

Sunday Morning Starters:

He arose!

That's a start.

A Fourfold Prayer

The Psalms are the meditations of godly men. The fact that they are inspired means that they are petitions worthy of our imitation. Four requests are made in Psalm 26 which we might well echo.

1. Vindicate me. This is a request for your innocence to be proven, for others to know that your plans and reasons are right. Be careful about vindicating yourself. You're apt to go too far. It's better to leave vindication up to the Lord.

2. Try me. This is a prayer for the Lord to search your heart, to inspect your deepest thoughts and purposes and affections. You should make this prayer at least twice a day – morning and night.

3. Do not gather my soul with sinners. “Don't lump me together with the wicked,” is what David is asking. Pray for good companions and request the wisdom to be a good companion yourself.

4. Redeem me. Here is a plea for deliverance, salvation from temptation, from trials, from wicked men, from Satan, from sin and death. We should make use of this prayer frequently. The man who goes a day without it should review his spirituality.

Include these sentiments of David in your prayer for today and in your plans for tomorrow. They'll help keep your heart in the right place, your feet on the right path, and your eyes on the right goal. They'll keep you close to the Lord.

- Jason Moore

Early Picture of Restoration

This is a wonderful story. It is the story of a restoration, of getting back to what is true, of returning to the law. Nehemiah and Ezra sought to bring the people back to that law. They began that restoration by Ezra’s reading the law from a pulpit of wood (8:4-5). The people responded by listening carefully then doing what they heard. This they did “because they had understood the words that were declared unto them.” This is the lasting method of restoration – returning to the word, then doing it.

I once read where some of the excavators who unearthed some of the Egyptian Pharaoh’s tombs found some wheat over 1500 years old. They planted it and it grew as if the seed had been caught last year. It is that way with restoration. When the seed of God’s word is sown, no matter the culture, the time, or place, it will produce the same, predictable result.

Restoration is getting back to the book. It can only be done when people return day after day to the same book. “Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God” (Neh. 8:18).

Each generation is responsible for restoration. Each generation must examine the truth for itself and determine what to do with it. “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God” (I Pet. 4:11).

- Dee Bowman

Spats Among Loved Ones

The kingdom of God is filled with different kinds of people, thrown together because they now share a common bond in Christ. Because there is this new closeness among these many different personalities, there is always the possibility of bumping into one another, the possibility of confrontations, even controversy.

Paul and Barnabas were the closest of brethren. It was Barnabas who had befriended Paul just after his conversion when people were still afraid of him. They had worked side by side in the work of the Lord, traveling together extensively. Now there was a contention between them, one so sharp that they decided it best to separate. And separate they did. Barnabas took John Mark and went one way, Paul took Silas and went another.

Even though contentions come sometimes, they need not be permanent. In fact, they dare not be. When Paul was in prison at Rome, he wrote to Timothy, “Take Mark, and bring him with thee; for he is profitable to me for ministry.” The quarrel was over, the preaching being more important than hurt or tender feelings.

We must love one another supremely and take care that personal differences don’t spill over into the congregation, that we keep personal differences personal.

- Dee Bowman

The Bread of Life

The miracles of Jesus were always practical in their aim. They were intended to lay the foundation for His teaching. The point to be gleaned from Jesus’ feeding of the 5000 is found the next day when He said to the multitudes, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger.”

Work not for the bread which perishes, but for the bread that endures. Don’t think that you’ve completed your work today when you’ve earned a living. If you did nothing to feed your soul today, you’re behaving like the crowds who sought Jesus only when they were filled with loaves.

Look to Jesus for all that you require. Do you need wisdom to decide? Do you need strength to overcome? Do you need hope to endure? Look to Jesus. He is the bread of life. He worked this miracle so that we would trust in His ability to provide for all that we need each day.

The resources of Jesus are never exhausted. Things are not as they appear. Jesus took five loaves and two fishes, gave the five thousand all they wanted, and ended up with twelve baskets of fragments. He can supply more than you need. No problem is too complex. No need is too severe. No obstacle is too great. Jesus is able to deliver you.

Well, go earn your bread today, but not wheat, or white, or the green stuff. Secure for yourself the bread that really matters, the kind that endures.

- Jason Moore

Trivial Pursuits

In colorful and pointed fashion the Proverbs give us warnings for the everyday perils we encounter. Hear the wise man’s warnings about some trivial pursuits that engage foolish hearts.

Covetousness. The man who hastens after wealth finds himself impoverished. He may secure riches but at the price of his soul. His eye is evil, because it is not set on what has real value.

Flattery. If you rebuke a man and he repents, he will afterwards love you more than if you had encouraged him in his wickedness. Even if he doesn’t repent, your actions find favor with God.

Disrespect. A man can rob father and mother in many ways. He can steal from their purse thinking that they owe him. He can deprive them of the respect they deserve when he speaks to them. He can neglect them in their old age. Solomon says that he is a friend to those who destroy temples.

Arrogance. The proud man will be humbled. His works will end in chaos. The humble man will be exalted. The Lord will give him success.

Ego. The man who trusts in himself will soon learn that he does not have as many answers as he thought. The man who trusts in the Lord is wise. He finds all the answers he requires.

Selfishness. The man who closes his eyes to the poor will save his wealth, but will inherit curses. The benevolent man will never lack.

Avoid the snares of the foolish today, and all your activities will meet with lasting success.

- Jason Moore

The Two Foundations

Jesus taught as one having authority. He called upon the multitudes who heard His preaching to do something. He gave them orders. He issued the charge that having seen His blueprint for life in the kingdom, it was time for the people to build. There were but two responses to His message.

The wise man builds his house upon the rock. The rock is Jesus Christ. It is His teaching which provides the foundation for the good life and the happy abode. The fact that He is God who cannot lie assures us of the truth of His teaching. The fact that He became a man to die in man’s stead gives us reason to build. The fact that He conquered sin and the grave makes the foundation indestructible and equips those who build upon it to face any storm of life which may assail them.

The foolish man builds his house upon the sand. The sand is any place without Jesus Christ. As the song says, “All other ground is sinking sand.” The man who doesn’t hear the teaching of Jesus, or who hears but doesn’t hearken, builds a house that cannot weather the storms of life. He builds on his own whims, on the beliefs of his parents, or on the values of society. All of these are shifting, sinking, shaking foundations. The house is doomed to fall.

Listen to Jesus today. He is the Master Builder. He alone can tell you where and how and with what materials to construct your life. Then build.

- Jason Moore

Sunday Morning Starters:

Plan your *righteousness*.

Plan your *righteousness* like you plan your work.

Plan your *righteousness* like you plan your fun.

Plan your righteousness *before* you plan your work and your fun.

If you don't plan it, you *won't* do it.

How do you expect *God* to plan for you when you make no plans for Him?

A Very Present Help In Trouble

Do you ever suffer from insomnia? It's a horrible way to spend the night. Seems the harder you try, the less likely you are to go to sleep. No matter what you count, no matter what kind of method you use, you are doomed to sleeplessness, an exasperating experience.

Many times such insomnia is caused by fears, anxieties, things we think might come to pass. There is hope, however. We need not fear. Listen.

God is our refuge. He is our place of safety. We can hide in Him and He will protect us. Even if the mountains fall into the sea, even if the mountains quake and the rivers flood, He is on His throne, and for the child of God, all is well. We are safe in the cleft of the Rock.

God is constant. He will never leave us nor forsake us. Even though our heathen enemies rage and even if our detractors dog us at every turn, He is ever near. He makes the wars to cease, destroys the implements of conflict, and stands astride the earth as its Conqueror. He is our Great God and we will not fear.

The next time you think things are bad, the next time you think things are unraveling and can't be retrieved, look up! God is on His throne. Take a deep breath, turn over and go back to sleep. He cares.

- Dee Bowman

The One Talent Man

I have been the one talent man. I still am in the extent of my abilities. But I mean in my attitude toward service, I've been the one talent man.

The one talent man glories in his thrift. He doesn't waste what the Lord has entrusted him. He isn't prodigal with his substance. He just doesn't do anything with it. He buries his talent and benefits nobody by it. I've done that. It's inexcusable.

The one talent man pities his meager abilities. Leave the teaching to the five talent man – after all, he's better equipped. Leave the visiting to the two talent man – he has more time. I've found excuses for not doing my share. One talent men can do at least one talent's worth of teaching and visiting. Self-pity brings God no profit.

The one talent man feigns seriousness. He was really only concerned about not causing the Lord any loss. He knew the Lord to be a hard man and didn't want to make any poor investments so he just made none. I've done that too. The Lord knows the risks. He knows that I may say the wrong thing, or say too much, or over prepare, or fall on my face. But that's no excuse to say nothing or do nothing for fear of failing. There's no punishment for trying.

Watch the one talent man mentality. There's not anyone who claims to be a five talent man. That's why the parable is about the one talent man. Avoid his mistakes. They're easy to make. I know. I've been there.

- Jason Moore

The Jailhouse Rock

Try to put yourself in Paul and Silas' shoes for a moment. You've just received a vision, concluding that God has called you to preach the gospel to the people in Macedonia (16:10). When you get there, you're dragged before the authorities, unjustly accused, stripped of your robes, beaten with rods, and thrown into prison with your feet in the stocks.

What's your next move? You turn to your partner, ask for his pitch pipe, and start a chorus of "*If the skies above you are gray...*" Right? That's what they did. "But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to them" (vs. 25). God had called them to preach to these people, and they were not about to stop preaching.

I just wonder what the prisoners would have heard coming from our cell. What songs would they have been listening to? "*Nobody knows the trouble I've seen*" or even "*Gloom, despair and agony on me.*" Remember that the bitterest of times don't justify the bitterest of attitudes.

God help us to be like Paul and Silas, who in the most selfish circumstances, saw an opportunity to serve. Their main concern was to make bondservants of Jesus Christ out of these prisoners. And sure enough, souls were saved that night because they refused to be bitter.

Don't stop preaching, no matter how hard it gets. Somebody is listening.

- Bubba Garner

A New Beginning

This great chapter marks the origin of several things as we understand them – time, matter, space, energy, life. But it also provides a glimpse of the nature and operation of God in creation.

It was simple. Though He possessed the power for explosions and eruptions, “by the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host” (Psalm 33:6). One succinct statement can put an end to centuries of discussion and debate; “in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” Enough said.

It was in order. He created the sun, moon, and stars *after* He designated a place for their habitation. He didn’t speak the sea and land animals into existence until He *first* separated the waters from the earth. From creation to salvation, He is a God of order, and He demands orderly praise from His creatures.

It was good. “And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good” (vs. 31). What else would you expect to come from the hand of a Maker who is so good? What greater glory can we give back to Him than to *do* good and *be* good? A new heaven and new earth await such new creatures. And that’s just the beginning.

- Bubba Garner

The Father Of All Liars

The Devil is a liar. Jesus said of him, “He was a murderer from the beginning and abode not in the truth, for there is no truth in him” (John 8:44). And he is described in our text as being “more subtle than any beast of the field.” He tantalized and tempted Eve in the garden until she sinned and then caused Adam to partake also. Let’s learn some lessons from her encounter.

Don’t hang around evil. Don’t even let him get near you. No good can come from being anywhere near him. He is always questioning things, always suggesting evil alternatives, disguised as good. If you hang around him long enough he will finally suggest something that will tempt you. Paul said, “give no place to the devil.” Don’t let him near you.

Make yourself aware of his intentions. Nothing good can come from associating with evil or with those who partake of it. You can’t flirt with evil and win. You have to understand that the devil is bent on your destruction – he wants you. Make no mistake about his intentions; he is not out to do you any good. He wants you – all of you.

Don’t answer when he calls. And he will call. He is always somewhere around. And be forewarned: he spends most of his time among the righteous; it’s the only part of the human family he doesn’t already own. Just pay no attention to him.

- Dee Bowman

A Humble Prayer

Israel was generous in supporting the construction of the temple in Jerusalem. Their zealous spirit was complemented by the humble prayer David offered before the assembly.

“All things come from You, and of Your own we have given You,” David prayed (vs. 14). Our gifts to God are spoiled when we become impressed with our gift giving. The worshipper who thinks he has given so much to God has not stopped to consider how much God has given him. He merely returns to God what is already His. That leads to the further consideration – God wants you, not your gifts. He desires children, not things.

“I know...that You test the heart and have pleasure in uprightness,” prayed King David (vs. 17). Hypocrites are brave souls. To be a hypocrite is to be cowardly before men who are fooled by the act, but to be courageous before God who sees through our mask. Better to fear God who tests the heart and to be brave toward men whose judgment of our performance doesn't matter.

“Give my son Solomon a loyal heart,” asked David (vs. 18). Of all the things David left to his son, his faith was the most precious. Thrones and palaces and armies and treasures are uncertain. But faith – it shall stand when glory and power and riches fail. Pass your faith to your family and you make them richer than Solomon in all his glory. Teach them to walk and to study but don't teach them to love God and you may secure their fortunes but not their future.

- Jason Moore

Sunday Morning Starters:

How To Be Worshipful:

Be prepared.

Be on time.

Be attentive.

Be reverent.

Be considerate.

Be a participant.

The Ancestry of Jabez

People have always been fascinated by their ancestry. Where did I come from? Who was my great-great grandfather on my mother’s side? These are fascinating questions. People today spend lots of time and money trying to find out who their forbearers were.

The Jews kept meticulous records of their heritage. They knew exactly where they came from. But, even knowing where they came from, they weren’t always able to find out much about their forefathers unless they were famous. Here the genealogical table is interrupted to tell us about a man called Jabez.

He was more honorable than his brethren. This says he was a man of character, a man who distinguished himself by his moral character and ethical sense.

He was a man of prayer. He was aware of the involvement of God in all that he did and he invoked His blessings on all his efforts. His prayer was for God’s presence in his life.

He sought good, abhorred evil. His cry was for deliverance from evil. Such a prayer shows his awareness of what sin can do to a man. He wanted no part of it. Evil “will grieve me,” he said. He knew. “Protect me from it,” he begs.

I’d like this man for an ancestor, wouldn’t you?

- Dee Bowman

Whatever We Ask

“Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask.” How many have wished the same from God? The disciples wanted a commitment from Jesus before He heard their request. Not even to the sons of Zebedee would Jesus make this open-ended promise. “What do you want Me to do for you?” He asked. Think of what condition we would be in if God, like some genie, honored every wish we had at various points in our life. We would be spoiled in every sense. It’s far better to pray, “If it be Thy will,” and lean on God’s wisdom than to make demands from our own limited perspective.

“You do not know what you ask,” Jesus responded to their petitions for seats on His right and left in glory. Jesus’ glory would not come without the cross. That was the “cup” and the “baptism” that Jesus asked the brothers if they were able to handle. Sitting beside Him in glory would demand walking the same path of suffering and service that He was trodding. “We are able,” they boasted. A few days later they would abandon Jesus to the arresting officers. They were not able. Not yet. Sometimes the Lord may know that we can’t handle the thing we ask for. It’s far better to pray, “If it’s best,” than to be so sure in our hearts that we are as able and willing as we claim to be.

Perhaps we could learn as well that the Lord is interested in providing opportunities for serving, not reigning. It’s the servant that will sit with Him in glory. More prayers should begin and end with “Here am I, send me” than “Here am I, give me.”

- Jason Moore

Information Well Said

The Proverbs of Solomon are wonderful. They are short, pithy, clever ways of saying great truths so that those truths stick in the mind, thus making them available when we need them quickly. This section is replete with good information. Look at:

Where our confidence should be. We should trust in God, not ourselves. We must not lean on our own understanding, but on the direction He provides. Only then can we go the right way. Trust is the predicate for obedience.

Where our focus should be. It is foolish indeed to concentrate on evil when evil is the enemy and will utterly destroy us. To depart from evil means to get as far away from it as you can. Don't fondle it, don't tolerate it. It will do you no good.

Where our blessings should be used. God is the Great Giver. It makes sense that He should have the “first fruits” of all that we have. To truly serve God you must give him the best you have, beginning with yourself. And remember, you can't out-give God. He invented giving.

What discipline is all about. We must learn the value of correction. We must come to see that God never requires of us anything that does not directly benefit us. Correction is a manifestation of love; it is meant to make sure our course is true, our hopes enlivened. Let us not despair of His management of our lives. God will always do us good.

- Dee Bowman

The Rich Man And Lazarus

The story of the rich man and Lazarus answers many questions about what happens when men die.

The dead are in a conscious state. The Bible sometimes describes death as *sleeping*. That describes the state of the body, not the spirit, and expresses the hope of resurrection when the body shall be reunited with the spirit and awake. The *spirits* of the rich man and Lazarus were very much awake and conscious of their surroundings.

The dead retain all the distinctiveness of their personality. They retain the memories of their earthly life and relationships. “Son, *remember* that in your lifetime you received your good things,” Abraham said to the rich man (vs. 25). “I have five brothers,” the rich man declared later. All is not forgotten beyond the grave, but *all is understood*. Understanding will comfort those in Paradise but haunt those in torment.

The assignment of men and women to Paradise and torment will be just. The rich man never said to Abraham, “This is unfair.” His plea was for mercy. The dead do not question God’s judgments. They all know that He has dealt fairly. The rich man showed no mercy in life; he received none in judgment. The difference between him and Lazarus is that he got what he deserved. Lazarus didn’t go to Paradise because he was poor, but because he was prepared. It will ever be so.

- Jason Moore

A Sinner’s Prayer

According to the Psalm heading, David wrote these words “when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.” In this lament and prayer for pardon, David makes these requests of his God.

Cleanse me. “Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin” (vs. 2). The man after God’s own heart committed adultery and covered it up with murder. Yet, with one stroke of the merciful and gracious hand of the Lord, he was made whiter than snow.

Heal me. “Let the bones which Thou hast broken rejoice” (vs. 8). His sin did not come without consequences. The little baby died. The sword never departed from David’s house. The wounds of guilt and shame probably never completely closed. But getting into the hands of the Great Physician eased the pain and made the repercussions more bearable.

Use me. “Do not cast me away from Thy presence” (vs. 11). As long as David didn’t give up on God, the Lord wasn’t about to give up on him. He still had great things in mind for the King of Israel, for life must go on.

Sin kills. It separates, it destroys, it sears. But God will not despise the contrite and penitent sinner. He’ll still cleanse us, heal us, and use us if we remain people after His own heart and according to His own will.

- Bubba Garner

The Road To Ruin

Do you remember the first time you burned your hand by touching the stove, or something else hot? Did you do that again? We would do well to understand how sin comes so that we don't get burned by it over and over by repeating the same foolish actions. James tells us:

Sin comes by temptation. Temptation is the track on which sin ruins. It's what introduces us to the possibility of sin. And it comes from deep within ourselves. Temptation is man's problem, not God's.

Temptation is a drawing away. Just as bait draws a fish, even so temptation draws men away toward sin. Enticement is the chief vehicle of temptation. Remember, what looks good is not always good for you.

Lust brings sin. When lust is delivered, it brings sin. Lust must produce after its own kind, “for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he reap.” When we allow evil thoughts to germinate, evil allurements to mesmerize, we are headed directly for sin. And remember, you can reach a place where it's almost impossible to turn back.

Sin brings death. Sin promises what it never delivers. Sin delivers all right. Sin delivers death, eternal and final separation from God.

We need to learn to recognize temptation so that we don't fall victim to its tenacious advancements.

- Dee Bowman

Sunday Morning Starters:

1. Pray.
2. Plan.
3. Listen.
4. Remember.

God Is So Good

The psalmist teaches us the need to stop, reflect, and praise God for His wonders, for His love, and for the wonders of His love. God is so good.

God is so good for giving us unshakable foundations. “You...laid the foundations of the earth, so that it should not be moved forever” (vs. 5). Away with the doomsday prophets who make merchandise of men’s fears. The earth will abide and will not be shaken until God does the shaking. Those who hope in Him are secure in any weather.

God is so good for bringing order out of chaos. At His rebuke the seas fled to their places, mountains arose, valleys sank (vs. 8). By His word they all stay in their places. And what order His word has brought to our disheveled lives! What chaos there would be without His direction.

God is so good for rewarding our labor. “He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and vegetation for the service of man” (vs. 14). In spite of the uncertainties of our labor, we receive so much for doing so little. If God has so rewarded our physical labors, will He not also reward our spiritual sacrifices?

God is so good for giving us a place to rest. The cedars of Lebanon are given a home by God. They in turn are a home for the birds. The stork nests in the fir. The uninhabitable mountain places are the habitation for wild goats. God has made a home for all His creatures. Will He not also make good His promise of a home for His people?

God is so good. All nature assures us.

- Jason Moore

An Unlikely Hero

John the Baptist was the second cousin of Jesus, born to an old priest, Zacharias, and his barren wife, Elizabeth. His life is worthy of our consideration as well as our imitation.

He was not afraid to be different. Preaching in a materialistic society, he wore a “garment of camel’s hair,” dined on fine locust, and washed them down with honey. He stood in bold contrast to his world, but he was not afraid to do so.

He stayed in his role. “He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals.” John’s role was to prepare the world for the coming of the Messiah, to get their hearts ready to receive the seed of the kingdom. He never lost sight of the fact that Jesus was the main attraction and he was just the opening act.

He was loyal to the truth. He told the leading religious party of the day to be more concerned with pleasing the Father God than father Abraham and “to bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance.” Later, he rebuked the son of Herod the Great for his involvement in an adulterous marriage. That stand cost him his life.

Is it any wonder why Jesus said, “among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist” (Matt. 11:11)? Let’s take our place in line behind him and prepare the world for the second coming of the Christ.

- Bubba Garner

There Is None Like Him

The message of this great text is profound. At the time it was delivered, it contradicted all the collective wisdom of scholars and kings. “Hear, O Israel!” Moses beckoned. The call was not just to hear, but to heed the message that followed.

“The Lord our God, the Lord is one!” Moses declared. That statement alone is full of meaning.

The Lord is solitary. He is the only one. The pagans believed in a host of gods. Our generation does too – “believe what you want to,” men say. The Lord our God is one. He is the *only* one. There is no other.

The Lord is sovereign. He is one. He answers to no one, and all answer to Him. He alone possesses the glory, the power, the dominion forever. For that reason, “Hear, O Israel.” There is no higher authority to be heard.

The Lord is singular. There is none like Him. None can compare. No God His equal. No prince His heir. The Lord is one. He has no competitor. Yet He has spoken; He has acted. He has spoken and acted to redeem Israel. There is none like Him.

The appropriate response to this message is to love the Lord heart, soul and strength. Cling to Jehovah for there is no other refuge. Obey Him for there is no other dominion. Love Him for there is none so lovable as He who first loved us.

“Hear, O Israel” The Lord our God, the Lord is one!”

- Jason Moore

In His Steps

When I was in first grade, Mrs. Denman (we called her Mrs. Demon) helped us make paper turkeys to take home the day before Thanksgiving. We traced our hand on a piece of construction paper, our thumb being the head and our fingers serving as the feathers. It is still my earliest memory of a pattern.

Peter said that Jesus left us an *example*, a word that originally meant “to trace letters” or a “writing copy.” As the scribe would carefully sketch the letters of an original document, so we are called to unerringly follow the Savior, step for step.

Where did His steps take Him? Through suffering, sacrifice, and selflessness. He didn’t treat people the way they deserved to be treated, but “kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.” He, though sinless, paid the price of a sinner. Where He has been, we must go.

Where will these steps take us? Through every battle, through every storm, to every victory. Even the grave is powerless to halt our journey, for His steps lead to His Father’s throne. Where He has gone, we can be.

If you don’t follow the pattern of your hand when you’re making turkeys, you’ll have a deformed bird taped to the refrigerator on Thanksgiving Day. The stakes are much higher when you drift from the hand print of God. Take up your cross and follow Him.

- Bubba Garner

He Carried My Sorrows

The story of Jesus is the most precious of all stories. It tells the depth of a man's sin. It tells of the length of God's mercy. It tells of the measurement of God's love. It tells of the joy of man's salvation.

Jesus bore our sorrows. If He had not come there would have been only moaning and sorrow at the end of matters. Think of being without the assurance of forgiveness, of facing death without hope, of looking in the face of eternity with no one to plead your case.

We are like sheep gone astray. Think about that. No place to turn, no way to go, no assurance of returning to the fold of safety. Only danger, fear, anxiety, anxiousness. No peace, no rest, just more wandering.

What kind of man was this? What kind of person was He that He would leave the joy and safety of Heaven, subject Himself to the ravages of time, be tempted like His creatures, be dragged into a world sick with sin and covered with filth, and subject Himself to death on a cross for the very persons who refused and rejected Him? Oh! What a Savior!

He bore our sins, He took our sorrows, He healed our wounds with His own, made us acceptable when we could have by no means achieved it for ourselves. Let us love Him, magnify and reverence His great name, the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

- Dee Bowman

The Press Toward The Mark

Man has always been inclined to change what God says to make it less difficult and more comfortable. People today have sought to change Christianity to make it what they want instead of how God designed it. They want it easy. Paul says:

Christianity is not biological. Who your parents were has nothing to do with your service to God. Every man is responsible for his own soul.

Christianity is not measured in terms of zeal. Paul was zealous, but he was wrong. It can be so with us as well. The word of God is the standard, not what men think, or say, or agree upon.

Christianity is not measured by how much you do. No matter how much you do you can’t be righteous enough to earn your salvation. It is only “through the faith of Jesus Christ” and obedience to Him that salvation is assured.

Christianity is not a single, one-time, action. Paul said he had “not already attained,” but, said he, “I follow after it that I may apprehend...” He didn’t consider it done just because he had believed in Christ. “I press toward the mark,” he said. It takes more than just saying “I believe,” you have to walk the walk.

Let us be impressed with the need to live the life, not just affirm it. Let us see the need to press toward the mark with care and diligence, knowing that our labor will be richly rewarded at the end.

- Dee Bowman

Sunday Morning Starters:

Principles For Following Jesus:

1. When you follow Jesus, you're not the one in front. "Get behind Me, Satan!" the Lord said to Peter.
2. When you follow Jesus, He's the one giving directions. There are no backseat drivers in the kingdom.
3. When you follow Jesus, you leave what He left. You see the same scenery He saw in your rearview mirror.
4. When you follow Jesus, you go where He went. To the woman at the well, to Lazarus' tomb, to the lepers, to the untaught, to the garden, to the cross.
5. When you follow Jesus, you end up where He is. That makes the difficulty worthwhile, doesn't it?

The Fall of A Nation

Spiritual Israel would do well to take notice of the events leading to the destruction of Judah. “The wrath of the Lord arose against His people” because:

They got too close to the world. “All the officials of the priests and the people were very unfaithful following all the abominations of the nations.” Instead of driving the heathen nations out of their land, they became more like them. First, they just wanted their king, and then they wanted their whole kingdom. Eventually, they got so far away from God that they never returned.

They regarded the holy as unholy. “They defiled the house of the Lord which He had sanctified in Jerusalem.” They knew the Lord to be a jealous God and knew of His displeasure with graven images. But they would not let go of their idols, even bringing them into His house. Their unrelenting grasp on these creations only loosed their grip on the Creator.

They mocked the message. They “despised His words and scoffed at His prophets.” All the great men whom the Lord sent to be His mouthpiece were “laughed to scorn” (2 Chron. 30:10) and persecuted. I guess we shouldn’t be too surprised: that’s exactly what they did to Jesus.

God shows no partiality, not even to His own people. “Do you suppose...that you will escape the judgment of God” (Rom. 2:3)?

- Bubba Garner

Three Steps Down And Up

The mountain message of Jesus is the most profound sermon ever preached, the most lively and dynamic piece of information that ever fell from the lips of any man. It contains basically two elements: 1) the proper attitude for acceptance by God; and 2) the proper conduct for His approval. Notice the attitudes here assigned.

You have to take three steps down. Blessed are the poor in spirit, those that mourn, those that are meek. These are all attitudes about how a man views himself.

1. Man must be humble enough first to consider, then to accept the will of God. Until a man divests himself of his own arrogance, he cannot be the follower of Jesus. Self denial is the essence of discipleship (Matt. 16:24), humility the beginning of salvation. Listening is what humility is all about.

2. Man has to be mournful – willing to cry over his own sins as well as the sins of others. Until we see the horror of sin and recognize what it does to man we will see no need for the Savior.

3. And man must submit his strengths – all of them – to the management of the Master. Meekness is making whatever strengths and talents you have the property of the Master, putting your whole self at His disposal.

Three steps down so you can go up.

- Dee Bowman

Why The Saints Come Together

God never gave a command that was without purpose. Here He reveals to us the purpose for the assembling of the saints.

We come together to proclaim publicly our allegiance to God. The assembling of Christians, in spite of the many demands made upon our time, says to all the world that our first allegiance is to God. We “hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering” (vs. 23). We may keep our other appointments, but none more faithfully than our appointment with God. We tell the world that He is first in our lives and second to none.

We come together to exercise our one another privileges. The assembly is not a oneself practice. We “consider one another” and “exhort one another” (vss. 24, 25). It’s an opportunity to serve. The person who gets nothing out of the services came for the wrong reason. The point of service is to serve, not to be served. Those who see the privilege in serving will see the rewards of assembling. They’ll always “get something out of it.”

We come together to keep our other-worldly focus. The first day helps us to keep our mind on first things, to order our priorities. The Lord knew that we couldn’t go more than seven days without refocusing and refueling. We focus on the Judgment Day as it approaches. We are stirred to love and good works. We’d all get lazy without one another’s provocation.

Don’t neglect the assembly of the saints. It’s for your own good. Make it a habit.

- Jason Moore

The Good American?

We sometimes think that the parable of the Good Samaritan is unsuitable to our society because times are so different. But times have really not changed *that* much.

These were dangerous times. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was known as the “Way of Blood.” It was full of twists and turns and rocky cliffs that made good places for robbers to hide. But the threat of danger did not stop the Samaritan.

These were busy times. This good man was “on a journey” and probably had not budgeted time to stop and help someone on the side of the road. He surely had places to go and people to see, but he was not too busy to serve.

These were selfish times. “Someone else will come along and pick him up,” he could have thought, or, “a Jew wouldn’t do this for me.” But selfish times call for selfless measures.

These were frugal times. This little pit stop came to be quite an investment for the Samaritan, at least two days wages. But the payment of satisfaction in helping his fellow man was worth more than any expense borne in the process.

Jesus used a priest and Levite as an example of those who did not show mercy to their neighbor. If He told the same parable today, I’m afraid He would use my name. Times may or may not have changed much since the Good Samaritan. But we can still go and do likewise.

- Bubba Garner

Sin: It Comes And It Grows

Genesis 4 paints a picture of the earliest men, and not a very pretty one. View it carefully. See the beginning of the picture and the end of the picture.

It paints a picture of envy and murder. The story of Cain is the story of a sad beginning. For whatever reason, Cain is jealous of the acceptance of Abel’s offering – so envious, in fact, that he conspires in his heart to kill his brother, a sad sight indeed. Sin begins in the heart.

It paints a picture of deception. When asked by God, Cain disavows any knowledge of the whereabouts of his brother when he knows full well where he is. And he knows that he actually *is* his brother’s keeper. You can’t hide sin.

It paints a picture of consequences. Cain’s actions caused God to inflict harsh punishment. Part of his punishment was just the simple consequence of what he had done, part of it was God’s penalty. Together, they made it hard for Cain. Sin is a harsh taskmaster.

It paints a bigger picture. It is not clear how much the sin of Cain affected the generations later – like Lamech and his wives – but it seems clear from this picture that whatever the sin, the punishment had increased sevenfold from that of Cain’s. Sin compounds sin.

Sin is not a pretty picture.

- Dee Bowman

They Dream Of Genie

In Samuel’s day, religion for many Israelites had come to mean possessing the ark. “As long as the ark is with us, we can win the battle.” “As long as the ark is with us, our camp is safe from invasion.” They were sorely wrong.

They had made religion a thing. They had fashioned God into a sort of genie who was obliged to serve and to save them so long as they carried Him along. Instead of a lamp or bottle, His home was the ark, at least in their mind.

It is no different today. Men wear crosses or cross themselves. They hide behind icons or attach statuettes to their dashboards – as if there is power in such emblems. The Lord is a person, not a thing. He desires a relationship, not a “we’ll call if we need you” kind of reliance on His power. He is not impressed, nor obliged to help us because we carry a cross, or a picture, or set up a nativity scene, or keep a Bible on our coffee table.

It is also no different, when religion is made a matter of going to church. It matters not if you make every service. What God desires again, is a relationship. When you omit the public sacrifices you make to God – the church service, the Bible class, the public prayers, the sermons – what sort of relationship do you have with Him? When all those things are ignored, what in your life says, “I serve God?” Hopefully, a multitude of things. Otherwise, you like Israel have trusted in a genie, not Jehovah.

- Jason Moore