

Saving Grace Daily Devotion

Monday, January 18

Listen

Jonah 3:4

⁴Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

Some of us might be familiar with the story of Jonah. He was a prophet commanded by God to call out against Nineveh, "that great city," because its evil had reached the heavens. By the end of the story, we hear Jonah tell us why he never wanted to obey the Lord's command. From Jonah' own mouth, "that is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster," (Jonah 4:2). And Jonah didn't try to make it easy for the Lord to accomplish his work of mercy. The only thing he spoke to the city is what is cited above in verse 4, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" Yet, the whole city repented, from the King to the lowest of citizens, "the people of Nineveh believed God," (Jonah 3:5). God accomplishes his will even when we are rebellious against him. He works to forgive. He works to bring about his mercy. He works to prove his loving faithfulness. And, as we set our minds on Jesus, if God can work repentance for a city through a rebellious prophet, then what might God be able to do for the world through his obedient son?

Take **2 minutes** to think about this verse in Jonah. If it helps fill the time, answer these questions:

Is it always easy to hear a word from God? (Does it ever frighten you?)

Is Jonah justified in wanting to withhold the mercy of God from the Ninevites?

Has there ever been a person or a group of people that you'd hate to see in the church? What might God like to see happen?

Saving Grace Daily Devotion

Tuesday, January 19

Pray

Mark 1:14-15

¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news^[1] of God,^[1] ¹⁵ and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near;^[k] repent, and believe in the good news.”^[1]

We have just heard God’s word from the mouth of a rebellious prophet Jonah the son of Amittai. Now we hear God’s word to us from the obedient son of God Jesus Christ. This is the good news of Jesus from his own lips. It consists of three things: 1.) The time is fulfilled, 2.) the kingdom of God has come near, 3.) repent, and believe the good news. The time of waiting is over. God had worked for hundreds and thousands of years through the Jewish people. He built them out of the family of Abraham and established them as a nation on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Yet, even with all the promises of God, they were a self-destructive people and the nation was overwhelmed time and time again by foreign nations. Now, God was making good on his promises. The time was fulfilled when Jesus stepped onto the scene. This was God in the flesh coming to bring salvation to his people and all the nations. So, his will would be done on earth as it is in heaven—the kingdom of God has graced this earth. Now, God desires that we turn from evil and violence in order to entrust him with our lives—he tells us to repent and believe. Jonah just gave people the bad news and it turned a whole city around. Jesus delivers to us the good news. Let this gift from God stir up hope in your soul for what God is doing in the world.

Take **2 minutes** to pray about what you have been learning from God. Remember:

God sent his perfect son Jesus at the fullness of time, but he works through imperfect servants to minister to his people all the time. (this includes you!)

God’s judgements can open an opportunity for repentance.

The kingdom of God is near.

Feel free to end your prayer in this way: *Dear Lord, Heavenly Father, thank you for delivering the good news to us in a way that we can understand. These days we are so often frightened by bad news and chaos seems to be the rule of the day. But your word creates life and new life. Bring order to your world according to the good news, we pray in Jesus’ name, Amen*

Saving Grace Daily Devotion

Wednesday, January 20

Family Devotion Day

Today's verse is just a simple reminder for each of us to have hope and trust in God. He has a plan for each one of us and sometimes we just don't understand. However, not understanding God's plan for us shouldn't stop us from having hope and trusting in Him. He knows exactly what He's doing.

Jeremiah 17:7

"Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord.

Activity 1: Reread this verse then ask yourself "What is God asking me to do?" and "Am I fulfilling His request?"

Activity 2: Repeat (as many times and as often as you need to): "Lord, I trust you!"

Saving Grace Daily Devotion

Thursday, January 21

Study

1 Corinthians 7:31b

“...For the present form of this world is passing away.”

We have been reading passages from the letters to the Corinthian church for the past couple of weeks. You might have noticed that these passages are pretty down-to-earth and they don't shy away from topics that might make us blush. Yet, it's important to speak about intimate matters that impact our lives for better or for worse. On top of that, Paul is responding to this church and their particular questions about marriage and principles for intimate relationships. Paul, as a minister of the gospel, does not encourage a “hush, hush” mentality when it comes to answering his flock's questions about these matters.

So, one of his summary remarks about whether one should get married or not is found in verse 31 quoted above. “For the present form of this world is passing away,” (1 Cor. 7:31b). It might come as a surprise that such a strong statement about the end of the world is really just talking about whether someone should get married or not. But, Paul cares for the people he is addressing, understands the gravity of what Christ is doing, and realizes the significant impact marriage can have on anyone's life. So, he brings his biblical knowledge and his knowledge of what God is doing in Jesus Christ to bear on the subject. He doesn't end up giving them a spelled-out principle that they must obey. Instead, he says, “that in view of the present distress it is good for a person to remain as he is,” (1 Cor. 7:26). He encourages members of this congregation to stay married if they are married or to stay single if they are single. But this is not a matter of sin, but a matter of wisdom that must be figured out on an individual basis. Paul encourages people who can't imagine staying single that, “he who marries his betrothed does well, and he who refrains from marriage will do even better,” (1 Cor. 7:38).

Well, what does this have to do with us? Maybe we are in a position where a major decision is being made about a romantic relationship we have had in our lives. Then Paul's words speak right to us. But whatever decisions we might be facing we can try to reason along with Paul. We can have the conversation that asks since, “the present form of this world is passing away,” what should I do? If we attend to this question, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can be kept safe from two pitfalls. First, we won't get caught up in thinking that worldly affairs are somehow beneath us as spiritual Christians. Paul was concerned with the day to day, earthly outcome of whether someone might get married or not. Second, we don't need to get so caught up in the matters of this world that we spend every waking hour trying to ring out every last drop of satisfaction from the life we lead. Paul reminds his people that God has fulfilled his promises. A lot has been finished and what's left will require a big renovation to what's here...so don't get too tied to this way of living. Martin Luther encouraged his flock in worldly affairs to “not sink too deeply into them either with love and desire or suffering and boredom, but should rather behave like guests on earth, using everything for a short time because of need.” (Luther, *Works*, 28:52).

Pray: *Dear Lord, Heavenly Father, open our ears and soften our hearts to listen to your voice of wisdom throughout our lives. Remind us again that the decisions that we make in this life are important so that we would come to you seeking your guidance in Jesus' name, Amen*

Saving Grace Daily Devotion

Friday, January 22

Hymn Devotion: *O Word of God Incarnate*

Scripture: Mark 1:14-20 *The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry and Jesus Calls the First Disciples*

History: Author, William W How (1823-1897) studied at Wadham College, Oxford, and Durham University and was ordained in the Church of England in 1847. He served various congregations and became Suffragan Bishop in east London in 1879 and Bishop of Wakefield in 1888. Called both the "poor man's bishop" and "the children's bishop," How was known for his work among the destitute in the London slums and among the factory workers in west Yorkshire. He wrote a number of theological works about controversies surrounding the Oxford Movement and attempted to reconcile biblical creation with the theory of evolution. He was joint editor of Psalms and Hymns (1854) and Church Hymns (1871). While rector in Whittington, How wrote some sixty hymns, including many for children. His collected Poems and Hymns were published in 1886. This text was first published in the 1867 addition to Psalms and Hymns (1854), a supplementary collection How edited with Thomas B. Morrell. If you recognized this name and history, you may recall he was the author of the hymn, "*For All the Saints*", as well.

1 O Word of God incarnate,
O Wisdom from on high,
O Truth unchanged, unchanging,
O Light of our dark sky:
We praise you for the radiance
That from the hallowed page,
A lantern to our footsteps,
Shines on from age to age.

2 The Church from you, dear Master,
Received the gift divine;
And still that light is lifted
O'er all the earth to shine.
It is the chart and compass
That, all life's voyage through,
Mid mists and rocks and quicksands
Still guides, O Christ, to you.

3 Oh, make your Church, dear Savior,
A lamp of burnished gold
To bear before the nations
Your true light, as of old;
Oh, teach your wand'ring pilgrims
By this their path to trace,
Till, clouds and darkness ended,
They see you face to face.

Devotion: In this week's Gospel reading, Jesus calls his first disciples, Simon (Peter), Andrew, James, and John, implying them to "follow Me". Jesus calls us to follow Him as well and promises to always be with us when we walk in His light. In this week's hymn of the day, the prevalent image is light: God is the Light; his Word is a light for our path; and we, the church, must be a light for the nations. How first published this song with a subhead quotation from Proverbs 6:23: *"For the commandment is a lamp: and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life"* (KJV). Some hymnodists have stated that the song is based on Psalm 119:105, which contains nearly the same imagery: *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path."* This hymn praises Christ as the fulfillment of God's word. God sent Jesus in human form to be the true "Light" to serve as a "lantern" to guide the church (vs. 1-2) and to inspire it to be a "lamp" for shining God's "light" to all the world (vs. 2-3). The text also includes travel imagery: "footsteps" (vs. 1), "chart and compass," "voyage" (vs. 2), and "pilgrims" (st. 3). Singing this text, we pray that the church, the people of God, will always be led by the Scriptures to seek Christ, to whom the Scriptures point, and to bring the good news of his Word to the nations.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, We thank You for sending your Son, Jesus, into the world as the true "Light". As You called Your disciples to follow You, we are being called to follow You as well. We know we may stray from Your path, but we thank you for Your Light that will always be with us to guide us back. Help us to share Your light with others so that all may experience Your wonderful love and grace. Amen.

Saving Grace Daily Devotion

Saturday, January 23

Prepare for Worship

Psalm 62:11-12

¹¹ Once God has spoken;

twice have I heard this:

that power belongs to God,

¹² and steadfast love belongs to you, O Lord.

For you repay to all

according to their work.

The Hebrew word for Psalms *Tehillim* which means "Praises." They are praises to God for who He is and what He has done. The writer of the Psalm, calls out to God, "Only to God does my soul hope for silently; from Him is my salvation." (Psalm 62:2) The rest of the world plots against man/ humankind, because they are afraid of people outwardly, they do one thing while inwardly they are deceitful. "They delight in lies; with his mouth they bless, but inwardly they curse forever." (Psalm 62:5) King David turns to the LORD (LORD with all capital letters in the Old Testament means "YHWH," "Yahweh," "I Am, what I Am," "He Will Be," the root word is "Being" The "I Am" is all being and brings all things into existence.) (Exodus 3:14) David calls upon the one who "Is and bring all things into existence the "I Am."

He places his trust in the one who is unmovable, The Rock, a stronghold who will not let him falter, stall, think twice, change his mind, waver or oscillate in his resolve to trust in the LORD. On God all of his hopes rest for deliverance, honor, refuge, strength, steadfast love and justice. He waits upon the LORD in silence because salvation comes from no other. The LORD (The I Am) all power belongs to Him (Psalm 62:11) He will deliver him and the LORD delivers us as well. The LORD has spoken.

This is the one in whom we place our trust. He never fails. He will always be there as our Rock, our refuge and our fortress. In Him we have life itself.

LORD, You are and always will be. Remind me today that You are there as my rock and salvation, my refuge and strength. When we feel unsteady remind us that we will never be shaken for we place our trust in You alone. Amen

Saving Grace Daily Devotion

Sunday, January 24

Praise

Mark 1:18

¹⁸ And immediately they left their nets and followed him.

Jesus simply says, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." (Mark 1: 17) Simon and Andrew didn't need time to think it over. They respond immediately and followed Jesus. They didn't tell Jesus "Could you wait a little while; we're fishing now and we'll be done in a few hours." Instead, they respond, "And immediately they left their nets and followed him." (Mark 1:18) Jesus speaks to their hearts, the Holy Spirit is upon Him and they respond immediately.

Jesus isn't done yet, He went a little further, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They're mending their nets. The phrase "mending their nets," meant to put everything in order for fishing the next evening. Mending the nets meant adjusting them, cleaning them, repairing them, "making them perfect," so they would be effective for the next evening of fishing any flaws and the fish would get away. James and John, "left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed Him." (Mark 1:20) Not everything is perfect with the nets, but that doesn't matter, they've been called to something higher.

When Jesus calls us today to follow Him. He doesn't necessary call us to leave our jobs, He calls us to leave all of the things that hinder us from following Him behind. He calls us to cast those things aside and listen to His voice, His Word in scripture. It transforms our lives and bring hope. It calls us to use whatever we do in this world to make a difference for the Kingdom of God. We are to use it to tell others what Jesus has done. Immediately everything has changed.

Almighty God, thank you for sending Your Son Jesus Christ to call us to follow. Guide us in our occupations, jobs and our retirement to see opportunities to tell others what You are doing and how You change everything. Give us Your hope and peace that passes all understanding as You lead the way. Amen