

Net•Work Notes

Week 10, Day 1: The Cross Creation—New Creatures

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6:23)

Baptized for Life

Baptism is all about taking the plunge into a real life. It is not just a religious symbol (though I suppose even an act as crucial and meaningful as baptism can be emptied of its meaning when performed thoughtlessly or considered carelessly), but an act that focuses and communicates the life of God.

Take a few moments to read Romans chapter 6. Here Paul talks about the power of baptism. Baptism has power because the life of Jesus has power. In the life of Jesus we see what it really means for someone to live out life in the image of God and do the work of God. Paul in the letter to the Colossians says of Jesus: “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation...” Remember the very beginning of Net•Work? What did we learn about God’s creation of human beings: we discovered that we were creatures God had expressly formed in his own image. We were made to reflect God’s very life in relationship with God and others and in the good work we were created to do.

But we chose to live Self-centeredly, not God-centeredly. Notice Paul’s recap of the results: living self-centeredly ultimately brings death. Remember the Genesis results of sin (another way of saying living for self alone): separation from the God of life; strained, competitive

relationships between men and women; sibling rivalry; violence; pride; and growing alienation and bloodshed between people. In Paul’s words above: “the wages of sin is death!”

You are probably used to hearing that Jesus’ death on the cross saves human beings, that it saves us. But maybe you wondered why or how. Jesus’ death saves because it brings life. Instead of acting self-centeredly, Jesus lived out a life of God-centeredness (see tomorrow’s Net•Work Notes). Ironically perhaps, Jesus most expressed what it meant to be like God when he gave life away. Baptism is the reality of receiving that life. And Paul reminds us: this is given as a free gift. At the cross, Jesus dying our death, God gives life away.

Notice in Romans 6 Paul can call us either “slaves” of sin or “slaves” of righteousness (new life with God). What or who are you serving in your daily life? Are you living selfishly, self-centeredly? Or have you claimed your baptism, your plunge into God-life in Jesus Christ?

Take a couple moments to reflect or pray about your answers.

Net•Work Notes

Week 10, Day 2: The Cross Creation—New Creatures

“...Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.” (Philippians 2:5b-8)

Divine Selflessness

Take a moment to read the first 13 verses of chapter 2 of Paul’s letter to the Philippians. Here in just a few verses we hear what the life of Jesus Christ was all about. What does Paul say the glory or greatness of Jesus was? What was it about him that displayed the glory of being God?

Just this: that he was willing to set aside all his power and glory—that he was willing to give his life away for others. We discover that life is not found when we try to grab it from God or others. True life is found and experienced when we give it away. Jesus entered a world in which human beings were ruled by their own selfishness, their fear of death (cf. Hebrews 2:14-18). In the world in which Jesus lived and taught and called disciples, death ruled.

But Jesus did not let death have the last word. He would not live in fear of death. Instead he chose to give his life away for others. Death is the natural consequence of sin, of a broken relationship with God. Jesus had neither sin nor a broken relationship with God to earn death! He went to death willingly, not to die the death he had earned, but to die our death.

But we must never forget! The power of Jesus’ self-giving love is stronger than death or any power death exercises around us. The living God has the last word. The resurrection declares that death cannot hold Jesus Christ. To Jesus belongs the power of an indestructible life (cf. Hebrews 7:16). And this power Jesus Christ gives away to all who follow him. That is why, as Paul puts it, in the end

“at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.”

(Philippians 2:10-11)

When we make a decision to follow Jesus Christ, we are declaring our loyalty and love for the true Lord in the world: Jesus Christ, God with us. Our true Lord is not death or our own small selves, but the Living God we know in Jesus Christ, the God who is willing to humble himself in order to love.

Net•Work Notes

Week 10, Day 3: The Cross Creation—New Creatures

And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Images of God

When we come to Jesus, trusting him for our future, letting him lead us in our decisions, we are made a new people. The image of God that we were created in (but had marred by sin) is restored when our lives are joined to Jesus Christ (who is the “image of the invisible God” according to Paul in Colossians).

Paul knew that we become what we put our hearts and minds on. If we think only of ourselves and what we want or need, we slowly shrink to the dimensions of our own narrow, mostly selfish, desires. But Paul compares life with Jesus Christ to beholding the magnificent presence of the face of God. As we focus on Jesus Christ, he says that we are transformed by God’s Spirit to reflect more and more the character, mind, heart, and action of God. We are restored to a vital, living, growing relationship with God and God puts his Spirit within us (Paul can call us temples of God’s Spirit!). Jesus promised that he would not leave us orphans, but would send his Holy Spirit to live in us and remind us of his words.

You may wonder what the best way is to “behold” the face and person of Jesus Christ. It is simply this: spend time with Jesus by reading and meditating on his words, and then talking with Jesus about what you are learning. Christians spend time reading their Bibles, not so they

can become Bible experts, but because this is the best way to hear Jesus speaking to us, speaking to our lives.

Take some time to think about your own time spent with Jesus. How often are you now spending time reading God’s word and asking Jesus to teach you? Could you make a commitment to adding two more such times each week? For example if you currently meet with Jesus a couple of times a week, could you decide to make a commitment to set 4 times aside in the week ahead (and beyond!)? The more time that we spend with Jesus, the more opportunity Jesus has to do his transforming work.

Net•Work Notes

Week 10, Day 4: The Cross Creation—New Creatures

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood... (1 Peter 2:9)

Identity and Destiny

Take a few moments to read 1 Peter 2:1-17. This is a great description of the results of new life by faith in Jesus Christ, of a life built upon the foundation and rock of Jesus Christ. You remember that Peter was nicknamed "Rock" by Jesus, so it is no wonder that Peter spent time thinking about that name and what it might mean. What Jesus taught him was that in meeting Jesus, he met the one who could lead Peter to discover his true identity and calling in life.

You remember that we discovered that two main consequences of sin were that we lost our true selves, not understanding how to enter into vital, caring relationships with others, and we became confused about the good work we were to do. Not knowing our own identities, we kept manipulating others to get them to fulfill our desires, our need to be somebody. But look what happens as a result of union with Jesus Christ: we are given our true identities; we now know who we are: we are God's chosen people, we are loved sons and daughters of God. What an awesome identity to have. We no longer have to grasp after the false and empty identities that the world offers. I no longer have to put someone else down in order to be big in my eyes or the eyes of someone else. There is great strength in knowing we are one of God's people.

But remember as well that in the beginning we were created for a good work to do. But in departing God's presence and his purposes, our understanding of what we are called to do was lost: work became hardship and toil; envy crept in about whose work was really important (and leading to Cain's murder of his brother Abel). Again, notice what happens when we come to Christ: we are given back our calling to a good work. This work may take a variety of forms, because God loves variety in his people. But the basic dynamic of our work is shared: we are a holy priesthood. In other words, we do not work primarily to make money, to acquire things, or gain status or importance in the eyes of others. Our basic work is priesthood: offering up our time, our talent, our interests and passions, our education, our effort to God to show our love and passion for God. We do it in the Spirit of the great Christian missionary and Olympian, Eric Liddel, who said, "When I run, I feel the Lords' pleasure!"

When you run, work, learn, or play, do you feel the Lord's pleasure? Can you offer this day, tomorrow, and beyond to God as part of God's holy priesthood?

Net•Work Notes

Week 10, Day 5: The Cross Creation—New Creatures

Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. (Acts 2:46)

Saved for Life

I want you think today about your own life with Jesus Christ. Maybe you think that you are on the edge of this life and haven't yet fully experienced your "baptism", your immersion into this full life with Jesus. Maybe you used to experience life with Jesus Christ in a deep and real way in the past, but now it has settled into a routine that seems old or stale. Maybe you are just beginning to live with Jesus day by day and are beginning to experience how truly free and good this life can be. Try to spend some time sharing with Jesus what your life is like with him right now.

Read through the second chapter of Acts. In this chapter, Peter tells the story of how God has been acting in history to bring life to his people and how the story is made complete with Jesus and his ministry, death, and resurrection. Peter could not help but talk about what God has done in his life through the lordship of Jesus Christ. Peter knew that if you wanted to experience "salvation", it is experienced as we are rooted in faith and trust in Jesus himself. So when asked, Peter replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ...and you will be saved." The rest of the chapter describes what happened to the people as they put their trust in Jesus. They experienced a new community that experienced learning, joy, commitment to one another, worship, sharing, and more.

Their experience of life was so rich that others wanted to share what they had received.

Think about what you have received by being a follower of Jesus Christ. What has Christ meant to you? What do you believe you still need to experience?

Spend some time giving thanks to God for your life, the people who have shared Christ with you, and for your experiences of God's love. Consider including in your faith statement people who have helped share faith in Christ with you and how they made a difference in your life.