

Friday, September 8, 2017

Deny

Matthew 15-16

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"
Matthew 16:24-26

It would seem that before any of the disciples knew that Jesus would die on a cross, He taught them that they must be ready to die to follow Him. Jesus has told Peter that the Father has revealed the truth about the Messiah (16:16-17). Peter then quickly illustrates by his words and actions that he does not fully understand what it means (16:22). Jesus teaches them and as He teaches them, He teaches me. Just as the Messiah must obey the Father (16:21), so also, those who follow Messiah must be willing to deny themselves and obey Him. It is a complete transfer of the will and it must occur daily. Daily, I must be ready to die to my self and live to Christ. It reminds me of Paul saying that he has been crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20). While the disciples would not yet have fully understood the perspective of Paul, Jesus is teaching what will be needed to follow Him—total sacrifice. I must learn to deny my self. That is hard to do because all my life I have learned to feed my self—that part of me that is only interested in me. I love to place myself in the center of the universe. I convince myself that everything revolves around me. But that is not at all true. God is the center of everything there is and everything revolves around Him. Denying my self allows me to place Him in the proper place in my life and allows me to lose my life only to find it! Another crazy paradox of the kingdom of God.

Father, please help me die to my self. Help me take up my cross daily so that I may follow You and live a life of total obedience. You know how hard this is for me, Lord. I have spent so much time focused so selfishly on myself. I need Your help daily to be Your servant. Amen.

Saturday, September 9, 2017

Forgive

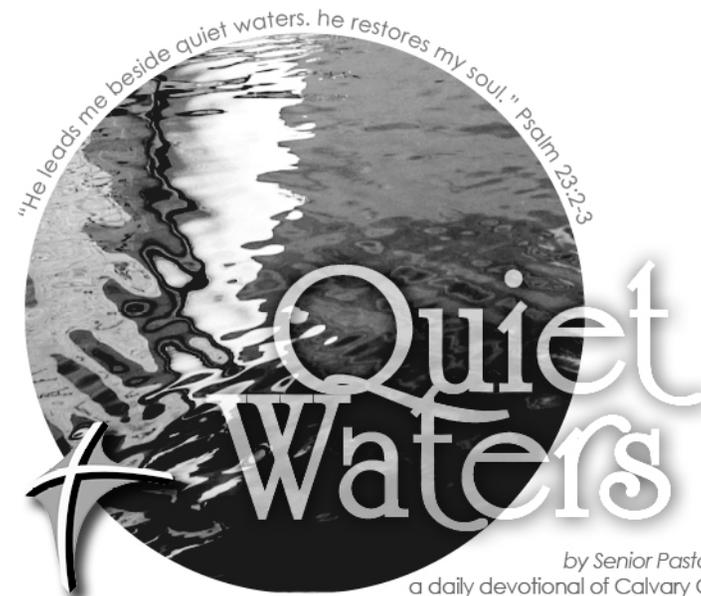
Matthew 17-18

"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from the heart."
Matthew 18:35

In this great discourse on forgiveness, the Teacher does a masterful job of helping us realize the folly of unforgiveness in the life of one who has been redeemed. In 18:21-35, we find the parable of the unmerciful servant. It gives a stark contrast between the mercy of God and the mercy of men in their fallen state. If a person is unable to forgive, it shows that they have not received the forgiveness that has been offered to them. When I come to God, I come realizing that I owe a debt I cannot pay. It is a debt of sin. My only hope is to throw myself at His mercy and pray that He accepts me. When He does, and when I embrace that mercy and forgiveness, and when I understand the liberation given to me, I long to give that to others. There is no person who has sinned against me to anywhere near the degree that I have sinned against God. It is like I owe God millions of dollars and someone owes me a couple of bucks. If I have been cleared of a large debt, am I not able to release someone from a small debt? The warning in this passage is clear. If I hold on to any unforgiveness, I do not truly understand all that I have been forgiven. I need to check myself carefully to ensure that I am not the foolish servant spoken of in this passage. I praise God for the times He allows me to forgive others in the way that He has forgiven me!

Father, help me to be always ready to forgive completely, just as You have forgiven me. Help me remember and live in Your mercy. Please let it radiate from my life. Amen.

September 4 - 9, 2017



by Senior Pastor Chuck Cervenka
a daily devotional of Calvary Community Church

Monday, September 4, 2017

Touched

Matthew 7-8

When he came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cured of his leprosy. Matthew 8:1-3

When the leper came up to Jesus and asked to be healed, Jesus did the unthinkable. He touched the man. He touched the untouchable. This man should not even have come and knelt before Jesus. Lepers were to be separate from other people. They were not supposed to come near to anyone. A person with leprosy was required to yell out, "Unclean, unclean!" whenever anyone came near. The last thing that anyone would do is touch a leper because touching someone who was considered unclean would make the person who touched them unclean as well. They would be unclean to come and worship God as described in the Law. Eventually, that came to mean that a person who was untouchable was unable to be in the presence of God. This is how many people feel. Shame keeps them from understanding that God does not view them as untouchable. Jesus makes this real. He touches a man who probably thought that he would never feel a touch again. Imagine being in a place in your life where you feel untouchable—where you feel as though everyone should avoid you—and then Jesus comes and touches you. I have often thought that this man would have been much more impacted by the touch than by the healing. I know that I have been. The touch of Jesus in my life has changed everything about me. I have felt the touch of compassion that allows me to know that I am clean. I am pure in the sight of God. He does not see the leprosy of my sin. He sees the righteousness of His Son. I am clean. I do not ever need to feel ashamed again. I have been touched by my King.

Jesus, thank You for touching me! Thank You for seeing me as I was—trapped in sin and helplessness. Thank You for not turning me away. I know that I am clean before You and that I have been rescued. It causes me such great joy and such a desire to serve You with all that I am and all that I have. You are my amazing King. I knelt before You with great need and You heard my cry. Now I kneel before You in adoration and humility. You have my heart. Amen.

Tuesday, September 5, 2017

Harassed

Matthew 9-10

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

Matthew 9:36-38

Jesus sees the crowd. He does not just see the physical crowd, He sees the spiritual crowd as well. Jesus sees that these people are being harassed and that they are helpless to stand up to the harassment. This is spiritual harassment and torment from Satan and his demons. These people do not know that there is a Shepherd who loves them and who will free them from this harassment and helplessness. Truthfully, many of the people probably do not even know that they are being harassed. They think it is just the way it is. They do not realize they could be set free. It is the same today. So many people are being bombarded by the attacks of the evil one and they do not even realize that there is One who could set them free. They do not even realize what freedom is. It can be easy to avoid having compassion for those who are most harassed. Jesus shows the right response. Reveal the Shepherd to them. The harvest is plentiful. There are so many who are overwhelmed by this harassment. Laborers are needed! That is me. I have been saved to be sent. I am called to be a laborer and to take the message of hope into a world that is being harassed. They are helpless apart from the Good News of the Savior.

Dear God, please remind me often to see the crowd as You do! Help me see the great need they have for a Savior and help me to have the boldness to step into their pain and reveal Your love. Amen.

Wednesday, September 6, 2017

Humble

Matthew 11-12

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Matthew 11:28-30

Jesus makes an amazing statement here. He says that He is gentle and humble in heart. I am amazed at the humility of my King. I am also amazed at how gentle He truly is. Kings are not generally considered humble. As I consider it, I realize that I have not thought of God as humble. Yet He must be. This is not at all to diminish who He is. That is a lie that we live with here. We believe that pride is to be preferred. There are pride parades and other demonstrations that celebrate the sin of pride and arrogance. Yet here Jesus reminds me that it is in humility that I am most like Him. I have been created in the image of God. The image is made manifest in my humility. It is a burden to carry the weight of pride in my life. I must always look down on people and things (as C. S. Lewis has said). The burden of pride wearies me because it is my battle against God. There is no rest for the proud. There is great rest for the humble. Pride must move my agenda above everyone else's. Humility is content where it is. Jesus calls me to learn gentleness and humility from Him. It is a great invitation. As I find myself becoming more and more like my King in this, I am finding greater and greater rest for my soul. I have no need for pride. It is an evil taskmaster I choose not to serve. I am grateful to know my King and the humility of His heart. I pray that His humility will be seen in me.

My Dear King Jesus, thank You for the truth of these verses. Thank You for a burden that is light. Forgive my pride. It weighs me down and causes me so much pain. Take my burden so that I may be a reflection of You! Amen.

Thursday, September 7, 2017

Heart

Matthew 13-14

"Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path."

Matthew 13:18-19

The parable of the sower is a parable of the seed and the soil. In many ways it teaches more about the soil than it does the seed or the sower. The seed that is sown is the Word of God. It is the truth of the gospel and all that it teaches. It is the truth about Jesus. It is the message of salvation and it is the message of how to live the continued life of obedience. The soil is the heart. The heart is how the word is received. Jesus describes four possible soils in this passage and in so doing reveals the four types of heart that hear the word of truth. Only one of these types of hearts can receive the truth in a way that brings true salvation. There first heart is an exposed heart. Like the road it is open to the elements and has become hard. It is not interested in hearing the truth of Jesus. It is proud and cold. The second heart is an unfocused heart. It is looking for whatever can bring joy for a moment. If the Word of God can bring a moment of joy, it is brought in for those moments when it is needed. The third heart is a selfish heart. A selfish heart is thinking only of itself. These are the weeds. A selfish heart adds the word into all the weeds of selfishness and, as long as the word aligns with what that heart wants to hear, it will listen. But when the word calls for sacrifice, the word will be ignored. The final heart is the heart that will receive salvation, initial (justification), ongoing (sanctification), and eternal (glorification). This is the servant heart. It is a heart that recognizes that the word of the gospel brings the freedom of serving the King. While it seems paradoxical, it is actually quite understandable. A servant heart understands that serving the King is the greatest place of freedom.

Dear Father, find my heart always to be a servant heart, please! May I always be ready to hear Your Word spoken into my life, ready to change whatever needs to be changed so that I may stand for You alone. Amen.