down by a world I do not understand. Worn down by the brutality of it all. Worn down trying to understand how God is driving it all. I come to the end of my finite mind. I come to the end of my understanding. I come to the end of my ability to reason my way through. And I just sit with the horror of it all. Overwhelmed.

I had dinner a few years ago with some friends. One of them does a lot of work in Rwanda with the mountain gorillas. He and his family have been engaged over there for decades helping with the research. He was there during the genocide. He saw the bodies piled up in the streets. Stacks upon stacks. It was horrifying. He can never get the images out of his head. If there's anything history has taught us, it is that man's inhumanity to man knows no bounds. The Killing Fields in Cambodia. The purges in Maoist China and Stalinist Russia. The Holocaust. And those are just the 20th century examples! The Mongolian conquest. The Crusades. The African slave trade. British occupation of India. Rome's brutal conquest of the Germanic tribes. For as long as human beings have walked this earth, there has been war. There has been violence. There has been suffering. In fact, some historians calculate that in the history of the human race, we've experienced four years of peace. FOUR! Can you imagine?

When human beings engage in such violence, they tend to pull on a common thread. God. God has ordained this war. God has sanctioned this violence. God is on our side. God commands us to fight these battles and destroy these enemies. But is this really true? I readily admit I have to struggle through the histories of the Old Testament more so than I do even Leviticus. I can make some sense of the law code but I cannot rationalize the death and destruction. So what's a faithful, Bible-believing Christian to do?

Three things help get me through this part of the reading every single year...

Joshua 5:13-15. At the beginning of the conquest, before the fall of Jericho, the commander of the Lord's Armies appears to Joshua. Joshua falls on his face before him and asks him if He is for Israel or for their adversaries. It's a great question. It's a common question. Essentially, he's asking the angel, "Are you for us or against us?" Are you on our side or their side? Are you team Israel or team Canaanite? I love the angel's response. "No, I am the commander of the army of the Lord. Now I have come." Basically, the only "side" I'm on is my own! I am no tribal deity. I am not like the other gods. I reign and rule according to my own sovereign purposes and plan.

My finite mind. My understanding of the world is shaped by time, culture, space, nation, etc. I am not an "objective" observer of history. There is no such thing. I have built in biases and assumptions that I bring to the table when I read the Word of God that act as "filters." These filters can be helpful or harmful depending on the text and will shape how I "receive" the Word of God in any situation.

Ancient Near East writings. The Biblical authors were not "objective" either. They were believers. They were fervent and devoted to their faith. They believed they were on God's side and justified in

their actions. They also wrote in typical ancient near east style which involved lots of hyperbole. It was a common rhetorical device in their day. In fact, we know from the Biblical text itself that the Israelites did NOT actually kill everything that breathed because at the end of Joshua God will warn them against making any alliances with the people who are left. Most likely, the Israelites “devoted to destruction” all the males of a particular city along with their buildings and religious icons. Furthermore, the numbers reported are almost certainly estimations, perhaps even exaggerations, more than an actual body count and were meant to communicate the overwhelming nature of their victories. So we cannot get lost in the details. What’s important and true is that God’s people conquered the Promised Land in fulfillment of God’s ancient promise to Abraham and that their battles against the tribes they drove out were an act of divine judgment for the horrific idolatries those tribes practiced which often included child sacrifice.

Humility. I need to read with humility because I do not know all the answers. Nor will I ever. There is much that is lost in translation due to my inability to see and understand things from an ancient near east context. Having said that, my questions and fears and doubts are real but I may not find satisfaction this side of heaven. That’s okay. If there is a God who rules and reigns over the universe and if this God is good then I can ultimately trust Him. I can trust He sees things I cannot and He is orchestrating things to His own ends which ultimately are just and holy and righteous.

There is one more thing I always try to keep in mind. My own sinfulness. The evil I carry in my own heart. Like the Apostle Paul, I do things I know I should not do. I don’t do things I know I should do. Every day is full of sins of “commission” and sins of “omission” that negatively impact the lives of those I love and the lives of those I am around. The evil in the world is not just “out there” but inside of me as well. So I read with the understanding that but for the grace of God, I too deserve the ban. I too deserve the Herem. I too deserve death and destruction. And that moves my heart to praise and thanksgiving for what God has done in Jesus Christ.

Readings for tomorrow: Joshua 15-18

March 26, 2020
HAS GOD'S PROMISE FAILED?

Readings for today: [Joshua 15-18](#)

Today's reading highlights a very important reality as we read Scripture. God's promises are always sure. Always true. Always good. God's great desire for His people is that they would dwell securely in the land He had promised them. At the same time, God's people are not perfect. They are not faithful. They are not whole-hearted in their devotion. Their strength fails. Their resolve weakens. Their obedience is not complete. The result is an incomplete conquest. A delay in the fulfillment of God's promise. Does this mean God has failed? Absolutely not! It means God has remained true to Himself. True to His plan and purpose for the world. True to the creature He first made in His image.

In the beginning, God gave human beings dominion over all He had made. We were created to work the "garden" that is this world. We were created to cultivate and help it flourish. We were entrusted with this responsibility. We were given agency so we might freely choose to serve God with all our hearts, souls, minds, and strength. We were given a will that was free which means our choices are real and result in real-life consequences. So when human beings in China withhold information on a growing epidemic in their own country, it breaks out into a worldwide pandemic that is difficult to stop. When human beings in America live beyond their means in unsustainable ways, it disproportionately impacts the global poor. When human beings in Africa funnel money intended for development into their personal coffers, it destroys families and lives for generations.

Israel was entrusted with the Promised Land. Each tribe allotted a specific portion by lot. They were to conquer that territory and drive out the pagan inhabitants. But Israel failed in her mission. They were unsuccessful in their attempts to fully subdue the land. They allowed certain Canaanite tribes to co-exist. And even though they forced them to do hard labor, they were setting the stage for future uprisings and conflict. From this point forward, Israel would struggle to remain faithful to Yahweh. Struggle to resist the temptation to worship other gods. Struggle to maintain their control over the land. Struggle to rest in the promise of God. Again, this is not because God somehow failed! Not at all! It is Israel who failed to remain faithful thus setting the stage for generations to come.

You and I are no different. Created in God's image. Given dominion over all God has entrusted into our hands. Our time. Our talent. Our treasure. Our influence. How are we stewarding all God has given us? How are we laying hold of the promise of God for today? How are we walking in obedience even in the midst of our current cultural crisis? The choices we make in this cultural moment carry real consequences for good or for ill. The agency we exercise is real as is the responsibility we bear for ourselves, our families, our neighbors, and the human race as a whole. What tone are we setting for future generations? What legacy are we leaving to our children and grandchildren? When they look back at this moment in history, what will they say? Will they see Christians responding with faith over fear? Peace amidst all the anxiety? Grace in the face of all the outrage and judgment? Sacrificial love in a world full of selfishness and greed? You and I will be held personally and corporately responsible for how we respond in this moment. May we respond like Christ!

Readings for tomorrow: Joshua 19-22

March 27, 2020
WITNESS

Readings for today: [Joshua 19-22](#)

“The people of Reuben and the people of Gad called the altar Witness, "For," they said, "it is a witness between us that the Lord is God." (Josh. 22:34)

What does it mean to be a witness? And what are we “witnessing” to? For the tribes of Israel, the altar by the Jordan was built to remind them they were all part of one large family. Deeply connected by their common kinship with Abraham but also their covenant with God Himself. The tribes of Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh were concerned that future generations might forget this connection and start to see the Jordan River as the boundary between God’s people and the rest of the world. They didn’t want to be left out so before they crossed the Jordan to take possession of their inheritance, they built a monument of “imposing size.” Not for burnt offerings. Not for sacrifices. But a witness to all of Israel that they were one people under Yahweh. Every time an Israelite would pass by the monument, it would “witness” to their shared history and deep connection.

In the Book of Acts, Jesus calls us “His witnesses.” We are witnesses in our neighborhoods, cities, nations, and to the very ends of the earth. In this way, we are living memorials to all God has done. We are living monuments to a shared history. A common heritage. The deep connection we share as God’s chosen people. We “witness” to the glory and goodness of God. We “witness” to the unity we share as the family of God. Anytime someone “passes us by” or interacts with us on any level, they should leave having “witnessed” the mercy and grace of God and having felt the deep love we have for one another.

Ultimately, the Bible itself is the pre-eminent witness. I love what Joshua 21:45 says, “Not one word of all the good promises that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.” The only reason we know this statement is true is because we have an accurate record of what took place. This is why we read the Old Testament. Within its pages, God “witnesses” to us over and over again of His great faithfulness and love. Even in the face of our sin. Even in the face of our rebellion. Even in the face of our evil. Even in the face of all our brokenness, God pursues us. God relentlessly chases us. God never lets us go.

Now, more than ever, the world needs a witness. The world needs the church to stand forth as a witness to God’s continued grace and mercy and miraculous strength. The world needs a witness from the church that is humble and servant-hearted. The world needs to experience the witness of the church as kind and generous. Perhaps most of all, the world needs to see the courage and boldness of the church in this time of fear and anxiety. They need to see a group of people over whom fear has no hold for their confidence is in the perfect love of God revealed in Jesus Christ. Friends, in times like these throughout history the church has shined like stars in the nighttime sky. My prayer for you. My prayer for us. My prayer for PEPC. My prayer for all the churches I have the privilege of partnering with in our community, in our denomination, and around the world is that we would be witnesses of “imposing size” during this challenging time not for our sake but for the glory of God!

Readings for tomorrow: Joshua 23-34, Judges 1

March 28, 2020
LOVE AND OBEDIENCE

Readings for today: [Joshua 23-24](#), [Judges 1](#)

“Be very careful, therefore, to love the Lord your God.” (Joshua 23:11)

These are among the final words Joshua spoke to the people of Israel. Love the Lord your God. With all your heart. All your mind. All your strength. All your soul. Love the Lord your God in all you say and do. Love the Lord your God in your worship. Love the Lord your God in your life. Love the Lord your God in your relationships. Love the Lord your God in your home. In your neighborhood. At your work. Love the Lord your God.

We get so confused about love. We think it has to do with a feeling. An emotion. A physical, hormonal response to another human being. We falsely equate love with physical attraction. We falsely equate love to the complex interactions of neurochemicals in our brains. This is why people fall “in” and “out” of love. It’s how people justify cheating on their spouses or getting a divorce and breaking up their family. It’s why people see no problem with having multiple sexual partners over the course of their lives or perhaps even at the same time.

The Bible defines love differently. Love is a choice. It’s a conscious decision we make to live in covenant faithfulness with God and with each other. It’s not dependent on emotions. It’s transcends our feelings. It’s a commitment that overrides our hormones. This love is not selfish but selfless. It takes as its highest good the needs of the other. It considers others more important than oneself. It takes commitment seriously. Even eternally. It is modeled after and flows from the love God has for us. God’s love never fails. God’s love is not capricious. It is steadfast. Loyal. True. God’s commitment to His people never ends. God’s faithfulness to His people knows no bounds. He is with them forever and as such, He has every right to expect the same kind of commitment from us.

What does such commitment look like? Obedience. Keeping God’s commandments. Just as God kept every word of His promise to us so we should endeavor to keep every word of our promise to Him. Listen to how Joshua puts it, “Therefore, be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right hand nor to the left...” (Joshua 23:6) Or as Jesus will later put it, ““If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” (John 14:15) Keeping God’s commands is not optional for the Christian. It is part and parcel of our love for God. One cannot say we love God and ignore what He says. One cannot claim to love God and do the opposite of His commands. One’s love for God is intrinsically wrapped up in one’s obedience.

Now does this mean we will obey perfectly? Of course not. Nor can we love perfectly. There is only one perfect love and that is the love of God made incarnate in Jesus Christ. In Christ, perfect love and perfect obedience meet. In Christ, perfect love finds perfect form in a perfect life lived on our behalf. Loving Christ means placing our faith in His finished work or complete obedience even unto death on a cross for our sins. It means trusting His love to be sufficient in our weakness. His faith to be sufficient in the face of our fears. His grace to be sufficient for our doubts. His mercy to be sufficient for our failings. Loving Christ means surrendering to Him over and over again. Each and every day. For as long as we are given breath on this earth.

March 30, 2020

TESTING

Readings for today: [Judges 2-5](#)

The Bible talks a lot about how God uses the circumstances of our lives to test the veracity of our faith. Do we believe God is who He says He is? Not just in the good times but in the bad as well? Do we praise God only when times are calm or are we able to praise Him in the storm? Do we consider it all joy - as James 1 says - when we face trials of various kinds? Do we understand in those moments that God is up to something in our lives? Can we see how He uses all things - even worldwide pandemics - for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose? Do we trust God enough to let the testing of our faith produce in us a steadfastness that actually leads to a deeper, fully, richer, more complete faith?

The beginning of the Book of Judges makes it clear that Israel has failed. She has not followed through. She has not driven out the nations who occupied the Promised Land. This will become a massive problem for her in the years ahead but God is faithful. He will use even their disobedience for His sovereign purposes. Yes, their presence will become a thorn in Israel's side. Yes, their gods will seek to ensnare Israel along the way. But rather than break faith with Israel. Rather than abandon the covenant He had made. God turns what they meant for evil for their good. He uses the pagan nations of the earth to test His people. Refine them. Strengthen them. Bring them to repentance. "These nations were for the testing of Israel, to know whether Israel would obey the commandments of the Lord, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses." (Judges 3:4)

I do not believe God created COVID-19. I do not believe God sent COVID-19 to punish our country for our sins any more than He's sent it to any other country to punish them for their sins. There is plenty of sin to go around. The world is full of disobedience. In what will become a common refrain in the Book of Judges, "everyone does what is right in their own eyes." However, I do believe God is sovereign. I do believe God is omnipotent. I do believe God is omniscient. I do believe God is using this cultural moment as means of drawing the world back to Himself. The more we repent. The more we cry out to God. The more we reach out for Him in the midst of our grief and suffering and pain, the more He will make Himself known to us. After all, He promises He is with the "broken-hearted and those crushed in spirit." (Psalms 34:18)

So the question for us today is this...will we allow God to use this testing to shape us more into the image of Christ? Or will we stubbornly cling to our self-sufficient ways? Will we trust God to use even our pain for His purposes? Or will we accuse God of falling down on the job? Will we believe God when He says He is with us always even to the end of the age and that our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory that will one day be revealed in us? Or will we cling to the things of this world with all our might? Will we have faith to walk with open hands before the Lord? Or will we clench our fists in fear and frustration?

Readings for tomorrow: Judges 6-9

March 31, 2020
HUMILITY

Readings for today: [Judges 6-9](#)

One of my favorite books is by Andrew Murray. It's a classic titled Humility. A short little read with insights packed into every page. Here is how he defines humility. "Humility is nothing but the disappearance of self in the vision that God is all...The highest glory of the creature is in being only a vessel, to receive and enjoy and show forth the glory of God. It can do this only as it is willing to be nothing in itself, that God may be all. Water always fills first the lowest places. The lower, the emptier a man lies before God, the speedier and the fuller will be the inflow of the diving glory."

I think we can all agree humility is a virtue sorely lacking in our world today. Even in the face of a life-threatening pandemic, too many of us still cling to our pride, arrogance, entitlement, and self-indulgence. I think of the young kids ignoring the danger to party on the beaches of Florida during spring break. I think of the politicians who simply cannot help themselves and use this crisis to score political points against the opposition. I think of the blame game the media engages in as it attempts to stoke our fears and outrage. I think of the pastors who still gather their churches in defiance of the best advice our public health officials have to offer. It's heartbreaking. It's sinful. It's the spirit of self-righteousness that God hates so much. And none of us are immune. Sure, we know how to say the right things. "God is first in my life!" "I love God the most!" "God is my all in all!" We sing songs that declare these truths. We sit through sermons where these truths are proclaimed. We tell these things to our Christian friends. But one look at our schedule. One look at our bank account. A glance at our Twitter feed, Instagram, or Facebook account. A moment of honest self-reflection. All these conspire to reveal what we really believe. We are our own gods.

Gideon was different. Not perfect. Not blameless in his generation. Not powerful and mighty among men. No, what marked him was his humility. The angel of the Lord found him treading out grain in a winepress. Providing for his family at great risk to himself. When the Lord called him to become the next judge over Israel, Gideon echoes Moses at the burning bush. "Who am I that you would send me?" So unsure of himself, he puts God to the test by laying out a fleece not once but twice! God honors his humble heart. Gideon was humble enough to place his faith and trust into action. He tears down the altar of Baal. He sends home his entire army before battle. And then, when confronted at the beginning of Judges 8 by the Ephraimites who wanted to claim the glory, he humbled himself before them and honored them. It's a stunning display. Finally, when it is all said and done, the people want to make him king. He refuses the crown. He refuses to take God's rightful place in their lives. In the words of Murray, Gideon understood "the highest glory of the creature is in being only a vessel, to receive and enjoy and show forth the glory of God."

What about us? What does humility look like in our own lives? Surely, it is more than words. It is life lived intentionally under the sovereign authority of God. A life lost in the vision that God is all. A life lived before God, submitted to God, surrendered to God. What does such a life look like in the 21st century in the midst of a global pandemic? It is a life of worship. Daily. Weekly. It is a life of Sabbath rest as we shelter in place. It is a life of prayer. It is a life of reflection on the Scriptures. It's a life spent serving those we love. Our families. Our friends. Our neighbors. Ultimately, it's a life of service to the Kingdom. It's a life of devotion to our Lord. It's a life that intentionally directs all its resources - time, talent, treasure - towards God. It is a life that engages the world while remaining set apart. A life of risk where safety and comfort are sacrificed for the sake of the gospel.

Readings for tomorrow: Judges 10-13