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June 1, 2020
THE DEATHLESS LOVE OF GOD

Readings for today: [Song of Solomon 5:2-8:14, Psalms 45](#)

“Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is strong as death, jealousy is fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the Lord. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, he would be utterly despised.” (Song of Solomon 8:6-7)

I needed hope this morning. I don't know about you but the events of this past week have weighed heavily on my soul. I've shed tears. I've spoken words. I've checked in on friends. I've listened voices far wiser and more bold than my own. I've grieved over the senseless death. The senseless violence. The senseless looting. I long for justice. I long for righteousness. I long for a more perfect union when a person will not have to wonder if they are being treated differently because of the color of their skin. And although I know progress has been made, it feels like we still have so far to go.

Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “The arc of the moral universe is long but it bends towards justice.” If I'm honest it feels like we still have so far to go and I'm tired. My strength is failing. My hope is fading. And if I'm feeling this way, I cannot imagine how my friends of color must feel. This is where God met me in our reading today. His love is as strong as death. His jealousy as fierce as the grave. I needed those words this morning. You see, the arc of the moral universe may be long indeed. It is certainly longer than my lifespan or even the lifespan of many generations. But God's reach is even longer. It is God who bends the arc. It is God who is at work in our world to bring justice. And we can trust God to complete His work because of His great love. The floods of racism and classism cannot quench love. The fires burning in our cities cannot destroy love. Even if the richest man on the planet tried to buy it to possess it for his very own, his offer would be rejected out of hand. God's love is free. God's love is faithful. God's love is priceless. God's love is powerful. It gives strength to the weary. Hope to the hopeless. Help for the helpless.

So we set God's love as a seal on our hearts. We wear it like a badge on our arms. We let our lives and loves and choices reflect the love of God. We make the love of God our aim in all we say and do not just personally but corporately in society as well. God's love is the foundation for justice. God's love is the root for all righteousness. God's love must serve as the philosophical base for all our laws and public policy. God's love must guide our leaders when they speak to us and on our behalf. Without God's love we are lost. Wandering. Foolish. Afraid. With God's love, we are found. Focused. Wise. Determined. May we cling to God's love today!

Readings for tomorrow: Proverbs 1-4

June 2, 2020

THE PATH OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Readings for today: [Proverbs 1-4](#)

“But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day. The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know over what they stumble.” (Proverbs 4:18-19)

I couldn't sleep again last night. Too much grief. Too much anxiety. Fears for our nation. For the utter lack of wisdom being shown by so many. Violence only begets more violence. We're seeing that on display. Every escalation is met by more escalation. Every foolish act only increases the pain. Demonic forces are on the loose. Their only aim is mayhem. They corrupt otherwise peaceful demonstrations. They take advantage of the crowds to wreak their havoc. They sow seeds of chaos. They love the night. They love the darkness. They wear all black. They mask up so no one can know their identities. They do not care who they hurt as long as they get to destroy. And the media covers their every move.

At the same time, there is light. There is hope. The righteous do shine like the dawn. I love seeing police officers kneeling down with the protestors to pray. I love seeing peaceful demonstrators confronting those who are looting. I love seeing wise leaders emerge who take the time to walk among the people. Listening. Honoring. Loving. Diffusing tension. De-escalating conflict. Bringing calm in the crisis. They understand their words have power. Their actions communicate respect. And I'm praying their light shines brighter and brighter with each passing day.

We are reaping what we've sown as a nation. As a country, we've commercialized outrage. The loudest and most obnoxious voices get all the press. Extremists get normalized and platformed. The dumpster fire that is Twitter has now spilled onto the streets. Anyone could have seen this coming. You simply cannot pursue the politics of division without suffering the consequences. Many years ago, political operatives made it their goal to divide the nation into two warring camps. They no longer saw a need to reach out across the aisle. No longer saw a need for compromise. It was a “win at all costs” mentality that resulted in a scorched earth treatment of one's political opponents and the hatred they fostered has now broken loose. But they aren't the only ones to blame. We all need to look into the mirror right now. We need to ask ourselves how we have contributed to the current climate. All of us bear some responsibility for what is taking place. That's the thing about democracy. It is government of the people, by the people, and for the people. So we need to come to grips with the hard truth that what happens in Washington DC is simply a macro-reflection of what happens in many of our local communities. And rather than blame-shift as is our wont in such circumstances, we must confess and repent and humble ourselves before the Lord and before one another.

King Solomon is quite possibly the wisest man to ever live. He specialized in solving intractable problems. Problems like the ones we face over race and power and economics. These things were not foreign to Solomon and people came from all over the world to seek his advice. How would he advise us today? In our situation? In our current cultural moment? I think he would say this, “To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth— Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance, The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.” (Proverbs 1:2-5, 7)

Readings for tomorrow: Proverbs 5-8

June 4, 2020
The Foundation of God's Throne

Readings for today: [Proverbs 9-12](#)

“When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices, and when the wicked perish there are shouts of gladness. By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, but by the mouth of the wicked it is overthrown.” (Proverbs 11:10-11)

Like all of us, I have watched the recent events unfold with a lot of fear and anxiety. A lot of sadness and deep grief. My heart breaks for the brokenness of this world. Far too many find themselves at the mercy of an unjust society. Far too many find themselves the victims of unrighteousness. Far too many feel powerless. Helpless. Hopeless. Afraid. Far too many feel the wheels of social progress have ground to a halt with their bodies trapped underneath. All around us cities are burning. Communities are struggling. Unrest is growing. Why?

We have abandoned God. The only source of true life and light and love in this world. By His command the world was made and all that was in it. By His command human beings were shaped and formed in His image. By His command we were given a mandate to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. Exercising dominion in His name. This was the pathway to true progress. This was the road to righteousness. This was the journey to justice. But we abandoned His ways long ago. We chose to blaze our own trail. Build our own road. Cut our own path through the wilderness. And where has that gotten us? A world full of hate and anger and fear. A world full of violence and suffering and pain. A world full of injustice and inequality. We have remade the world in our own broken image and are suffering the consequences of our actions.

God calls us to a different path. The path of righteousness. The path of justice. Psalm 89:14 teaches us that God's throne rests on these two pillars. Righteousness is about our standing before God. Clothed in Christ, we seek to become who we already are in Him. We follow His commands. We conform our hearts and minds to His example. We speak His truth. We live for His glory. We surrender all that we have and all that we are to Him. Justice is about the systems and structures we live under. Government. Business. Education. Media. Arts. Church. Family. These are by definition unjust because they are human creations and each generation must engage in the work to align them and re-align them with God's Kingdom. When righteous people are engaged in justice work, the cities and communities in which we live flourish. When unrighteous people engage in unjust work, the cities and communities in which we live burn. This is the power God entrusted to us from the beginning and it is responsibility He has given us as human beings.

The Proverbs are full of all kinds of wisdom regarding the righteousness and justice of God. All of us should be seeking to become more righteous individually and all of us should be working for justice systemically and collectively. This unique gift the church offers the world is Jesus. Governments pass laws. Social policy can be re-written and reformed. Law enforcement can enforce a host of new regulations. But none of it will make a bit of difference without the transformation of the human heart. Friends, more than ever, the world needs Jesus. Who are you sharing Him with today?

Readings for tomorrow: Proverbs 13-16

June 5, 2020
HOPE DEFERRED

Readings for today: [Proverbs 13-16](#)

Proverbs 13:12 says, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life." As soon as I read these words this morning, it reminded me of something Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "In a sense, our nation's summers of riots are caused our winter's delay." When people ask me why we can't seem to get past the race issue in America, this is what I tell them. We keep deferring hope for our African-American brothers and sisters and it continues to make our nation sick. Rather than offer up my own words as to why that may or may not be, I humbly offer you the words of the brilliant King himself as he delivered them at Grosse Pointe High School in Michigan less than a month before his assassination. The speech is one he'd give before in several forms and it is titled, "The Other America." It's long but worth your time.

Rev. Dr. Harry Meserve, Bishop Emrich, my dear friend Congressman Conyers, ladies and gentlemen.

I need not pause to say how very delighted I am to be here tonight and to have the great privilege of discussing with you some of the vital issues confronting our nation and confronting the world. It is always a very rich and rewarding experience when I can take a brief break from the day-to-day demands of our struggle for freedom and human dignity and discuss the issues involved in that struggle with concerned people of good will all over our nation and all over the world, and I certainly want to express my deep personal appreciation to you for inviting me to occupy this significant platform.

I want to discuss the race problem tonight and I want to discuss it very honestly. I still believe that freedom is the bonus you receive for telling the truth. Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free. And I do not see how we will ever solve the turbulent problem of race confronting our nation until there is an honest confrontation with it and a willing search for the truth and a willingness to admit the truth when we discover it. And so I want to use as a title for my lecture tonight, "The Other America." And I use this title because there are literally two Americas. Every city in our country has this kind of dualism, this schizophrenia, split at so many parts, and so every city ends up being two cities rather than one. There are two Americas. One America is beautiful for situation. In this America, millions of people have the milk of prosperity and the honey of equality flowing before them. This America is the habitat of millions of people who have food and material necessities for their bodies, culture and education for their minds, freedom and human dignity for their spirits. In this America children grow up in the sunlight of opportunity. But there is another America. This other America has a daily ugliness about it that transforms the buoyancy of hope into the fatigue of despair. In this other America, thousands and thousands of people, men in particular walk the streets in search for jobs that do not exist. In this other America, millions of people are forced to live in vermin-filled, distressing housing conditions where they do not have the privilege of having wall-to-wall carpeting, but all too often, they end up with wall-to-wall rats and roaches. Almost forty percent of the Negro families of America live in sub-standard housing conditions. In this other America, thousands of young people are deprived of an opportunity to get an adequate education. Every year thousands finish high school reading at a seventh, eighth and sometimes ninth grade level. Not because they're dumb, not because they don't have the native intelligence, but because the schools are so inadequate, so over-crowded, so devoid of quality, so segregated if you will, that the best in these minds can never come out. Probably the most critical problem in the other America is the economic problem. There are so many other people in the other America who can never make ends meet because their incomes are far too low if they have incomes, and their jobs are so devoid of quality. And so in this other America, unemployment is a

reality and under-employment is a reality. (I'll just wait until our friend can have her say) (applause). I'll just wait until things are restored and. . .everybody talks about law and order. (applause)

Now before I was so rudely interrupted... (applause), and I might say that it was my understanding that we're going to have a question and answer period, and if anybody disagrees with me, you will have the privilege, the opportunity to raise a question if you think I'm a traitor, then you'll have an opportunity to ask me about my traitoriness and we will give you that opportunity.

Now let me get back to the point that I was trying to bring out about the economic problem. And that is one of the most critical problems that we face in America today. We find in the other America unemployment constantly rising to astronomical proportions and black people generally find themselves living in a literal depression. All too often when there is mass unemployment in the black community, it's referred to as a social problem and when there is mass unemployment in the white community, it's referred to as a depression. But there is no basic difference. The fact is, that the negro faces a literal depression all over the U.S. The unemployment rate on the basis of statistics from the labor department is about 8.8 per cent in the black community. But these statistics only take under consideration individuals who were once in the labor market, or individuals who go to employment offices to seek employment. But they do not take under consideration the thousands of people who have given up, who have lost motivation, the thousands of people who have had so many doors closed in their faces that they feel defeated and they no longer go out and look for jobs, the thousands who've come to feel that life is a long and desolate corridor with no exit signs. These people are considered the discouraged and when you add the discouraged to the individuals who can't be calculated through statistics in the unemployment category, the unemployment rate in the negro community probably goes to 16 or 17 percent. And among black youth, it is in some communities as high as 40 and 45 percent. But the problem of unemployment is not the only problem. There is the problem of under-employment, and there are thousands and thousand, I would say millions of people in the negro community who are poverty stricken - not because they are not working but because they receive wages so low that they cannot begin to function in the main stream of the economic life of our nation. Most of the poverty stricken people of America are persons who are working every day and they end up getting part-time wages for full-time work. So the vast majority of negroes in America find themselves perishing on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. This has caused a great deal of bitterness. It has caused a great deal of agony. It has caused ache and anguish. It has caused great despair, and we have seen the angered expressions of this despair and this bitterness in the violent rebellions that have taken place in cities all over our country. Now I think my views on non-violence are pretty generally known. I still believe that non-violence is the most potent weapon available to the negro in his struggle for justice and freedom in the U.S.

Now let me relieve you a bit. I've been in the struggle a long time now, (applause) and I've conditioned myself to some things that are much more painful than discourteous people not allowing you to speak, so if they feel that they can discourage me, they'll be up here all night.

Now I wanted to say something about the fact that we have lived over these last two or three summers with agony and we have seen our cities going up in flames. And I would be the first to say that I am still committed to militant, powerful, massive, non-violence as the most potent weapon in grappling with the problem from a direct action point of view. I'm absolutely convinced that a riot merely intensifies the fears of the white community while relieving the guilt. And I feel that we must always work with an effective, powerful weapon and method that brings about tangible results. But it is not enough for me to stand before you tonight and condemn riots. It would be morally irresponsible for me to do that without, at the same time, condemning the contingent, intolerable conditions that exist in our

society. These conditions are the things that cause individuals to feel that they have no other alternative than to engage in violent rebellions to get attention. And I must say tonight that a riot is the language of the unheard. And what is it America has failed to hear? It has failed to hear that the plight of the negro poor has worsened over the last twelve or fifteen years. It has failed to hear that the promises of freedom and justice have not been met. And it has failed to hear that large segments of white society are more concerned about tranquility and the status quo than about justice and humanity.

Now every year about this time, our newspapers and our televisions and people generally start talking about the long hot summer ahead. What always bothers me is that the long hot summer has always been preceded by a long cold winter. And the great problem is that the nation has not used its winters creatively enough to develop the program, to develop the kind of massive acts of concern that will bring about a solution to the problem. And so we must still face the fact that our nation's summers of riots are caused by our nation's winters of delay. As long as justice is postponed we always stand on the verge of these darker nights of social disruption. The question now, is whether America is prepared to do something massively, affirmatively and forthrightly about the great problem we face in the area of race and the problem which can bring the curtain of doom down on American civilization if it is not solved. And I would like to talk for the next few minutes about some of the things that must be done if we are to solve this problem.

The first thing I would like to mention is that there must be a recognition on the part of everybody in this nation that America is still a racist country. Now however unpleasant that sounds, it is the truth. And we will never solve the problem of racism until there is a recognition of the fact that racism still stands at the center of so much of our nation and we must see racism for what it is. It is the notion of an inferior people. It is the notion that one group has all of the knowledge, all of the insights, all of the purity, all of the work, all of the dignity. And another group is worthless, on a lower level of humanity, inferior. To put it in philosophical language, racism is not based on some empirical generalization which, after some studies, would come to conclusion that these people are behind because of environmental conditions. Racism is based on an ontological affirmation. It is the notion that the very being of a people is inferior. And their ultimate logic of racism is genocide. Hitler was a very sick man. He was one of the great tragedies of history. But he was very honest. He took his racism to its logical conclusion. The minute his racism caused him to sickly feel and go about saying that there was something innately inferior about the Jew he ended up killing six million Jews. The ultimate logic of racism is genocide, and if one says that one is not good enough to have a job that is a solid quality job, if one is not good enough to have access to public accommodations, if one is not good enough to have the right to vote, if one is not good enough to live next door to him, if one is not good enough to marry his daughter because of his race. Then at that moment that person is saying that that person who is not good to do all of this is not fit to exist or to live. And that is the ultimate logic of racism. And we've got to see that this still exists in American society. And until it is removed, there will be people walking the streets of live and living in their humble dwellings feeling that they are nobody, feeling that they have no dignity and feeling that they are not respected. The first thing that must be on the agenda of our nation is to get rid of racism.

Secondly, we've got to get rid of two or three myths that still pervade our nation. One is the myth of time. I'm sure you've heard this notion. It is the notion that only time can solve the problem of racial injustice. And I've heard it from many sincere people. They've said to the negro and to his allies in the white community you should slow up, you're pushing things too fast, only time can solve the problem. And if you'll just be nice and patient and continue to pray, in a hundred or two hundred years the problem will work itself out. There is an answer to that myth. It is the time is neutral. It can be used either constructively or destructively. And I'm sad to say to you tonight I'm absolutely convinced that

the forces of ill will in our nation, the forces on the wrong side in our nation, the extreme righteous of our nation have often used time much more effectively than the forces of good will and it may well be that we may have to repent in this generation not merely for the vitriolic words of the bad people who will say bad things in a meeting like this or who will bomb a church in Birmingham, Alabama, but for the appalling silence and indifference of the good people who sit around and say wait on time. Somewhere we must come to see that human progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability, it comes through the tireless efforts and the persistent work of dedicated individuals who are willing to be co-workers with God and without this hard work time itself becomes an ally of the primitive forces of social stagnation. And so we must always help time and realize that the time is always right to do right.

Now there is another myth and that is the notion that legislation can't solve the problem that you've got to change the heart and naturally I believe in changing the heart. I happen to be a Baptist preacher and that puts me in the heart changing business and Sunday after Sunday I'm preaching about conversion and the need for the new birth and re-generation. I believe that there's something wrong with human nature. I believe in original sin not in terms of the historical event but as the mythological category to explain the universality of evil, so I'm honest enough to see the gone-wrongness of human nature so naturally I'm not against changing the heart and I do feel that that is the half truth involved here, that there is some truth in the whole question of changing the heart. We are not going to have the kind of society that we should have until the white person treats the negro right - not because the law says it but because it's natural because it's right and because the black man is the white man's brother. I'll be the first to say that we will never have a truly integrated society, a truly colorless society until men and women are obedient to the unenforceable. But after saying that, let me point out the other side. It may be true that morality cannot be legislated, but behavior can be regulated. It may be true that the law cannot change the heart but it can restrain the heartless. It may be true that the law can't make a man love me, but it can restrain him from lynching me, and I think that's pretty important also.

And so while legislation may not change the hearts of men, it does change the habits of men when it's vigorously enforced and when you change the habits of people pretty soon attitudes begin to be changed and people begin to see that they can do things that fears caused them to feel that they could never do. And I say that there's a need still for strong civil rights legislation in various areas. There's legislation in Congress right now dealing with the whole question of housing and equal administration of justice and these things are very important for I submit to you tonight that there is no more dangerous development in our nation than the constant building up of predominantly negro central cities ringed by white suburbs. This will do nothing but invite social disaster. And this problem has to be dealt with - some through legislation, some through education, but it has to be dealt with in a very concrete and meaningful manner.

Now let me get back to my point. I'm going to finish my speech. I've been trying to think about what I'm going to preach about tomorrow down to Central Methodist Church in the Lenten series and I think I'll use as the text, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do."

I want to deal with another myth briefly which concerns me and I want to talk about it very honestly and that is over-reliance on the bootstrap philosophy. Now certainly it's very important for people to engage in self-help programs and do all they can to lift themselves by their own bootstraps. Now I'm not talking against that at all. I think there is a great deal that the black people of this country must do for themselves and that nobody else can do for them. And we must see the other side of this question. I remember the other day I was on a plane and a man starting talking with me and he said I'm sympathetic toward what you're trying to do, but I just feel that you people don't do enough for yourself and then he went on to say that my problem is, my concern is that I know of other ethnic groups, many

of the ethnic groups that came to this country and they had problems just as negroes and yet they did the job for themselves, they lifted themselves by their own bootstraps. Why is it that negroes can't do that? And I looked at him and I tried to talk as understanding as possible but I said to him, it does not help the negro for unfeeling, sensitive white people to say that other ethnic groups that came to the country maybe a hundred or a hundred and fifty years voluntarily have gotten ahead of them and he was brought here in chains involuntarily almost three hundred and fifty years ago. I said it doesn't help him to be told that and then I went on to say to this gentlemen that he failed to recognize that no other ethnic group has been enslaved on American soil. Then I had to go on to say to him that you failed to realize that America made the black man's color a stigma. Something that he couldn't change. Not only was the color a stigma, but even linguistic then stigmatic conspired against the black man so that his color was thought of as something very evil. If you open Roget's Thesaurus and notice the synonym for black you'll find about a hundred and twenty and most of them represent something dirty, smut, degrading, low, and when you turn to the synonym for white, about one hundred and thirty, all of them represent something high, pure, chaste. You go right down that list. And so in the language a white life is a little better than a black life. Just follow. If somebody goes wrong in the family, we don't call him a white sheep we call him a black sheep. And then if you block somebody from getting somewhere you don't say they've been whiteballed, you say they've been blackballed. And just go down the line. It's not whitemail it's blackmail. I tell you this to seriously say that the nation made the black man's color a stigma and then I had to say to my friend on the plane another thing that is often forgotten in this country. That nobody, no ethnic group has completely lifted itself by it own bootstraps. I can never forget that the black man was free from the bondage of physical slavery in 1863. He wasn't given any land to make that freedom meaningful after being held in slavery 244 years. And it was like keeping a man in prison for many many years and then coming to see that he is not guilty of the crime for which he was convicted. Alright good night and God bless you.

And I was about to say that to free, to have freed the negro from slavery without doing anything to get him started in life on a sound economic footing, it was almost like freeing a man who had been in prison many years and you had discovered that he was unjustly convicted of, that he was innocent of the crime for which he was convicted and you go up to him and say now you're free, but you don't give him any bus fare to get to town or you don't give him any money to buy some clothes to put on his back or to get started in life again. Every code of jurisprudence would rise up against it. This is the very thing that happened to the black man in America. And then when we look at it even deeper than this, it becomes more ironic. We're reaping the harvest of this failure today. While America refused to do anything for the black man at that point, during that very period, the nation, through an act of Congress, was giving away millions of acres of land in the west and the mid-west, which meant that it was willing to under gird its white peasants from Europe with an economic floor. Not only did they give the land, they built land grant colleges for them to learn how to farm. Not only that it provided county agents to further their expertise in farming and went beyond this and came to the point of providing low interest rates for these persons so that they could mechanize their farms, and today many of these persons are being paid millions of dollars a year in federal subsidies not to farm and these are so often the very people saying to the black man that he must lift himself by his own bootstraps. I can never think ... Senator Eastland, incidentally, who says this all the time gets a hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars a year, not to farm on various areas of his plantation down in Mississippi. And yet he feels that we must do everything for ourselves. Well that appears to me to be a kind of socialism for the rich and rugged hard individualistic capitalism for the poor.

Now let me say two other things and I'm going to rush on. One, I want to say that if we're to move ahead and solve this problem we must re-order our national priorities. Today we're spending almost thirty-five billion dollars a year to fight what I consider an unjust, ill-considered, evil, costly, unwinnable

war at Viet Nam. I wish I had time to go into the dimensions of this. But I must say that the war in Viet Nam is playing havoc with our Domestic destinies. That war has torn up the Geneva accord, it has strengthened, it has substituted...(Interruption)...I just want to say in response to that, that there are those of us who oppose the war in Viet Nam. I feel like opposing it for many reasons. Many of them are moral reasons but one basic reason is that we love our boys who are fighting there and we just want them to come back home. But I don't have time to go into the history and the development of the war in Viet Nam. I happen to be a pacifist but if I had had to make a decision about fighting a war against Hitler, I may have temporarily given up my pacifism and taken up arms. But nobody is to compare what is happening in Viet Nam today with that. I'm convinced that it is clearly an unjust war and it's doing so many things--not only on the domestic scene, it is carrying the whole world closer to nuclear annihilation. And so I've found it necessary to take a stand against the war in Viet Nam and I appreciate Bishop Emrich's question and I must answer it by saying that for me the tuitus? cannot be divided. It's nice for me to talk about ... it's alright to talk about integrated schools and in integrated lunch counters which I will continue to work for, but I think it would be rather absurd for me to work for integrated schools and not be concerned about the survival of the world in which to integrate.

The other thing is, that I have been working too long and too hard now against segregated public accommodations to end up at this stage of my life segregating my moral concern. I must make it clear. For me justice is indivisible. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

Now for the question of hurting civil rights. I think the war in Viet Nam hurt civil rights much more than my taking a stand against the war. And I could point out so many things to say that. . . a reporter asked me sometime ago when I first took a strong stand against the war didn't I feel that I would have to reverse my position because so many people disagreed, and people who once had respect for me wouldn't have respect, and he went on to say that I hear that it's hurt the budget of your organization and don't you think that you have to get in line more with the administration's policy ... and of course those were very lonely days when I first started speaking out and not many people were speaking out but now I have a lot of company and it's not as lonesome now. But anyway, I had to say to the reporter, I'm sorry sir but you don't know me. I'm not a consensus leader and I do not determine what is right and wrong by looking at the budget of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference or by kind of taking a look at a gallop poll and getting the expression of the majority opinion. Ultimately, a genuine leader is not a succor for consensus but a mold of consensus. And on somepositions cowardice ask the question is it safe? Expediency asks the question is it politics? Vanity asks the question is it popular? The conscience asks the question is it right? And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe nor politics nor popular but he must do it because conscience tells him it is right.

Now the time is passing and I'm not going to... I was going into the need for direct action to dramatize and call attention to the gulf between promise and fulfillment. I've been searching for a long time for an alternative to riots on the one hand and timid supplication for justice on the other and I think that alternative is found in militant massive non-violence. I'll wait until the question period before going into the Washington campaign. But let me say that it has been my experience in these years that I've been in the struggle for justice, that things just don't happen until the issue is dramatized in a massive direct-action way. I never will forget when we came through Washington in 1964, in December coming from Oslo. I stopped by to see President Johnson. We talked about a lot of things and we finally got to the point of talking about voting rights. The President was concerned about voting, but he said Martin, I can't get this through in this session of Congress. We can't get a voting rights bill, he said because there are two or three other things that I feel that we've got to get through and they're going to benefit negroes as much as anything. One was the education bill and something else. And then he went on to say that if I push a voting rights bill now, I'll lose the support of seven congressmen that I sorely need

for the particular things that I had and we just can't get it. Well, I went on to say to the President that I felt that we had to do something about it and two weeks later we started a movement in Selma, Alabama. We started dramatizing the issue of the denial of the right to vote and I submit to you that three months later as a result of that Selma movement, the same President who said to me that we could not get a voting rights bill in that session of Congress was on the television singing through a speaking voice "we shall overcome" and calling for the passage of a voting rights bill and I could go on and on to show. . .and we did get a voting rights bill in that session of Congress. Now, I could go on to give many other examples to show that it just doesn't come about without pressure and this is what we plan to do in Washington. We aren't planning to close down Washington, we aren't planning to close down Congress. This isn't anywhere in our plans. We are planning to dramatize the issue to the point that poor people in this nation will have to be seen and will not be invisible.

Now let me finally say something in the realm of the spirit and then I'm going to take my seat. Let me say finally, that in the midst of the hollering and in the midst of the discourtesy tonight, we got to come to see that however much we dislike it, the destinies of white and black America are tied together. Now the races don't understand this apparently. But our destinies are tied together. And somehow, we must all learn to live together as brothers in this country or we're all going to perish together as fools. Our destinies are tied together. Whether we like it or not culturally and otherwise, every white person is a little bit negro and every negro is a little bit white. Our language, our music, our material prosperity and even our food are an amalgam of black and white, so there can be no separate black path to power and fulfillment that does not intersect white routes and there can ultimately be no separate white path to power and fulfillment short of social disaster without recognizing the necessity of sharing that power with black aspirations for freedom and human dignity. We must come to see. . .yes we do need each other, the black man needs the white man to save him from his fear and the white man needs the black man to free him from his guilt.

John Donne was right. No man is an island and the tide that fills every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. And he goes on toward the end to say, "any man's death diminishes me because I'm involved in mankind. Therefore, it's not to know for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee." Somehow we must come to see that in this pluralistic, interrelated society we are all tied together in a single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality. And by working with determination and realizing that power must be shared, I think we can solve this problem, and may I say in conclusion that our goal is freedom and I believe that we're going to get there. It's going to be more difficult from here on in but I believe we're going to get there because however much she strays away from it, the goal of America is freedom and our destiny is tied up with the destiny of America. Before the Pilgrim fathers landed at Plymouth we were here. Before Jefferson etched across the pages of history the majestic words of the Declaration of Independence we were here. Before the beautiful words of the Star Spangled Banner were written we were here. And for more than two centuries our forbearers labored here without wages. They made cotton King, they built the homes of their masters in the midst of the most humiliating and oppressive conditions and yet out of a bottomless vitality they continued to grow and develop and if the inexpressible cruelties of slavery couldn't stop us, the opposition that we now face including the white backlash will surely fail.

We are going to win our freedom because both the sacred heritage of our nation and the eternal will of the Almighty God are embodied in our echoing demands. So however difficult it is during this period, however difficult it is to continue to live with the agony and the continued existence of racism, however difficult it is to live amidst the constant hurt, the constant insult and the constant disrespect, I can still sing we shall overcome. We shall overcome because the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends towards justice.

We shall overcome because Carlisle is right. "No lie can live forever." We shall overcome because William Cullen Bryant is right. "Truth crushed to earth will rise again." We shall overcome because James Russell Lowell is right. "Truth forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne." Yet that scaffold sways the future. We shall overcome because the Bible is right. "You shall reap what you sow." With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair, a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to speed up the day when all of God's children all over this nation - black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old negro spiritual, "Free at Last, Free at Last, Thank God Almighty, We are Free At Last."

Readings for tomorrow: Proverbs 17-20

June 6, 2020
PASSING THE TEST

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

“The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, and the Lord tests hearts.” (Proverbs 17:3)

I want to pose a challenging question this morning. What if what we are seeing in our nation is the Lord’s judgment? After all, we’ve read how pandemics were often a sign of the Lord’s judgment in the Old Testament. Same with civil unrest. Economic downturns. What if God is finally bringing judgment on America for her sins? Her capitalistic greed? Her lust for political power? Her obsession with outrage and hate? Her deep and persistent racism? What if the conflation of a global pandemic, racial tensions and protests, economic recession, and social distancing/quarantines are all part of God’s plan to test us? Refine us? Purify us? Would we let Him? Are we willing to engage in personal as well as corporate self-examination? Are we willing to engage in personal as well as corporate confession? Are we willing to engage the works that lead to repentance personally as well as corporately? Or will we continue to blame-shift? Avoid responsibility? Traffic in conspiracy theories? Close our eyes to the truth?

The reality is we will never know for sure why these things happen. Israel frankly didn’t know either. It was only upon reflection. Only upon looking back that they could see clearly how the hand of the Lord was at work. Today is the 76th anniversary of D-Day. On this day so many years ago, over 160,000 men stormed a 50-mile stretch of heavily fortified French coastline to set the world free from the tyranny of Nazism. They came from all different ethnicities. All different nationalities. All of them joining together to fight the worst kind of evil. The battle wasn’t easy. They struggled up those beaches. They suffered traumatic wounds and mass casualties. Those who survived often never spoke about it again because the pain was simply too great. But still they fought. Still they endured. Still they persevered until the great day of victory. Looking back, I believe we can see the Lord at work in their efforts and sacrifice which is why we honor them as heroes.

Sadly, the very evils so many gave their lives to defeat have come home to roost in our nation today. White supremacy. Runaway corporate greed. Politics of division. Police brutality. Violence as a form of protest. And a media utterly committed to fanning the flames of resentment and fear as they highlight the absolute worst in us. The furnace we find ourselves in is only growing hotter and hotter with each passing day. How will we respond? How can we pass this test?

By following the way of Jesus. The way of sacrificial love. The way of mercy and compassion. The way of grace and peace. This, friends, is what our world needs and it is what God demands from His people. In a world so quick to hate, we offer love. In a world so driven by greed, we offer generosity. In a world so divided and full of identity politics, we proclaim every human being’s inherent dignity and worth because they are made in the image of God. In a world where violence and brutality are often measures of first resort, we offer non-violence and peace. We refuse to de-humanize groups of people because of their race or profession. We understand when one of us hurts, all of us hurt. When one of us suffers, all of us suffer. When one of us experiences injustice, all of us experience injustice. We believe Jesus and we trust Jesus when he says hate can only be overcome by love. Evil can only be overcome by good. Anger can only be turned away by gentleness. Enemies can only become friends through prayer and compassion and sacrifice.

The way of Jesus is not easy. It requires great faith. Faith in the One who left all the privileges and glories of heaven to come to earth. Faith in the One who willingly relinquished all of His power and authority to become a servant. Faith in the One who refused to return evil for evil, an eye for an eye, violence with violence. Jesus went through the crucible of this life. He endured the flames of the fiery furnace on our behalf. Jesus was tested by His Father and when He hung on that cross interceding for us even as we killed Him, He passed. And we received salvation. Jesus is still in the salvation business, friends. Only this time He sends us. His people. Holy and beloved. Set apart for His purposes in this world. If you want to know what you can do to meet the demands of this cultural moment, love like Jesus. Listen like Jesus. Serve like Jesus.

June 8, 2020

PRIDE COMES BEFORE A FALL

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

“Haughty eyes and a proud heart, the lamp of the wicked, are sin...“Scoffer” is the name of the arrogant, haughty man who acts with arrogant pride.” (Prov. 21:4, 24)

There is no greater sin than pride. Pride lies at the root of all sin. It was pride caused Satan to fall from grace and glory when the heavens were young. It was pride that caused Adam and Eve to reject God’s command and go their own way. Cain’s pride was wounded so he killed Abel. It was Joseph’s pride that got him in trouble with his brothers. In his pride, Moses thought he could deliver Israel without God. Saul, in his pride, refused to make right sacrifices. David’s pride caused him to number Israel so he could see how powerful he was. Solomon, in his pride, thought he could worship lots of different gods and still remain faithful to Yahweh. Over and over again in the Scriptures, we see pride creep up in God’s people with devastating effect.

Pride is still our greatest sin. Pride makes us think we know best how to live our lives. Pride makes us think we can stand in judgment over God’s Word and determine what is relevant. Pride makes us think we are like God, discerning good from evil. But how’s that working out? When we look at the world around us, is it not pride that is the root cause of the violence? The suffering? The pain? Is it not the pride of nations that causes them to go to war? Is it not the pride of privilege that causes some to look down on others? Is it not the pride of wealth that causes us to accumulate more and more while others go without? Is it not pride that drives our decision-making on a daily basis? We do what’s best for us first without a thought for others. Haughty. Proud. Wicked. Scoffer. Arrogant. These are the labels God uses for us when we fall into this trap.

So what’s the answer? Humility. Not thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought. Or less of ourselves than we ought. But simply thinking of ourselves less. When we think of ourselves “less.” When we consider others before we consider ourselves. When we have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus who – though He was God – did not consider His prerogatives as God something to hold onto. We begin to become humble. We take on the form of a servant. We begin to look like Jesus. And humility comes with its own reward. “The reward for humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life.” (Prov. 22:4) God blesses the humble. God blesses those who put Him first. Who put others first. He grants them His favor and they often find the very things they were chasing so hard after coming into their life. The difference, of course, is that these things no longer have any hold on us because Christ now has the tighter grip.

So are you a humble person? Are you the kind of person who needs compliments? Needs to be told how good you are? Are you the kind of person who hates compliments? Hates it when you are recognized for something you did? Both are signs of pride, friends. Are you the kind of person who receives rebuke? Correction? Critique? Or do you grow resentful and angry? Are you the kind of person who crumbles at the first sign of disapproval? Both are signs of pride, friends. Are you the kind of person who chases achievement? Are you the kind of person who avoids achievement? Both are signs of pride, friends. God wants you to think of yourself less. The truly humble person accepts honor and praise for the things they do well because they recognize God has blessed them. The truly humble person is generous with praise of others. Looks for opportunities to build others up. To spread the praise while taking responsibility for any failures. The truly humble person rejects any attempt of the enemy to make them feel worthless, afraid, or of less value in the eyes of God. A truly humble person is free because they do not live for praise nor in fear of praise. So are you a humble person? Pray for God to show you the way.

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Kings 5-6, 2 Chronicles 2-3

June 9, 2020
MORIAH

Readings for today: [1 Kings 5-6, 2 Chronicles 2-3](#)

“Then Solomon began to build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the Lord had appeared to David his father, at the place that David had appointed, on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.” (2 Chron. 3:1)

I love today’s passage mainly because of how it ties so many different threads together. Mount Moriah is the Temple Mount. It’s the place where Solomon built his Temple. But as Chronicles mentions, it’s also the place where David saw the angel of the Lord relent from his destruction of Jerusalem. 1 Chron. 21:16 tells us, “David lifted up his eyes and saw the angel of the Lord standing between earth and heaven...” This is really what temples were all about in the ancient world. They were the places where heaven and earth meet. Where God’s presence literally dwelt on earth. It was the place you came when you wanted to speak to God. Encounter God. Worship God. These were deeply sacred spaces. Thin spaces where the veil between this world and the next grew thin.

This isn’t the only place Mount Moriah appears in the Scriptures. Moriah is also the place where Abraham went to sacrifice Isaac. And those of you who remember the story from Genesis 22, probably recall it was the angel of the Lord who stayed Abraham’s hand. Thin space. Sacred space. The Lord providing a ram in the thicket to sacrifice on the altar. And, of course, for those who believe in the rapture and certain streams of end times theology, Mt. Moriah is the place where Jesus will return when He comes again. It’s where the New Jerusalem will be located. It’s the throne from which God will reign for all eternity.

What to take away from the building of the Temple? First of all, I think it’s important to recognize sacred spaces in our lives. Places where God showed up in a powerful way. Bending the heavens to come to earth to perform a miracle or do a mighty work in our lives. It could be a healing. It could be miraculous provision of some kind or another. It could be a moment where God came through when we felt desperate or helpless. Those spaces will hold a special place in our hearts as well they should. But these spaces aren’t just personal, they’re communal as well. I think of the sacred space being created right now as so many march for justice. The sacred space being created in laboratories all over the world as so many race for a cure for COVID. I think of the sacred space many communities will create as they gather to listen and love and work for a more united future. All of these point to the reality that sacred space is not just out “there” but in each of our hearts. The Bible declares that those who trust in Christ are now “temples” of the Holy Spirit. Walking, talking “Moriahs” due to the abiding presence of the Living God. God has touched down in our lives. He has done something in our hearts. And we need to praise Him continually for the miracle of spiritual rebirth.

It also means there is a certain “sacredness” that all human beings share. Made in the image of God. Endowed with dignity, worth, and honor as a result. Broken? Yes. Sinful? Yes. Prone to wander? Lord, I feel this deep in my bones. But beloved nonetheless. Friends, you encounter the sacred everywhere you go and in everyone you meet. As C.S. Lewis once said so well, “There are no ordinary people. You’ve never talked to a mere mortal.” Everyone you meet destined for immortality. Either with God or without. Make sure you give them the chance to see Jesus in you today!

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Kings 7-8, Psalms 11

June 10, 2020
POWERFUL PRAYER

Readings for today: [1 Kings 7-8, Psalms 11](#)

The prayer of King Solomon at the dedication of the Temple is one of my favorites in all of Scripture. It serves as a great model for us as we think about our own prayer life or prayers during times of great cultural upheaval like the one we're currently living in. It begins with an ascription of praise for who God is and a recognition that He is utterly transcendent.

"O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you, in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and showing steadfast love to your servants who walk before you with all their heart..." (1 Kings 8:23) Solomon acknowledges the greatness of God. His majesty. His glory. His splendor. He is not just one among many gods. He is alone is the true God of the heavens and the earth. He is also a God defined by faithfulness. Eternal loyalty. Steadfast love for His covenant people who are the humble recipients of His blessing. This attitude is truly the starting point of prayer. Prayer must begin with an understanding of who God is and who we are. We are not the same. We are not on the same level. God is the shepherd and we are the sheep. God is the potter and we are the clay. God is the king and we are his servants. Prayer place us in a humble position before the Lord. This is the ONLY posture one can take when we come before God in prayer.

"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built! Yet have regard to the prayer of your servant and to his plea, O Lord my God, listening to the cry and to the prayer that your servant prays before you this day..." (1 Kings 8:27-28) As we come humbly before the Lord, we are assured of His promise to hear us. To listen. To attend to our prayers. God hears every word. Every cry. He sees every tear. He knows the secret thoughts of our hearts and He delights when we bring those before Him openly and honestly. Solomon makes it clear that the Temple's primary purpose is to serve as a house for prayer. A place where Israel can come before God and lay their requests before Him.

God not only listens to our requests, He also hears our confession. Throughout this prayer, Solomon acknowledges the inescapable reality of sin. It is ubiquitous. It is epidemic. It is simply part of who we are as God's people. So when a man or woman sins. When God's people sin collectively. Whether against neighbor or friend. Through systems of oppression or abuse. When Israel suffers defeat at the hands of their enemies or the rains are shut up in the heavens or famine strikes the land. When viral pandemics rage, economies fail, racial tensions rise, and shelter-in-place orders are laid down. In those moments, if we will humble ourselves and pray and seek God's face, God promises to "hear in heaven your dwelling place and forgive and act and render to each whose heart you know..." (1 Kings 8:39)

God will do all these things in such a way as to make His name great upon the earth. Even in Solomon's prayer, there is a missional, outward-facing component. "Likewise, when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a far country for your name's sake (for they shall hear of your great name and your mighty hand, and of your outstretched arm), when he comes and prays toward this house, hear in heaven your dwelling place and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to you, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and that they may know that this house that I have built is called by your name." (1 Kings 8:41-43) God desires to fill the earth with His glory. Israel is called to serve this very purpose. In the way Israel orders her life and faithfully serves her Lord, she will be a witness to the nations and to all of creation of the steadfast love of God.

You can see why I love this prayer so much! As I said above, it is a great model for us to follow in our own lives as we ponder and reflect on the challenges we face individually and collectively. Passages like this invite us to bring our requests before the Lord and trust Him with the results. Because of Christ, Christians have access to the Father in ways Solomon, in all his wisdom, could never have imagined! Because Christ sits at the Father's right hand interceding for us continually, the door is always open. The way to the Holy of Holies always clear. We have a standing invitation to come before our Heavenly Father with the blessed assurance He will always listen. When you pray for yourself or the world in which we live, pray with this eternal promise firmly fixed in your mind and heart.

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Chronicles 4-7, Psalms 134, 136

June 11, 2020
HEAL OUR LAND

Readings for today: [2 Chronicles 4-7](#), [Psalms 134, 136](#)

“If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.” (2 Chronicles 7:14)

If there was ever a verse that spoke directly to our cultural moment, it would be this one. In this passage God is speaking directly to His people. He is telling them that in times of national hardship. When the rains don't come and there is drought. When the locusts swarm and there is famine. When disease strikes and there is death. One could further add, when there is warfare and conflict leading to death and destruction. When natural disasters hit and there is suffering. When pandemics arrive on your shores. Racial tensions stirred from within. Violent community uprisings. Economic disasters. Shelter-in-place orders that seem arbitrary and capricious. Fears of government takeovers or police brutality. When these things happen, the most important thing God's people can do is turn to Him.

It begins with humility. We humble ourselves before His face. We lay aside all our pride. All our arrogance. All our thoughts, opinions, and ideas on what's gone wrong and why. We take all the solutions we come up with and cast them at His feet. We acknowledge our weakness. We acknowledge our foolishness. We acknowledge the simple fact that we are sinners and therefore have this tendency to corrupt everything we create or touch. We confess our natural inclination to make everything about us. Our natural instinct for self-promotion. Self-preservation. Self-indulgence. We come before God with open hands, recognizing there is nothing we bring to the table when we are in His presence except our sinful, broken selves.

Second, we pray and seek God's face. We come not to offer God our wisdom, our solutions, our thoughts or ideas. We come seeking His face. We come seeking His wisdom. We come seeking His ways. We come with a willingness to obey. A willingness to walk the road He lays out for us. We come seeking His Kingdom, not our own. We come seeking His will, not our own. We come seeking His favor and His grace because we know our resources are all tapped out. This is what it means to pray in faith. We pray trusting God knows what's best. We pray believing God has what's best in mind for us. We pray with the sure and certain knowledge that God loves us and longs to save us.

Finally, we turn from our wicked ways. We repent. We actually make changes in our life. We actively seek to align our hearts with God's heart. Our ways with God's way. Our thoughts with God's thoughts. We intentionally seek to become more like Jesus. The perfect and beloved Son of God. The One who relinquished all His rights and privileges in order to reach down to save us. The One who traversed the heavens to come to earth to rescue us. The One who gave everything up in order to deliver us from sin and death.

Friends, I know we are living through challenging times. I know 2020 feels like a year we could all just forget and drop in the ocean. But I also know it is times like these where God's people often do their best work. As we humble ourselves. As we pray. As we repent. As we cry out God, the Holy Spirit goes to work in our hearts and minds transforming us more into the image of Christ. Embrace the work, my friends! And trust God with the results!

Readings for tomorrow: Psalms 146-150

June 12, 2020
HOW GREAT IS OUT GOD!

Readings for today: [Psalms 146-150](#)

I love these final Psalms. They extol the greatness of God. I can imagine all of Israel gathered at the Temple singing them at the top of their lungs. Wave after wave of sound ascending to the heavens. Their hearts on fire. Their passion for God enflamed. Their love for Him crescendoing. Their worship overwhelming the senses. It's a powerful thing to witness.

When I am in Ethiopia, I have the privilege of worshiping with a sorts of different churches. Most of them Pentecostal in one form or another. When they sing, it is a whole body experience. Dancing. Swaying. Clapping. They sing without any sense of self-conscious pride. No insecurities at all. No worries about the number of verses or choruses on repeat. No debates over personal preference. They simply sing from their hearts. Their joy is palpable. They love singing together. They love being together. They love worshiping before the Lord. It is powerful.

Like Israel, they praise the God “who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the sojourners; he upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.” (Psalms 146:7-9) They recount God's goodness. They praise God's greatness. My interpreter helps me understand each chorus and verse. They sing about God's provision. God's protection. God's miraculous healing. God's deliverance from evil.

Like Israel, they praise the God “determines the number of the stars; he gives to all of them their names. Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure...He covers the heavens with clouds; he prepares rain for the earth; he makes grass grow on the hills. He gives to the beasts their food, and to the young ravens that cry...He gives snow like wool; he scatters frost like ashes...He sends out his word, and melts them; he makes his wind blow and the waters flow.” (Psalms 147:4-5, 8-9, 16, 18) In the rainy season they experience the blessing of abundant water flowing, bringing life to their dry land. Flowers bloom. Crops flourish. Herds increase. The grasslands are rich and full and green.

Like Israel, they know when they praise God, they are joining their voices with the heavens and the earth. The heavenly host and the saints who have gone before them. They join the great cloud of witnesses around the throne of God to give Him the worship due His Holy Name. “Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights! Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his hosts! Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars! Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens!” (Psalms 148:1-4)

Oh how I hope and pray for the day when we can abandon ourselves to worship in the way Israel once did! Oh how I hope and pray for the day when we can put aside all pretense and pride and self-consciousness and insecurity and consumeristic thoughts and attitudes and worship God like our Ethiopian brothers and sisters! Oh how I long for the day when we would come face to face with our God! See Him for who He is! Worship Him in Spirit and in Truth! Give Him the praise He deserves! The worship He demands! Fall on our faces before His throne, casting all our crowns before Him! Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Kings 9, 2 Chronicles 8, Proverbs 25-26

June 13, 2020
THE CONSEQUENCES OF NATIONAL SIN

Readings for today: [1 Kings 9](#), [2 Chronicles 8](#), [Proverbs 25-26](#)

I can't help but reflect on our current cultural crisis as I read the passages for today. God appears to King Solomon a second time after the dedication of the Temple and says this, "I have heard your prayer and your plea, which you have made before me. I have consecrated this house that you have built, by putting my name there forever. My eyes and my heart will be there for all time. And as for you, if you will walk before me, as David your father walked, with integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you, and keeping my statutes and my rules, then I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father, saying, 'You shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.'" (1 Kings 9:3-5) So far so good. If Solomon remains faithful, he and his kingdom will be blessed. If Solomon follows God's rules. Obeys God's commands. Walks in all God's ways. God will be faithful. God will dwell in the Temple. God will watch over Israel and show His great love to her. Furthermore, God will establish descendants who will sit on the throne of Israel forever just as He promised David...Solomon's father...the man after God's own heart.

"But if you turn aside from following me, you or your children, and do not keep my commandments and my statutes that I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land that I have given them, and the house that I have consecrated for my name I will cast out of my sight, and Israel will become a proverb and a byword among all peoples. And this house will become a heap of ruins. Everyone passing by it will be astonished and will hiss, and they will say, 'Why has the Lord done thus to this land and to this house?' Then they will say, 'Because they abandoned the Lord their God who brought their fathers out of the land of Egypt and laid hold on other gods and worshiped them and served them. Therefore the Lord has brought all this disaster on them.'" (1 Kings 9:6-9) Some might ask here if God's promises are conditional. No, they are not. God's discipline is as much a reflection of His love as His blessings. One cannot be in relationship with God and expect only affirmation. God is faithful. He will convict. He will judge. He will right every wrong in our lives, in this life or the next. If Israel stays faithful, she will experience blessing. If Israel abandons her faith, God will not abandon her but she will experience His judgment. The same is true for Solomon. Probably even more so as leaders are held to a higher standard.

Now consider where we find ourselves in this cultural moment. Our leaders have largely abandoned God. Their behavior is often immoral and unjust. Their attitudes arrogant and rude. Their words are crass and inflammatory. They cannot be trusted because they are - by and large - ungodly people seeking their own selfish ends. I know this is a bold and broad statement but I believe their own words and actions convict them. And frankly, the average person is not much better. In a democracy, we elect the leaders who best represent us. So before we criticize those in power, we must look in the mirror. We too are selfish. We too are arrogant. We too have largely abandoned God. Is it any surprise that riots and unrest have broken out? Is it any surprise there is so much anger and outrage in our communities? Is it any surprise that so many other nations are asking what has happened to America?

And still there is hope. Hope for revival. Hope for spiritual renewal. Hope for national repentance as we humble ourselves before God. Christians should be leading the way. Humbly acknowledging our grievous sins against Native Americans, African-Americans, and people of color. Humbly acknowledging our greed and selfishness and pride. Humbly acknowledging our lust for violence and sex and outrage. Humbly acknowledging that none of us is righteous. Not one. All of us have sinned and fallen short of God's glory which means all of the systems we create socially, politically,

economically, etc. are by definition corrupt and unjust on some level. And this means all of us are victims and perpetrators of injustice on some level. We all have a part to play in creating the mess we've made and we all have a part to play in cleaning it up.

God blesses the humble. God blesses those who confess their sins openly and honestly before Him. God blesses the nation that repents. The nation that bows the knee to Him. Now, more than ever, our country needs Jesus. May the church be bold in her witness as she humbly, sacrificially, generously, graciously, mercifully shows the world a different way!

June 16, 2020
PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

Readings for today: [Ecclesiastes 1-6](#)

Ecclesiastes. The most depressing book in all the Bible. So depressing in fact that many have questioned why it was even included in the canon of Scripture. Tradition tells us Solomon wrote this book in his old age as he looked back on his life with deep regret. You may remember he started out well. Asking for wisdom from God when he could have had riches and honor and power. But over the years, he fell into temptation. He did all the things kings were not supposed to do according to Deuteronomy 17. Acquiring incredible wealth. Marrying many women. Accumulating great military power. As a result, he began to believe his own hype. Trust in his own strength. Rely on himself and his own wisdom to make his way in the world. He forged alliances with many nations. He allowed for the worship of many different gods. Especially for his harem. Over 700 wives and 300 concubines. Crazy. The result was apostasy. Solomon lost his first love. And it is his regret that we hear so clearly as we read this book and it should serve as a warning to us all. If the wisest and wealthiest and most powerful king in the history of Israel can fall away, so can we. And this is why we must read this book. Because we've been given a window here, friends. An opportunity. Life for many of us, pre-COVID, was simply unsustainable. We were running too fast. Redlining our lives. But then came the shutdown. All of sudden we were reminded what life at a slower pace looks like. We were reminded what meals around the family dinner table felt like. We were reminded of some of the simpler things like evening walks, family games, cooking and cleaning together, lots of laughter and joy. Friends, life doesn't have to go back to the way it was before this crisis hit. You do have a choice. You can keep chasing all the vanities that exist under the sun and be exhausted and busy and miserable most of the time or you can start chasing that which is eternal which only comes from God and leads to happiness.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus asks this question. Very similar to the one Solomon asks in Ecclesiastes. What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world but forfeits his soul? Or as Solomon puts it, What does man gain or profit by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? Is it wealth? Honor? Power? Pleasure? Wisdom? All these things are vanity according to Solomon. The Hebrew word for "vanity" literally means "hot air." Smoke on the wind. A breath of vapor on a cold day. They are here today and gone tomorrow. There is no substance to them. Certainly nothing eternal about them. Think about all your accomplishments. Everything you've worked so hard to achieve. Think of the hours you've put in. Think of the energy you've invested. Think of the sacrifices you've made. Think of the stress and anxiety you've had to endure. Is it really worth it? A generation comes and a generation goes. How many of you remember know what your great-grandparents accomplished? How many of you even know their names?

The Bible says even the earth is subjected to vanity. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. (Romans 8:20-21) And that's why the Apostle Paul will go on to say that all creation is groaning. Just like all of humanity is groaning. Waiting for the day when all things will be made new. All wrongs be set right. The curse of sin broken. The weight of sin lifted. The burden of sin removed. We all know deep down that nothing in this world endures. Nothing done under the sun will go with us. Not our wealth. Not our possessions. Not our reputations. Not our achievements. No matter how great they may be. The things of this world were simply not made to endure and that's why Solomon says there's nothing new under the sun. It's like the world's set eternally on repeat. The things we've said. The things we've seen. The things we've heard. All the things we've done. None of it's new. It has been already in the ages before us. And so

Solomon concludes, It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. The more we see the world for what it truly is, the more our hearts break. All you have to do is look around. Well over 100K dead so far from COVID-19. Millions of dollars of damage from the riots and looting of the last several weeks in cities all across America. Violence between police and protesters. Racial tensions erupting yet again because of how we've failed to face our history honestly and pursue justice and reconciliation for people of color in our country. The more we see these things, the more helpless and hopeless we are tempted to feel. And that's exactly where God wants us. At the end of ourselves. The end of our strength. The end of our wisdom. The end of our ideas. The end of our resources. For at the end of it all. Where our groanings meet creation's groanings, there we find yet Another groaning with us. The Holy Spirit. Paul says, The Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know how to pray so the Spirit Himself prays for us with groanings too deep for words...Friends, what Paul essentially is saying in Romans 8 is that for the Christian – and this is where we have the advantage over King Solomon. King Solomon for all his wisdom focused too much on things done under the sun – and that's why he got so depressed and discouraged - whereas we Christians know the One who reigns and rules over the sun. So as we fix our eyes on Him, we can trust that the Holy Spirit is at work. Searching the depths of our hearts. Gathering up all the broken and shattered pieces of our lives. Pulling together all the vanity of vanities that so often mark our lives and bringing them into the holy of holies to present them as an offering before the Father. And what do we receive in return? Grace. Mercy. Peace. Contentment. Joy. In short, true happiness. Why? Because we have confidence that our Father's work is NOT vanity. And His promise is that He will work all things together – even all the violence and suffering and heartbreak and pain we're seeing and experiencing in our world today – for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.

So instead of looking for hope in all our vanity under the sun, we should be looking to the One who reigns and rules over the sun. The One who first set the sun in motion and called the stars by name. The one who built the storehouses for the winds and first filled the streams. The One who dug the ocean's depths with His own hands and raised the mountains high. We look to the One who loved us so much He gave us His only Son. Friends, Jesus Christ redeems us from the vanities of this life. He Himself embraced the vanity of this world so He could set free us from it. He endured the vanity of vanities of the cross so He could save us. And as a result, the work you and I do now carries eternal weight. The lives you and I lead are eternally significant. Because Jesus rose from the dead, our labor is never in vain.

Readings for tomorrow: Ecclesiastes 7-12

June 17, 2020
FINDING JOY AMIDST OUR SORROWS

Readings for today: [Ecclesiastes 7-12](#)

Often lost in all Solomon's talk about vanity and emptiness and chasing the wind is the number of times he encourages the reader to enjoy life. Enjoy the time they have been given. Enjoy the hours and days of blessing. Enjoy the seasons when life is good. Yes, you will experience bad times. Yes, you will experience hardship and adversity. Yes, you cannot place your trust in wisdom, wealth, influence, or a good name. But you can still find joy. Simple pleasures of feasting, friendship, and family.

“In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him.” (Ecclesiastes 7:14)

“And I commend joy, for man has nothing better under the sun but to eat and drink and be joyful, for this will go with him in his toil through the days of his life that God has given him under the sun.” (Ecclesiastes 8:15)

“Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do...Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.” (Ecclesiastes 9:7, 9-10)

“Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.” (Ecclesiastes 11:9)

To be sure, Solomon is encouraging a “sober” joy. A joy tempered by the realities of hard work, adversity, judgment, and death. A deeper joy that transcends superficial happiness. A joy that springs from a deep love of life and all the blessings God has given. The profound joy that comes from a life lived before God in this world. The joyful life for Solomon is not all bubbles and rainbows and unicorns. It's a utterly realistic joy. A joy that acknowledges the harsh truth about our broken world. A joy that walks eyes wide open to pain and suffering. A joy that doesn't run from trouble.

I've been a pastor for over twenty years. I've spent countless hours counseling people from all walks of life. I've served congregations on the East Coast. The Deep South. The Midwest. For the last ten plus years, I've been out West here in Colorado. A common thread running throughout all my conversations is the universal desire for happiness. A craving for joy. But it's a joy without hardship. A happiness without sorrow. An unrealistic expectation that life can be lived...indeed should be lived...without pain and suffering. In the most extreme cases, the person seems to believe God “owes” them such a life. It's why one of the most frequent questions I have to help people wrestle with is “Why, God?” Why did God let this happen to me? Why didn't God protect me from this tragedy? Why does God allow suffering? Why does a good God allow evil to exist in the world? Such questions, at their best, reveal the longing we all have for the world to come. The world where God will wipe away every tear, end all injustice, and heal every hurt. At their worst, however, they reveal a deep misunderstanding of the world around us. A false expectation that this life can be lived without experiencing hardship and pain. Solomon is clearly confronting the latter attitude.

So how do you experience the world? Especially today's world? When you wake up in the morning, what's your expectation? Do you walk into life eyes wide open to both the good and the bad? Are you willing to embrace the ups and downs? Do you understand that life will be filled with pleasure and pain? Accomplishment and adversity? Struggle and success and failure? And do you seek the deeper joy God offers us in Jesus Christ? I love what Jesus himself says in the Sermon on the Mount, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? (Matthew 6:25) You say, how naive! What rubbish! I struggle with anxiety about all sorts of things! My family. My children. My future. My business. My health. And yet, as Jesus continues, "which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? (Matthew 6:27) What has all that worry gotten you besides ulcers? What has all that anxiety gotten you except a prescription for medication? The reality is you can only control so much in this life. Not just personally but corporately as well. Letting go and letting God is a key component to finding true peace in this world. And the good news is your Heavenly Father knows what you need before you even give it voice. "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble." (Matthew 6:34)

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Kings 10-11, 2 Chronicles 9, Proverbs 30-31

June 18, 2020
GOD IS FAITHFUL

Readings for today: [1 Kings 10-11](#), [2 Chronicles 9](#), [Proverbs 30-31](#)

God is steadfast in His love. God's mercies are new every morning. God's forgiveness is unconditional. We know these truths. We declare these truths. We hold fast to these truths. But God is also just. God will not be mocked. God disciplines those He loves. He is faithful to judge as He is to show mercy. God is sovereign. He reigns and rules over all He has made. His commands are to be followed. His laws obeyed. And woe to the one who thinks they are wiser than Him. Woe to the one who thinks he can ignore God. Woe to the one who is faithless. None of us get a pass before the judgment seat of Christ.

“And he said to Jeroboam, “Take for yourself ten pieces, for thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Behold, I am about to tear the kingdom from the hand of Solomon and will give you ten tribes (but he shall have one tribe, for the sake of my servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city that I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel), because they have forsaken me and worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of Moab, and Milcom the god of the Ammonites, and they have not walked in my ways, doing what is right in my sight and keeping my statutes and my rules, as David his father did. Nevertheless, I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand, but I will make him ruler all the days of his life, for the sake of David my servant whom I chose, who kept my commandments and my statutes. But I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand and will give it to you, ten tribes. Yet to his son I will give one tribe, that David my servant may always have a lamp before me in Jerusalem, the city where I have chosen to put my name. And I will take you, and you shall reign over all that your soul desires, and you shall be king over Israel. And if you will listen to all that I command you, and will walk in my ways, and do what is right in my eyes by keeping my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did, I will be with you and will build you a sure house, as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you. And I will afflict the offspring of David because of this, but not forever.” (1 Kings 11:31-39)

Solomon was one of Israel's greatest kings. His wisdom was unfathomable. His wealth uncountable. His political power unassailable. He lived in glory and splendor all of his days. People traveled the earth to hear him speak. Queens and kings came to pay homage before his ivory throne. He was a legend in his own time. A man of immense gifts. He built cities. He raised the Temple. He contracted great palaces and beautiful gardens. His armies were powerful. Stationed all over Israel, they kept watch and protected the nation. But Solomon grew proud. Arrogant. Selfish. He started to believe his own hype. He believed he was above the law. He felt he was the author of all his blessings. So his heart turned from the Lord. He began to create other temples. Raise other shrines. To the gods of the women he had married. Ashtoreth. Chemosh. Milcom. He made sacrifices to them. He honored them alongside Yahweh. And he was judged. The kingdom torn from his descendants.

You and I are no different. Even as Christians, we come under God's righteous judgment. Yes, we escape the final judgment of hell through the shed blood of Christ but we are fools if we think that God doesn't still judge us for our thoughts, attitudes, and actions. We are ignorant if we think we have some sort of “fire insurance” that gives us a pass to do whatever want in this life. Jesus makes it clear in John 14:15, “If you love me, keep my commandments.” There is no wiggle room here, friends. If you love Christ, you will love His Word. If you love Christ, you will accept His discipline and rebuke and correction. If you love Christ, you will make it your aim in life to follow in His ways. This is why we see the church so weak in America today. She has lost her first love. She has taken the grace God offers

for granted. She has compromised her faith for the sake of political and social power. The results have been devastating. I believe God is ripping our nation apart in judgment. Tearing us into pieces because we simply will not obey Him. He is raising up adversaries from within and without. He is giving us up to the lusts of our hearts, our disordered passions, and our debased and corrupt ways of thinking. (Romans 1) Our only hope is repentance. Humble submission. Full confession of our sin and reception of His forgiveness. God will mercy if we have but the humility to seek it.

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Kings 12, 2 Chronicles 10

June 19, 2020
SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Readings for today: [1 Kings 12](#), [2 Chronicles 10](#)

“If you will be a servant to this people today and serve them, and speak good words to them when you answer them, then they will be your servants forever.” (1 Kings 12:7)

We have a leadership crisis in our world today. We see it in politics. We see it in business. We see it in the church. The prevailing model is ego-centric. It cares only for the accumulation of power and wealth and influence and control. It is self-promoting, self-protecting, and self-serving. It tends to attract abusers, predators, and narcissists. The hallmarks of arrogance, deceit, lust, greed are all present. And people are suffering as a result. It may be the abusive father who uses anger to make his wife and children cower. It may be the pastor who uses his position to prey on vulnerable women. It may be the politician who manipulates the gears in the system for his personal benefit. It may be the businessman who continues to rake in billions while taking away healthcare benefits for his employees. It was Lord Acton who once said, “Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” None of us are immune.

Solomon’s son rises to power after his father’s death. As he ascends the throne, he calls in his father’s counselors. Men who have overseen the most glorious chapter in Israel’s history. Men who have also witnessed the moral failings of the wisest king who ever lived. Their counsel to him is to back off. To give the people of Israel rest. They have spent a generation serving their king. Building cities. Serving in the army. Toiling without end. Fulfilling Solomon’s every whim. If Rehoboam will but honor them. Love them. Serve them. Consider their good above his own. They will be loyal forever. Sadly, Rehoboam chooses another path. One suggested by the young men who’ve grown up with him in the palace. They are privileged. Spoiled. Arrogant. Entitled. And they counsel him to try and outdo his father. The plan backfires spectacularly. Rehoboam loses 80% of his kingdom.

Of course, Jeroboam isn’t much better. Raised up by God to serve as king over ten of the tribes of Israel, one would think Jeroboam would remain faithful. But he is arrogant and afraid. A deadly combination no matter who you are. He is afraid he will lose his kingdom if he allows his people to worship Yahweh in the Temple. So he creates his own shrines to Yahweh. Golden calves representing the Lord. Perhaps following the example of King Solomon, he reduces Yahweh to yet another pagan deity. He sets his idols up in Dan and Bethel. Appoints his own priests. Establishes his own feast. Attempting to mirror what God has established for His people. The plan backfires spectacularly.

What would happen if we set our hearts to serve rather than be served? What would happen if we set our hearts to love rather than react out of fear? What if we responded to another person’s pain and suffering with compassion rather than dismissal and disdain? What if we honored one another as image-bearers of God rather than dehumanize and tear down those we don’t know? Can you imagine what the world might look like if instead of trashing Colin Kaepernick when he first took a knee, the NFL took the time to listen to his concerns? Worked with local law enforcement in the cities where they have franchises to develop community programs to help people? Used the wealth and power and influence of both owners and players to address systematic racism and implicit bias in our communities? Sadly, they chose to close ranks and defend their brand. Perhaps they’re an easy target. What about each one of us? What if instead of laughing at the racist or sexist jokes at work, we refused to tolerate them? What if we intentionally created space in our lives for those who are different than us? What if we listened more than we spoke? What if we simply called evil “evil” and good “good” rather

than justify it because this or that person is “on our side” in the culture war? What if we stopped settling for the lowest common denominator in our national leaders? What if we stopped watching media outlets who only appeal to our basest emotions? What if we sought to serve in our homes, schools, communities, businesses, and churches?

I believe God is searching for men and women who will faithfully follow Him. Men and women who will deny themselves rather than promote themselves. Men and women whom the treasures of this world have no hold on because their treasure is already laid up in heaven. Men and women filled with the fruit and gifts of the Spirit. Men and women who embrace the way of Jesus who said in Matthew 20:28, “The Son of Man didn’t come to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many.”

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Kings 13-14, 2 Chronicles 11-12

June 20, 2020
NATIONAL PRIDE

Readings for today: [1 Kings 13-14](#), [2 Chronicles 11-12](#)

“After this thing Jeroboam did not turn from his evil way, but made priests for the high places again from among all the people. Any who would, he ordained to be priests of the high places. And this thing became sin to the house of Jeroboam, so as to cut it off and to destroy it from the face of the earth.” (1 Kings 13:33-34)

“When the rule of Rehoboam was established and he was strong, he abandoned the law of the Lord, and all Israel with him.” (2 Chronicles 12:1)

Following Jesus is hard. Jesus tells us as much. It is a costly life. A life of perpetual sacrifice. A life of constant self-denial. A life of service to the lost and least and underprivileged. Narrow is the way that leads to salvation and Jesus Himself is that way. As Christians, we exchange our lives for His life. Our ways for His way. Our loves for His love. And this is what makes it so hard. Jesus willingly and gladly for the joy set before Him gave up everything in order to save us. He refused to use political power to accomplish His goals. He refused to use military might to accomplish His aims. He loved His enemies. Prayed for those who persecuted Him. Forgave them with His dying breath. He refused to use violence. Refused to use the awesome power at His command. Over and over again, He met hatred with love. Anger with gentleness. Suffering and pain with empathy. Becoming a Christian means taking on His mantle. It means living according to His truth. Walking in His way. Receiving His life.

The same was true in the Old Testament as well. Over and over again, Yahweh calls His people to trust Him. To believe in Him. To walk in obedience to His ways. Over and over again, they make the same mistake we make. They place their trust in their own power. Their own strength. They make alliances with foreign nations in order to secure their territory. They marry foreign wives to shore up their political position. They lean on their own understanding, creating high places and shrines and temples to different gods. Hedging their bets. Covering all their bases. Compromising their faith. And God’s response? Judgment.

And what is God’s judgment? It is simply God honoring the choices we make. So when Jeroboam sets up idols in Dan and Bethel and calls his people to worship them, God gives them over to their foolishness. If they are going to place their trust in idols of metal, then they will have to live by the decisions they make. Rehoboam follows God for a period of time but then begins to trust in his own strength. He becomes prideful and arrogant. And God gives him over to his foolishness. If Rehoboam is going to trust in his own military power, then Rehoboam will have to fend for himself against the might of Egypt. It never goes well, does it?

I cannot tell you how many times I have sat in my office counseling Christians who find themselves in crisis. Almost every time they have abandoned God. Sure, they come to church occasionally. Sure, they still acknowledge His existence. Sure, they give a little money here or there. But they have left His ways far behind. They have chased after idols of their own making. It may be the youth sports they’ve allowed to dominate their family schedule. It may be their work they’ve allowed to take over their lives. It may be their pride that keeps them from ever truly connecting with a church or other believers. It may be money or success or professional achievement that they’re chasing. It may be affirmation or acceptance from others. It could be any number of things but they always end up crashing and burning because God honors the choices we make in this life. He holds us responsible for our sin. He will not

be mocked or used or taken for granted. He is not sentimental, soft, or weak. At the end of the day, either we will say to Him - "Thy will be done" - or He will say to us - "thy will be done."

And what is true for us as individuals is also true for us as a nation. The challenges we face are a direct consequence for the attitude we have towards God. We have abandoned Him. And I'm not talking about taking prayer out of schools here. I'm talking about our national arrogance. Our belief we are exceptional among all the nations of the earth. Our trust in our wealth and power and resources and ability. We have been far too proud for far too long and God has given us over to the consequences of the choices we have made. The idols of individualism, consumerism, materialism, racism, and classism have failed us. Our absolute hatred for those who are politically or socially different than us is tearing us apart. Our selfishness, greed, and arrogance is killing us. Our only hope is repentance. Humility. Learning to walk in the ways of love and compassion and generosity and grace once again.

June 22, 2020
PRIVILEGE

Readings for today: [1 Kings 15:1-24](#), [2 Chronicles 13-16](#)

There is quite a bit of conversation in our culture today about privilege. Fundamentally, it rests on the premise that we bear some kind of responsibility for the actions of past generations. For Americans, this is a tough pill to swallow. We are hyper-individualists. We do not believe we should be held accountable for something someone else has done. We especially believe we shouldn't be held responsible for the mistakes of our parents and grandparents and great-grandparents, etc. We even turn to the Bible to back up our claim. "Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die...The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself." (Ezekiel 18:4, 20) And I certainly affirm this is true. We are responsible - each one of us - for our own choices in life. At the same time, we must listen to the whole counsel of God which clearly teaches that generational sin is also a reality. "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." (Exodus 34:6-7)

Think about what we read today. Abijam takes over as king after Rehoboam dies. For three years he reigns in Jerusalem. He walks in all the sins of his father and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord. Of course, not everything he does is bad. The Chronicler paints a bit of a different picture for us. The high point of Abijam's reign was a great victory over Israel that came about because he trusted in the Lord. But in the final analysis, Abijam is weighed and found wanting. "Now in the eighteenth year of King Jeroboam the son of Nebat, Abijam began to reign over Judah. He reigned for three years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Maacah the daughter of Abishalom. And he walked in all the sins that his father did before him, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father. Nevertheless, for David's sake the Lord his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, setting up his son after him, and establishing Jerusalem, because David did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and did not turn aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite." (1 Kings 15:1-5) Now if Ezekiel 18 were the only dynamic in play, Abijam would rightfully be judged for his sin and his family deposed. No son to sit on the throne. No lamp in Jerusalem. A new line would begin. But Abijam is the beneficiary of what one could call "Davidic privilege." God choosing to overlook his sin because of His great love for David.

White privilege works similarly but in the opposite way. Whereas Abijam benefits from the righteousness of his great-grandfather, we who are white (especially men) benefit from the unrighteousness of our forefathers. The historical facts are clear. The founders of our country - even going back to the first white colonists in Jamestown - clearly set up a system to benefit wealthy, white, land-owning men. These were the only people eligible to vote. The only ones eligible to hold public office. They were the shapers of public policy. Even the phrase - "We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal" - was on the face of it untrue. Those who penned those words did NOT believe such equality should extend to Native Americans or the African slaves they owned. The result was generations of systematic discrimination and oppression towards those of a different color. At the same time, our nation was in its ascendancy. Wealth and resources and power and influence was being created at an astronomical rate. But again, only for those who had access. (Read: White, land-owning men) Yes, a civil war was fought and many white men gave their lives to end

slavery but that didn't mean the end to oppression or racism. See this excellent video by Phil Vischer - aka "Bob the Tomato" from VeggieTales - for more information. The point of all of this is that those of us who were born white were born into a system specifically designed for our advantage. Yes, that system has changed over the years. Yes, attempts like Affirmative Action and others have leveled the playing field to a certain extent. But the efforts have fallen too far short. There is still so far to go. The fight for justice and equality is an ongoing, generational one.

So what do we do? Should we be ashamed of the color of our skin? No. Should we feel a sense of shame over the world our forefathers created? Yes. Should we acknowledge it as a broken and sinful system and seek to dismantle it or reform it or align it with God's justice and righteousness? Absolutely. Should we judge our ancestors harshly? Not so much. Like Abijam, each of them was a complex individual capable of great good and great evil just like every one of us. The historical context in which they lived was far different than the one we currently live in. And we should be humble enough to recognize that a hundred years from now, future generations will look back and judge us for our own blindness. Ultimately, equal access, equal opportunity, and equal treatment under the law are aspirations that will only become reality in the Kingdom of God which is why the mission to proclaim the gospel to the nations is so urgent! Only when we bow the knee and cast our privilege before the throne of King Jesus will true freedom, true justice, and true peace appear.

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Kings 15:25-16:34, 2 Chronicles 17

June 23, 2020
SHALOM

Readings for today: [1 Kings 15:25-16:34](#), [2 Chronicles 17](#)

Today's reading highlights what happens when a nation or a people or an individual abandons God. We descend into chaos. We drag everyone down with us. Everyone who is under our authority. Everyone over whom we have influence. Everyone who lives under our rule and reign. Jeroboam was an unfaithful man. Though raised up by God, he quickly abandoned God's ways and refused to obey God's commands. Particularly concerning worship. He set up idols in his cities so his people wouldn't go down to Jerusalem. He set up a new priesthood to replace the Levites. He builds new temples and shrines and establishes new cultic practices. In essence, Jeroboam creates a whole new religion to replace that which God established in His Word. The result is judgment. Jeroboam dies. A battle for the throne ensues. Kings are murdered. Families massacred. Entire households wiped out to the last man. It is brutal. It is bloody. It is like an episode of Game of Thrones.

Chaos is what happens when humanity tries to live without God. This is the central message of the Bible. We are sinful and corrupt to the core. We are selfish and greedy. We have a lust for power that will never be quenched. Given the right set of circumstances, all of us are capable of great evil. If there's one thing history demonstrates beyond a shadow of a doubt, it's that human beings are totally depraved. The evidence is overwhelming. The case is convincing. God's verdict is just. We all deserve death. We all deserve judgment. We all contribute to the chaos of our world either by the things we do or the things we refuse to do. And that's why we need Jesus.

Jesus is the prince of peace. The destroyer of chaos. The one who holds the authority over life and death. Sin and evil. The one who died in order to save. I love how one of my favorite authors, Paul Scherer, once put it, writing in the midst of World War II - "(Christ) stands not at the circumference but at the center of the human experience because sin stands there: to be met in the gospel with more than love; to be met with rescue. (In Christ) all that could become man in God and all that could become God in man got into the world to work out His holy will, not around the edges but from the very heart and core of all that is worst and most irrevocable about living. The 20th century, the death that rains out of the skies, stripped and broken lives wandering forlornly across the frontiers of Europe, war chattering its red insanities on the horizon of every day that dawns, your life, my life, with their old habits that cling like barnacles to a ship's hull, all of it piling up into weird and monstrous shapes! The hand that lays hold of such a world is terrible, crushing empires; but pierced, bringing life again out of death. Lifting all our wrong and all our rebellion until it becomes as it were God's own, and He Himself becomes it's victim. There is no deliverance out of the process of history. There is only deliverance in it, and that by a God who is not alone outside it or against it but in the process Himself."

Friends, the only hope we have for peace in the midst of our chaotic world is Jesus. The Prince of Peace. The Author of our salvation. The Name that is above every name. The Wonderful Counselor and Mighty God. And the good news of the gospel is that He has come to deliver us! He has come to rescue us! He has come to meet us right where we are in the middle of all we are going through! He will never leave us or forsake us! He will never abandon us to our fate! He is with us. He is for us. And if we will simply humble ourselves and turn to Him, we will find Him waiting with open arms. May we turn to Him as a nation. As a church. As individuals. So that we may receive the peace that only He can bring.

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Kings 17-19

June 24, 2020
THE WORD OF THE LORD

Reading for today: 1 Kings 17-19

I love the story of Elijah. I love his faithfulness. I love his courage. I love his passion. I love his heart. What makes Elijah so great was his ability to listen to the Word of the Lord. His sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. His humble submission and willingness to sit in God's presence in silence. There was nothing great about Elijah. Nothing unusual. Nothing out of the ordinary. He was simply a human being. A human being like any other human being. A man just like any other man. But he was called to play a specific role in God's Kingdom and the life of Israel.

Elijah was a prophet. A man set apart to hear the Word of the Lord and deliver it to God's people. The Word of the Lord came to Elijah, telling him there would be a famine in the land and to go and live by a brook where the ravens would feed him. When the brook ran dry, the Word of the Lord came to Elijah and told him to go to Zrephath where a widow would care for him. When the widow's son died, the Word of the Lord came through Elijah to raise him the dead. The Word of Lord challenged Elijah to risk his life and confront King Arab. Queen Jezebel. 450 prophets of Baal. After a miraculous victory, the Word of the Lord opened Elijah's eyes to see the coming rain. When Elijah ran for his life, the Word of the Lord again came to him bringing comfort and peace.

Notice where the power lies. Not in Elijah. Not in his strength. Not in his confidence. Not in his power. No, the Word of the Lord has an authority all its own. A divine power to tear down every stronghold and every high thing that sets itself against the knowledge of God. It is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe, Jew and Gentile alike. And if there is anything that sets Elijah apart, it is his obedience. Simply his willingness to hear and obey, seemingly without question. This is what makes him great.

Do you want to be great in the Kingdom? Do you want to do great things for God? Do you want the abundant life Jesus promises? Do you believe you will do greater things than even Jesus himself? As He promises in John 14:12? "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father." (John 14:12) You don't need wealth. You don't need education. You don't need professional success and achievement. All you need is obedience. A humble spirit. A willing heart. God specializes in using such vessels for His glory in the world.

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Kings 20-21

June 25, 2020
GRACE

Readings for today: [1 Kings 20-21](#)

One of the things that I'm always amazed by is the grace of God. The verdict on King Ahab is clear. He is not a godly king. He breaks all the commandments. He does not love Yahweh. He is as pagan as they come and yet God still reaches out to him. Still delivers him. Still rescues him from his enemies. It reminds me of what Paul says in Romans 5:10, "While we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son..."

God's grace is truly unconditional and that seems scandalous to us. We can't wrap our heads and hearts around it. God's grace does not discriminate. It is there for the prodigal as well as the Pharisee. It is there for the sinner and the saint. It is freely offered to any and all whether they be black or white or brown. Rich or poor. Gay or straight. Old or young. God shows no partiality. All He asks is that we receive it. We trust it. We open our hearts to it.

Sadly, we too often reject it. Much like Ahab. Ben-hadad has gathered a massive force to bring against Israel. Thirty-two kings join him in this fight. They bring horses and chariots which were the Sherman Tanks of their day. They invade the northern kingdom of Israel and march right up to the gates of the capital city of Samaria. Ahab knows he can't win. He offers all his gold and silver to buy them off. No deal. The army takes their positions. The trumpets are about to sound. Victory is assured. Israel will be destroyed. Ahab looks on helplessly from his position on the walls. And then he hears a voice at his side. A prophet has been sent by God. "Behold, I will give this great multitude into your hand this day so that you shall know I am the Lord." Why doesn't God leave Ahab to his fate? After all, he deserves it. He's earned it. The just decree would be for Ahab and all who follow him to die. But God is merciful and gracious. He loves us with an everlasting love. God desires all to be saved and come to a knowledge of His truth. Even an evil king like Ahab.

What about you? Does this give you hope? Some of us have things in our past that we think God would never forgive. We have memories that bring us shame. We have seen things and done things that are terrible and tragic. And yet God still loves us. Warts and all. Does this discourage you? Make you think less of God? Perhaps you're more like me and you wish God were more consistent. Be careful what you ask for! God's grace is baffling to would-be Pharisees like us. That's why Jesus had such problems with them. God's grace seemingly bends and breaks His own rules for the purpose of drawing all people to Himself. Our story today only demonstrates the lengths God is willing to go in order to accomplish His saving purposes in our world. And as remarkable as this story is, it doesn't even hold a candle to the scandal of the cross. God dying to save a world at war with Him. God dying to save a people in rebellion against Him. God dying to turn His enemies into friends. Amazing grace indeed!

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Kings 22, 2 Chronicles 18-20

June 26, 2020
ACCOUNTABILITY

Readings for today: [1 Kings 22](#), [2 Chronicles 18-20](#)

Do you have a Micaiah in your life? Someone who is willing to be honest? To give it to you straight? Someone who is unafraid to spare your feelings? Do you have someone in your life who holds you accountable? Who asks you hard questions? Who is willing to confront you on your sin? Do you have someone in your life who you listen to? Respect? Love enough to receive their critique well? Sadly, it's my experience that most people, even most Christians, do not have such a person in their life.

Ahab had such a person...and he hated him. "There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the Lord, Micaiah the son of Imlah, but I hate him, for he never prophesies good concerning me, but evil." (1 Kings 22:8) Ahab was an insecure king. He didn't want to hear the truth. He surrounded himself with people who would tell him what he wanted to hear. Sycophants. "Yes-men." People who did not have Israel's best in mind but only their influence and position before the king. This is one of the reasons power tends to corrupt. The more success and fame and influence one gains in life, the more one attracts such people. Power is the ultimate aphrodisiac and it takes great humility and intentionality to surround oneself as President Lincoln once did with a "team of rivals." Ahab was clearly no Lincoln. It was so obvious, King Jehoshaphat immediately picked up on it as they planned their attack on Ramoth-gilead. Jehoshaphat wanted to hear from the Lord so he asked Ahab to call a real prophet. Someone who was willing to speak the truth. To share God's Word even if it involved judgement. So Ahab calls Micaiah. And Micaiah delivers the bad news. "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. And the Lord said, 'These have no master; let each return to his home in peace.'" (1 Kings 22:17) Ahab throws up his hands. I told you so. This guy has it out for me. He never brings me good news. And then Micaiah goes on, "Therefore hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left; and the Lord said, 'Who will entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' And one said one thing, and another said another. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord, saying, 'I will entice him.' And the Lord said to him, 'By what means?' And he said, 'I will go out, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' And he said, 'You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do so.'" (1 Kings 22:19-22)

This section is key. When we refuse to repent. When we refuse to humble ourselves before the Lord. When we refuse to listen to His voice. He brings judgment. He forces us to our knees. He actively opposes the proud. God sends a lying spirit into the sycophants that Ahab surrounded himself with. He uses the very means Ahab had chosen to insulate himself against the Word of God to bring about Ahab's destruction. Let that sink in for a minute. These men were ALREADY lying to Ahab. In fact, they had based their entire careers on deceit and telling the king exactly what he wanted to hear. So God was not treating Ahab unfairly or unjustly. He simply was using their sin to bring about His sovereign will.

So let me ask again, do you have a Micaiah in your life? Someone who can speak hard truth to you in love? Someone who is bold enough to hold you accountable? Someone you submit to in humility? Someone who is close enough as a brother and/or sister and who is faithful enough to confront you on your sin? If you do not have such a person in your life then let me suggest you have made the same mistake - wittingly or unwittingly - as Ahab. You have surrounded yourself with people who do not have your best in mind and you need to go deeper. You need to challenge yourself. Make yourself vulnerable. Empower another person to hold you accountable. The reality is we do not "die to self" naturally. We must be forced to give up our life. We must be challenged to give up self. We must be held accountable as we struggle along this narrow way.

Readings for tomorrow: [2 Kings 1-4](#)

June 27, 2020
MIRACLES

Readings for today: [2 Kings 1-4](#)

Today's reading is full of miracles. God healing the waters of Jericho. God filling up a dry land with pools of water. God creating a supply of never-ending oil. God raising a child from death. Miracles are hard for those of us raised in a scientific worldview to accept. We believe such phenomena need to be observable and repeatable or they can't have happened. We believe there must be some kind of natural explanation so we do all kinds of mental gymnastics trying to explain them away. Surely the water wasn't actually bad? Surely the water that filled the pools was a freak rain storm? Surely the woman just wasn't aware of how much oil she did have? Surely the boy was just sick or unconscious or in a coma of some kind.

Miracles are by definition unrepeatable events. They are one-time occurrences where the Lord of the universe intervenes supernaturally in His creation. If one truly believes there is a God then one must conclude He is not bound by the same laws of nature He established that govern His creation. He is the Creator after all. Not a created being. He exists outside of time and space. He is truly free and unbounded. He is not subject to what He creates and therefore is able to act as He sees fit.

I have personally witnessed miracles in my life. I have many friends around the world who testify to miracles they have seen. I have seen God heal those who are sick. I have even witnessed a resurrection. These are awe-inspiring events that drive me to my knees before the Lord. They are humbling because of how they bring you face to face with the power of God. But I also know many who question God's miracles. They wonder why they haven't seen God act in such ways. They wonder why God performs miracles for some and not others. They sometimes reject miracles simply because they seem so arbitrary and unfair. Such thinking only exposes the poverty of our spiritual condition.

We don't deserve miracles. We don't earn miracles. We don't claim miracles. God is not a genie in a bottle who owes us three wishes. He cannot be manipulated or controlled or bound to our will. He is sovereign. He sees all of history and all of creation stretched out before Him all the time. He chooses to act as He wills to accomplish what is often a hidden purpose. Who are we to question His wisdom? Who are we to question His judgment? God never promises us life will be fair. He never promises to treat everyone the same. These are American ideals. Human ideals. And God is not bound to follow our limited understanding of justice. What does God promise? He promises to love us. He promises to be with us. He is faithful to us. He loves each of us with an everlasting love and that should be miracle enough for us.

June 29, 2020
OPEN OUR EYES

Readings for today: [2 Kings 5:1-8:15](#)

I have heard it said that the world has yet to see the power that would be unleashed through one man or woman who's sold out to God. I disagree. I think we see such power all the time. Certainly in Scripture. Take the story of Elisha for instance. He's a one-man wrecking crew when it comes to Syria. Ben-hadad wanted to destroy Israel. Invaded time after time. He had the best generals. Mighty men of valor like Naaman. The odds were surely in his favor. But Israel had one advantage...Elisha. A man who loved God with all his heart. From Elisha's deep faith sprung wisdom and insight and even prophetic utterances. He thwarted the plans of Ben-hadad to such an extent that his counselors believed it was like Elisha was hanging out in Ben-hadad's bedroom!

Elisha posed such a great threat that Ben-hadad sent his entire army on a seek and destroy mission. Find him. Kill him. Destroy whatever city is giving him refuge. So Elisha and his servant wake up one morning only to see the Syrian army arrayed in all its might before them. It must have been an intimidating sight. The servant is immediately afraid. What will we do? How will we survive? But Elisha doesn't miss a beat. He asks God to open the eyes of his servant so that he can see what Elisha sees. Horses. Chariots. The mountains ringed with fire from the army of the Lord.

This is one of my favorite stories in all of Scripture because of the reminder that though my circumstances may seem bleak. Though I may undergo all kinds of trials and tribulations. Though I may suffer and struggle and hurt. Though the enemy wage war against me. Though the government or culture or society grow increasingly hostile to the gospel. No matter what may come, my adversaries - as numerous as they may be - are no match for the armies of the Lord! His sovereign hand continues to lead and guide and protect. His power cannot be measured. His wisdom cannot be fathomed. And if I will simply lift my eyes above the hills, I will see where my true help comes! (Psalm 121)
Think about where we find ourselves as a culture today. We are drifting away from our Judeo-Christian moorings. Morality is changing. Truth is relative. Scores are abandoning faith altogether. We shouldn't be surprised. We have only ourselves to blame. Christians largely became complacent over the last several decades, settling for a cultural form of the Christian faith that held no real power to transform. Rather than preach the gospel, we turned to moral therapeutic deism. Self-help with a little Jesus thrown in. As society continued its drift, we turned to political power, seeking to enforce our vision of the Kingdom of God. But for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. So the harder we tried, the more pushback we received. The result is a nation that is becoming increasingly hostile to the Christian faith. Would that we could recapture the spirit of Elisha! He sought no reward for his deeds. He never tried to turn his gifts into political power. Instead, he simply served his people with as much faith as he possibly could and he left the results up to God.

"Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all." (Ecclesiastes 9:11) I frequently find myself in positions where I am weak. I have no power. No authority. I am not strong or swift or wise or wealthy. In those moments, I am tempted to despair. And that's when God has me right where He wants me! God does His best work when I come to the end of myself. God does His greatest work when I get out of the way. God is at His most glorious when I am weak and afraid and lonely and have nowhere else to turn. All I have to do is open my eyes. See the power He has brought to bear. Sit back and watch Him go to work. Trust Him for the victory.

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Kings 8:16-29, 2 Chronicles 21:1-22:9

June 30, 2020
LEAVING A LEGACY

Readings for today: [2 Kings 8:16-29](#), [2 Chronicles 21:1-22:9](#)

“And he departed to with no one’s regret.” Woof. That’s rough. To come to the end of your life with no one to mourn your passing. No one to make fire in your honor. No words shared at your funeral. Nothing to say in your obituary beyond your birthdate and death date. Perhaps Jehoram earned his fate. After all, he killed all his brothers when he ascended the throne. He enticed the people to abandon the worship of the Living God. He lost several battles. Suffered terribly at the end of his life, dying in great agony. He left Judah far worse than he found it. All in all, a terrible king.

I’ve performed these kinds of funerals. Funerals where very few people attend. Very few words are said. Very few kind sentiments expressed. I remember a tragic funeral for a young woman who was kidnapped and murdered. She ran with a rough crowd all her life and it tragically caught up to her. All her closest friends could talk about was the way she partied. How much she could drink. It was heartbreaking. I remember a funeral for an older man who died from alcoholism. About three or four people showed up for his funeral and they all wanted it over as soon as possible so they could get out of there. No words to share. Nothing about love. Compassion. Family. He died pretty much alone. To no one’s regret.

These moments are burned into my memory. I cannot shake them no matter how hard I try. They serve as a lesson to us all about how we live and why we live. To honor what’s truly important in life. God. Family. Friends. Seeking the lost. Serving the least of these in our world. Taking the time and making the time to live not for ourselves but for the sake of others. To give ourselves away in an attempt to make this world a better place. To leave this world better than the way we found it. It may be breaking a generational pattern in your family. Speaking kindly to friends in need. Helping a stranger. Sharing the gospel with someone you know. Maybe it’s serving in a particular mission endeavor at home or abroad. Or just taking the time to tuck your kids into bed at night and tell them a story. Sometimes the most significant moments of our lives are the simplest.

Through it all, the most important thing we can do is seek after God. Ask Him for His wisdom to show us the way. To help make our lives count. Serving Christ is the best way to leave a legacy as we have seen over and over again throughout the books of 1&2 Kings and 1&2 Chronicles. The legacies of each king is measured primarily by how they honored God with their lives. Honor God and their lives and subjects were blessed. Dishonor God and their lives and subjects were cursed. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, “Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you.” (Matt. 6:33) Or, as my friend Ray Noah likes to say, “You take care of the things God cares about (lost people) and He will take care of the things you care about.”

Readings for tomorrow: [2 Kings 9-11](#), [2 Chronicles 21:10-23:21](#)