

Sunday Morning Starters

Sunday: The Beginning of Creation

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was formless and void, and the darkness was over the surface of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.

Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. And God called the light day, and the darkness He called night.

And there was evening, and there was morning, one day.”

(Genesis 1:1-5)

Monotony Of Life Without God

Life apart from God is just one big, monotonous bore. Listen to the wise man.

One generation passes, another comes. So it has been from all time. This generation will pass away and another will take its place. The courses of life are inalterable.

The sun goes up and down and a day is past. This same process occurs 7 times and becomes a week, a week becomes a month, a month a year, and on and on it goes.

The hydrological cycle has been in place almost since the beginning. Mountain snows melt and fill little streams, little streams empty into big ones, the big ones into little rivers, little rivers into big ones, and the big ones into the oceans. Oceans evaporate and the whole process starts all over.

Man is never satisfied. He has never seen, heard, felt, known all he wants to see, hear, feel, know. There is no new thing; everything stays essentially the same.

Life without God brings no true joy, but living for God does. It makes the life worth living, the joy worth giving. It makes family important, the job fulfilling, even discipline appealing. God's life, lived in God's way is refreshing and wonderful, always new, for it promises an everlasting one.

- Dee Bowman

Which Way Would You Go?

God had promised Abram both an heir and an inheritance. Soon after his arrival in Canaan, a famine drove him to Egypt. He returned only to face a conflict with Lot because of the quantity of their combined goods. Abraham, in his generosity, not only gave up the prized portions of the land but also the possibility of making his beloved nephew his heir. Jehovah’s promises must have seemed distant to father Abram. Given his choice, which way would you go?

Lot was not the only one with choices on this occasion. Abraham had the right to choose his own abode without considering the wishes of his brother’s son. The fact that he let Lot leave while he was still childless and the fact that he let Lot choose the choice lot while he took the leftovers, is another indication of the great faith of Abraham. I ask again, which way would you go?

Every day you make choices not so unlike Abraham’s. You make choices about where you will pitch your tent, choices about your education, your career, your companions, your abode, your standard of living – all of which have spiritual repercussions. You are deciding now which way you would have gone. Look at your life. Look at where you live. Look at what you’re doing. Look who you’re with. Look at who your friends are. Tell me. Which way would you have gone? Which way are you going?

- Jason Moore

The Direction of Worship

There is more to religion than observing certain rituals. Further, it is not a social occasion where people come to see one another worship and praise God. True worship is an adoring reverence, an intense longing of the creature for the Creator. Jesus sternly rebukes empty worship and vain service in this section.

The Pharisees bind stern discipline and impose heavy burdens, but all for show, He says. Their worship and service is hypocritical. They have employed theatrics as a substitute for praise.

Worship, all of it, is God-ward, not man-ward. To go through the motions is repugnant to God. It neither praises God nor edifies the worshiper. “I despise your feast days,” He told the people who had desecrated worship by their own devices (Amos 5:21). We must take care not to do the same today in either our private or public worship.

Worship is special. It must not be polluted by false doctrine or personal whims; but it can have all the right implements and be done for all the wrong reasons.

True worship holds God’s presence as special, His being as wonderful, His blessings as innumerable. It is personal and private, even when it’s done in public.

- Dee Bowman

How Men Leave God

Men are not original in the way that they leave God. It happens the same way every time.

“They knew God” – not everything about Him but enough to know better “for God made it evident to them” (v. 19)

“The did not honor Him...or give thanks.” Men quit praying before they actually leave. They quit worshipping regularly. Something always comes up. An emergency. A convenient one.

“They became futile in their speculations.” Men never just leave. They justify their leaving. They point out the hypocrisy of others, the nitpicking of the elders, the austerity of the preacher. They forget *their* accountability to God.

“Professing to be wise, they become fools.” The reprobate are always provoking their self-sufficiency, that they can make it without the Lord and without the help of His people, forgetting that that road has been tried oft before.

“They exchanged...God for an image.” Idolatry has not ceased. It’s just more sophisticated. Men always leave God for something or someone. And in order to live with themselves they make God into a god who smiles on their ungodliness, who gives them time to sow wild oats. Or they so immerse themselves in pleasure that they don’t think about God so that fun becomes their idol.

Not smart. But there’s nothing smart about leaving God. It’s folly. It’s just plain dumb.

- Jason Moore

The Word Became Flesh

Jesus Christ was with God in the beginning. It was by Him that all things were created (Heb. 11:2) and it is through Him that all things continue to exist (Col. 1:16-17).

What a glorious thought that the same Word became flesh and dwelt among men. What a grand miracle was the God-man, Jesus, that “light that shineth in the darkness,” that “true light that lightheth every man.” What love is shown in Him, what mercy and grace. God’s love for man manifested in the flesh.

Jesus came to be the sacrifice for sin. The miracle of His incarnation, in connection with the miracle of His resurrection, constitute the whole of the redemptive process, the cornerstone of Christianity, the hope of heaven for His creatures. The love that is seen in One so mighty leaving the portals of heaven to die on a cross is beyond the comprehension of the most astute, beyond the dreams of the most imaginative. *He was God; He became man.* Consider that, if you will, for it is the basis of our salvation.

Would you give some thought to these grand themes today? Read the passage again. Think on the love it reports, the significance of the Gift it describes.

- Dee Bowman

Jesus Among the Churches

Jesus is not disinterested in the affairs of churches. John’s vision of Jesus among the lampstands dictating letters to the churches of Asia is testimony to His care for their well-being.

He is interested in their growth. If the local church were not a help to the growth of the individual, Jesus would never have established it. Those who say they have no need of the local church, question the judgment of Jesus who said differently.

He is interested in their trials. Jesus is witness to the sufferings of saints. He has “the keys of death and of Hades” (vs. 18). Their trials are not unfamiliar to Him, but lie along a path that He first trod and blazed by His resurrection.

He is interested in the preparedness. Jesus selected John for the purpose of equipping the seven churches of Asia for “the things which must shortly take place” (vs. 1). His precautions to prepare them is assurance that He has taken similar precautions for all ages.

He is interested in their loyalty. “He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God” (vs. 1). His interest in our affairs is just cause for Him to expect our sincere interest in His purposes.

Jesus stands among the churches today watching, helping, and hoping that we’ll be faithful. Let us as soldiers take courage from His presence.

- Jason Moore

The Joy Of Learning

Learning has always been one of my great joys. I don't know who taught me to love learning. My parents, I suppose. I don't even remember feeling anything but affection for it. *Treasure Island* for the first time one summer. Suddenly the woods and the creeks and the island, in the middle of the Tennessee River to which we sometimes canoed, were full of pirates and buried treasure. I learned later that the island had been home to some Indians – which was just as great – and we spent many a day hunting arrowheads, building forts, and scouting for game or enemy strongholds.

But of all the learning that I've pursued, none rivals the joy of learning the story of the Bible. I had not known much of the Bible story until I was in the third grade. I remember hearing my Bible class teacher, Louise Horton, tell about John the Baptist eating locusts and wild honey and it sounded so good I would have eaten a grasshopper.

Read the Bible. Every day. Fall in love with it. Read it and talk about it. Know it so well, that you can tell its stories in your own words. Learn to quote it. If you don't ache through the day until you've had a daily dose, then you're not reading your Bible like you ought. Pick it up and read it. Meditate. Contemplate. Cogitate. Luxuriate. Know the joy of learning the best kind of information.

Make it a habit!

- Jason Moore

“How Can These Things Be?”

Nicodemus was himself a teacher of the Jews (see vs. 10), one who instructed people in the law; and yet he had the same difficulty many people have today – a failure to differentiate between the physical and the spiritual. Jesus talked with him about the new birth, one that would make entrance into the kingdom possible. “Marvel not,” said the Lord, “for you see the effects of things without seeing the things themselves; just as you see the effect of the wind, you will see the effect of the new birth.”

Nicodemus had some things to recommend him and the Lord knew it. It was for that reason that He took some time explaining things to him.

Nicodemus was humble. The key to all learning is the humility to expose your ignorance openly. It is never out of order to say “I don’t know.” It’s the pathway by which you are apt to find out.

Nicodemus was interested. He had seen the miracles of Jesus and knew that no ordinary man could do them. He was interested in this new kingdom and asked about it. We know he asked because the narrative says, “Jesus answered...”

Nicodemus learned. At the end of Jesus’ life Nicodemus, along with Joseph of Arimathaea, courageously took the body of Jesus to the tomb.

We can learn spiritual truths if we are humble and interested enough to ask.

- Dee Bowman

Fishing For Men

“Come after Me, and I will make you become fishers of men,” was Jesus’ invitation to the sons of Jonah. Curious isn’t it that Jesus should call fishermen to preach His gospel? Maybe not. Fishing for men is not so unlike seeking God’s gilled creation.

Fishing takes patience. Sometimes you catch a boat load, like on the day of Pentecost. Other times you only catch one, like the Ethiopian nobleman. Still other times, you don’t even get a bite. One thing is certain. You’ll never make a catch until you throw out your line.

Fishing takes persistence. You may return to the same hole a dozen times before you make a catch. Sometimes a stormy day causes one to bite who only ignored your efforts when the sun was shining. People like fish are different, unpredictable. You just have to keep coming back until they’re hungry.

There’s at least one significant difference between catching fish and men. When fishing for men, you never do catch your limit. There’s always more fish in the sea. Too many in fact. Too many to be sitting in the boat playing with our tackle. Let’s go fishing!

- Jason Moore

Giving God Our Best

True honor is never cheap. If it's legitimate honor, it's never accorded without a price. “I will not give that which costs me nothing,” said David (2 Sam. 24:24). Few things are more precious than true honor.

The Lord will not take second place, nor should He. He is God, the Almighty, the Creator, the Sustainer of life, the Giver of all there is. We should honor Him in the highest way we can – with “the first fruits,” not the leftovers. The highest honor we can bestow on Him is to give Him the best of all that we have – our substance, our talent, our time, our energy.

Nor should we be displeased with the Lord's chastisements. To receive them appreciatively and with confident resignation is a sure sign of honor. Did our parents not chasten us, and for our good? Correction is part of love, a vital part. The chastening of the Lord is a sure sign of His interest and concern for us, of His desire to make us into all we have the potential to be. This can't be done without some advice, some instruction, even some rebuke. We honor Him when we accept it willingly.

Let us honor God in our lives today. Let us begin by giving Him first place and let us not despise His chastenings when they come, knowing they are for our good.

- Dee Bowman

Watch And Pray

Ezekiel was a watchman himself (3:17). He returns to that idea and implores the people to set before *them* a watchman. Two things are implied in the concept of a watchman. First, he must *watch*, an indication that danger may be present. Second, he is a watch *man*, indicating that the work is not for a novice.

Ezekiel warns about the seriousness of being a watchman. If he is not diligent and watchful, the disaster which befalls the people will bring disaster to him (vs. 6).

Our Elders watch for our souls. They are commanded to “tend the flock of God which is among you” (I Pet. 5:2). Elders are those who “watch for souls, as those that must give an account” (Heb. 13:17).

We need to heed the advice of our watchmen. If they warn us and we hear, all’s well. If we don’t hear and heed their warning, they will not be charged, for they have done their work; but we will be lost for not listening to their warning.

There is a real sense in which all of us are watchmen. We watch for one another, encourage and edify one another on account of our common enemy. To watch out for someone is to love one another; to love one another is to watch out for one another. Let’s do it!

- Dee Bowman

The Blessed Life

The first Psalm is a bit of a paradox. It sounds more like the Proverbs and other wisdom literature than poetry. But, at the same time, you could not write a more fitting introduction to the Psalter. In a book of songs and prayers intended for worship to God, Psalm 1 first settles the matter of who is worthy to come into His presence. It depicts the kind of life necessary for true worshippers – the blessed life.

The right attitude. You can't have the right attitude towards good things when you don't have the right attitude toward evil things. Since the blessed man doesn't want to end up in the seat of the scornful, he stays as far away as possible from the counsel of the wicked and the path of sinners. That also keeps him closer to God.

The right conduct. The secret of the blessed life lies in verse 2: delight and meditation in the word of God. We don't have the right to expect Him to listen to what's on our mind when we have not read and obeyed what has been revealed about His.

The right influence. A firmly planted, fruit-bearing, prosperous tree stands as a testimony to the world of what faith in God can produce. But the wicked are useless chaff, separated from what is truly valuable, blown by the winds and whims of worldliness.

The right destiny. How foolish that some believe in a destiny without a destination. The Lord knows the way of the righteous because it is *His* way. Those who seek their own path to God end up lost.

- Bubba Garner

The Day God Became Man

In connection with the resurrection, the birth of Jesus is the most significant event in all of human history. The narrative you have just read tells us in brief, but powerful terms how God became man. Joseph was told, “fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.” How thrilling that God became man.

“And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins,” the angel further stated. Could there be a more important event in all history? What a herald was the angel on that day! God became man that He might do for man what he could not do for himself. Oh, blessed thought!

Notice, further, that all this was done in fulfillment of prophesy, particularly Isaiah 7:14. Listen to its assurance, hear its promise: “they shall call His name Emmanuel, which is being interpreted, God with us.” Jesus became a man, and fulfilling all prophesy, became our sacrifice on the cross to procure our salvation.

Special days are important to us, none more special or more important than when the Son of God became a man that He might redeem us from our sins. Let us serve Him diligently today, let us love Him supremely, let us accord to Him the highest honor, for He it was who died for our sins.

- Dee Bowman

Sunday Morning Starters: Practical Pointers From Proverbs

“5 Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth. 6 Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee. 7 Wisdom *is* the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding. 8 Exalt her, and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honor, when thou dost embrace her. 9 She shall give thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee” (Proverbs 5:5-9)

Solomon, the great herald of Wisdom, tells us why we should make her our companion today:

- **“She shall preserve thee”** – She keeps you from sinking when you’re in over your head.
- **“She shall keep thee”** – She shows you where to build fences to prevent you from trespassing.
- **“She shall promote thee”** – She makes the young man wise beyond his years and the old man wise beyond his time.
- **“She shall bring thee honor”** – *Fame* is the prize of those in the news; *honor* is the reward of those in the right.
- **“She shall crown thee”** – Victory is her promise. Maybe not today. Maybe not tomorrow. But someday. Guaranteed. Get Wisdom. She is man’s best friend.

- Jason Moore

The Price Of Salvation

You cannot reflect long on God’s redemptive scheme without wondering with David, “What is man that You are mindful of him?”

God has made man His occupation. All creation, even the angels, serve some role in God’s plan to save sinners. God has spared no expense.

The sun, the moon, the stars sing to us of His glory. The birds, the beasts, the teeming seas all declare the Maker’s praise. The seed, the plant, the flower, the fruit all tell the tale of His providence. There are still other productions – the craft of spirit-beings who arrange the sets and work behind the scenes – the effects of which we witness but the operations of which are still a mystery.

In a single day you will pass a thousand vistas, and hear a thousand songs, and be told a thousand tales all with the singular purpose of producing in you a single impression: God has been mindful. And all these spectacles of nature are orchestrated to make mindless men mindful of God.

Were God’s investment in our salvation limited to these countless expressions of His care, it would be enough. Enough to attract our attention. Enough to prod our amazement. But not enough to save. It took another investment. It took a Son. It took a cross. It took a tomb. It took Jesus.

It took all creation and God’s only Son to redeem sinners. It took the best. It deserves our best in return.

- Jason Moore

Speech Patrol

My reading habits have changed over the last six months. Where *Reader's Digest* and the sports section once cluttered our coffee table, a new monthly magazine now sits: *New Baby*. I found this quote in an article a few weeks back. “You spend the first two years of your child’s life teaching them to talk and the next sixteen trying to get them to be quiet!”

Tongue trouble is, in fact, a *lifelong* struggle. You never reach the age or level of maturity where you have completely conquered it, for “no man can tame the tongue” (vs. 8). Anyone who thinks otherwise dangerously underestimates its power and potential. Solomon said that death and life are in its hand (Prov. 18:21) and that the one who guards his mouth is able to keep his whole soul from trouble (21:23).

The first twelve verses of chapter three make up James’ sermon on the tongue. It is a subject he introduced in chapter 1 saying, “everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger” (Vs. 19) and “if anyone thinks himself to be religious and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man’s religion is worthless” (vs. 26).

This section first appears to be a lesson for teachers: let not many of you be “masters” (KJV), for few can master the tongue. But the applications reach to include *anyone* who speaks.

David referred to his mouth as the “door of my lips” (Psalm 141:3). More often than not, it needs to be shut.

- Bubba Garner

No Fear

No Fear. I see that logo everywhere. Especially on the automobiles and t-shirts and ball caps of young people. I detest it. It seems arrogant to me. It depicts a life of frivolity, an attitude of carelessness, a foolish daredevil posture toward life and toward authority.

The wise man describes the only life that is without fear. It is a life of wisdom and discretion. *Wisdom* consists of information about what is right and just to do and about what is to be avoided. *Discretion* equips a man with the ability to discern that what is permissible is not always practical, that what is lawful is not always expedient. This pair of virtues provides a twin-edged sword for cutting to the heart of difficult decisions.

Observe the foes that wisdom and discretion will conquer. Fear of falling – “your foot will not stumble.” Fear of conscience – “your sleep will be sweet.” Fear of financial disaster – “do not be afraid of sudden terror.” Fear of enemies – “do not be afraid of trouble from the wicked.”

Trouble is a guarantee for life under the sun. The wise man admits this in our reading. He says, “Do not be afraid of trouble...*when* it comes.” Trouble, with a capital T, will come your way. But wisdom and discretion will prevent you from being the source of it, will help you to provide a solution to it, and give you a way to navigate through it with no reason to fear it for “the Lord will be your confidence.”

- Jason Moore

A Small Package

When you think about all the organs and muscles that make up your body, the tongue seems rather insignificant. “Yet it boasts of great things.”

The two examples that James uses indicate that a little can do a lot. Even children can guide the direction of a horse when they have control of its mouth; for a little bit goes a long way. And a captain can steer a massive ship through the winds and waves of a storm with a small rudder. He overcomes the elements by controlling that little device.

“The tongue is a small part of the body” (vs. 5). So don’t let it deceive you.

Don’t underestimate its potential for good. Silence is not *always* golden. There is a time to speak (Eccl. 3:7), a time to use the tongue, a time to unleash its power and influence for productive things in the kingdom. It is true that Jesus said, “by your words you will be condemned.” But it is just as true that He said, “by your words you will be justified” (Matt. 12:37).

Don’t underestimate its potential for evil. How tragic when we use it to tear down instead of build up, to hurt instead of heal, to make war instead of peace. We’ve heard a lot recently about “weapons of mass destruction.” Perhaps the biggest one is in the mouth.

As Wordsworth observes, “we rule irrational animals with a bit, how much more ought we to be able to govern ourselves.” If you can’t, your religion is worthless.

- Bubba Garner

The Greatest Choice Of All

When I was a small boy we played a game called "three wishes." We took turns telling what we would wish for. A silly kid's game? Maybe. Read on.

The Lord appeared to Solomon, son of David and heir to his father's throne, and said, "Ask what I shall give you."

Solomon could have asked for riches, fame, or power, but he didn't. He asked for wisdom. "Wisdom?" you ask, "how strange."

But wisdom is the most basic of all man's needs, for man is the only part of God's creation made with the freedom of choice, and making good choices is what wisdom is all about.

Wisdom is the ability to apply what you know to a set of circumstances so as to achieve the best end for all concerned. Wisdom is the need of parents, of children, of employers, of rules and those ruled. Wisdom means making good choices, choices where everyone involved benefits.

The wisest of all human choices is the choice to serve God. It's wise because it means we will receive forgiveness of sins if we obey Him; it's wise because it means we will become more like Him if we serve Him; it's wise because we will be rich beyond our dreams when we receive that eternal crown at the end of matters. What other choice makes any sense?

Ask God for the wisdom to choose well. It is the richest and choicest of all God's blessings.

- Dee Bowman

The Baptism of Jesus

The baptism of Jesus was like no other baptism. Jesus did not require it, as John pointed out, because Jesus was not a sinner. So why was He baptized? “To fulfill all righteousness,” Jesus Himself explained.

Jesus’ baptism fulfilled John’s ministry. The descent of the Spirit at Jesus’ baptism was a sign to John that Jesus was the Christ. It was a sign to the prophet that he should decrease and Jesus increase. It constituted the inauguration of Jesus’ earthly ministry.

Jesus’ baptism was an endorsement of John’s work. Had Jesus not submitted to John’s baptism, His rebuke of the Pharisees who rejected John’s baptism and teaching would have had no impact. The connection between John as forerunner and Jesus as the coming king was made clear to all.

Jesus’ baptism identified Him with sinners. He was not a sinner, but He received a sinner’s cleansing as if He were. He took upon Himself the appearance of a sinner in anticipation of His taking away the sins themselves. His baptism was a foreshadowing of His death, burial and resurrection of which our own baptism is a pattern.

Thus it was fitting for Jesus to be baptized. It was a fitting end and beginning. It was a fitting seal for John and disavowal of His opposers. And it was a fitting sign of Jesus’ mission. It fulfilled all righteousness.

- Jason Moore

Sunday Morning Starters: Practical Pointers From Proverbs

“23 Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life. 24 Put away from thee a forward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee. 25 Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. 26 Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all they ways be established. 27 Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove they foot from evil” (Proverbs 4:23-27)

Here’s a good sermon from Solomon, and sound advice for the assembly:

- **Keep your heart** – No seed can survive the heart that’s full of weeds.
- **Watch your mouth** – A “forward” mouth is a crooked one. Ever notice how ugly your mouth looks when you say ugly things?
- **Open your eyes** – Don’t be distracted, and don’t go to sleep. Will the Lord give attention to those who yawn in His presence?
- **Look where you’re going** – Worship must be directed to the throne. It won’t arrive there accidentally.
- **Stay on course** – Keep your mind between the ditches of indifference and excessive enthusiasm.

Get Wisdom. Bring her with you to worship.

- Jason Moore

Fired Up

“The tongue is a fire” (vs. 6). And gossip is just like a good fire.

It sometimes begins innocently, even accidentally. There is a theory that the great Chicago fire of 1871 started when a cow kicked over a lantern. “Behold how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire” (vs. 5). All it takes is one careless match, one slip of the tongue, and a whole community of people can be brought down.

It spreads rapidly. It doesn’t take long for a flickering flame to become a raging inferno. And gossip catches on even quicker. You may not be able to control what other people are spreading around, but you *can* be the one who keeps it from going any further. The righteous do not “take up a reproach against a friend” (Psalm 15:3). It’s one thing to not pass it on; it’s quite another to not even listen to it.

It is difficult to extinguish. It starts easily, but have you ever tried to put one out? You might be able to correct the matter with people you told. But how will you ever track down the people they told, and the people they told...

Its damage is usually irreversible. It’s impossible to put back together a home destroyed by fire. What about taking back the words you used to burn someone else? You can apologize, but your mouth has already spoken that which fills your heart.

The tongue is “the very world of iniquity” (vs. 6). That’s putting it mildly.

- Bubba Garner

The Twelve Apostles

Consider the twelve men Jesus chose.

Simon – impetuous, impulsive, impertinent Peter. There is room in the kingdom for the extrovert.

Andrew – went back to bring his brother, Peter. There is room for the second fiddle.

James & John – cousins of Jesus who sought chief seats. There is room for the overly ambitious.

Philip – made the simple reply to doubting Nathaniel, “Come and see.” There is room for simple men.

Bartholomew – likely the Nathaniel whom Philip brought. There is room for the honest skeptic.

Matthew – a publican, an office despised by his countrymen. There is room for the outcast.

Thomas – the doubter. There is room for those with imperfect faith.

James – called “the less” likely because of his youth. There is room for the young.

Simon – member of a militant Jewish nationalistic sect. There is room for the misguided.

Judas – called Thaddeus, of whom the gospels record only his naïve question. There is room for the ignorant.

Judas – the betrayer. There is room even for the betrayer, except the unrepentant one.

All these men were under construction at the time Jesus called them. There is room in the kingdom for men like them who are willing to become what the Lord can make of them.

- Jason Moore

Self Destruction

The trouble with the tongue is not just that we use it to hurt *one another*. It's that we end up hurting *ourselves* even more. The inevitable result of all lying, gossiping, slandering, and cursing is death by our own poison.

“The tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body” (vs. 6). Don't believe the old adage about sticks and stones. Words *will* harm you. In a matter of seconds, they can crumble reputations that took years to build. They have the power to separate intimate friends, destroy influence, and bring about any man's demise. And if somehow you escape life unscathed by your words, don't count on the Lord letting them slip by. Jesus said that “every careless word that men shall speak, they shall render account for it in the day of judgment” (Matt. 12:36).

“The tongue is a restless evil” (vs. 6). The word *restless* denotes instability, a result of blessings and cursings coming from the same mouth. Nature will not allow a fountain to bring forth fresh and bitter water or a fit tree to produce olives. Neither will it allow those made in the image of God to use their tongues for both good and evil. Such inconsistency is a self-destructive sin.

But the one who does not stumble in what he says is a “perfect man” (3:2). He is complete, lacking nothing, attaining his true purpose. And he has probably bitten a hole through his bottom lip.

- Bubba Garner

The Lord Will Have His Way

It’s a terrible mistake to think the Lord God will not vindicate Himself. His character demands it. If God were to tolerate evil and not punish it, He would be only slightly different than His creatures. Paul said, “Behold the *goodness and severity* of God” (Rom. 11:22). For God to be good, He must also be severe.

Nahum warns us about this side of God’s nature. He is “slow to anger,” he says, but just as He has His way with nature, He will have His way when He metes out His indignation against ungodliness at the end of things. He is a “good stronghold in the day of trouble,” but He will “with an overrunning flood” devastate His enemies when all is said and done.

Make no mistake about it, there will be a time of judgment, a time when He who was the Savior will come as the Judge. And there will be no excuses then, no “reasons” for evil, no “reasons” for excesses, no “reasons” for disobedience of any kind.

“God is jealous” (vs. 2) says that He will not tolerate competition. You either serve with all your whole being or you don’t serve at all; there is no middle ground.

Even though it’s hard to do, take a little time today to consider the severity of God. Think for a few minutes about His judgment and how it will be with you when that time comes. Such thinking may make you a better, more dedicated person.

- Dee Bowman

The Story of Ruth

The book of Ruth is like a rose among thorns, an oasis of refreshment in a parched, deserted land.

Ruth is a testimony to the possibility of living a godly life in an ungodly generation. She lived in the time of the Judges when everyone did “what was right in his own eyes.” Not so Ruth. She was an exception. She proved that we can be exceptions.

Ruth is a tribute to the enthusiasm of first generation believers. Her faith was simple. Her affection is genuine. Her devotion is absolute. She doesn’t know that she’s not supposed to believe.

Ruth is a model of the worthy woman. Put her in any age. Place her in any culture. Shoulder her with any burden, and she’ll bear it with courage. She is the picture of unassuming, unpretentious, unsoiled virtue. Women in our age would beautify and beatify themselves by following her lead.

Ruth is an OT example of the Good Samaritan spirit. She, an outsider to the covenant and an enemy of Israel, showed unexpected kindness to another in need. She went beyond what justice required, and operated on the principle of mercy. It is the better way. It is the Savior’s way.

Ruth is easy to read, easy to love, but hard to follow. Blessed are the ruthless.

- Jason Moore

The Good News About Salvation

“Gospel” means “good news.” It heralds some great new happening.

In today’s reading we are told how the resurrected Jesus appeared to the disciples who had been told of His resurrection and didn’t believe it. Seems that problem still exists today. “Lord, who hath believed our report?” (Isa. 53:1). It is sad indeed that, after all He has done for man, he still rejects Him.

The gospel is not restricted to one race or class of people; it’s for everyone, Jew and Gentile, black and white, male and female. The reason is simple: everyone needs it. It’s everyone’s “good news.”

The gospel is the good news about salvation. It is to be believed and obeyed. Those who reject it will be lost (Mark 16:16). Paul says of that gospel that “it is the power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16). He told the Corinthians it was the means “by which ye are saved...” (I Cor. 15:1-2). It concerns the Son of God, born of the seed of David, declared the Messiah by the resurrection from the dead (Rom. 1:3-4).

If you suddenly found a cure for cancer would you make it available to as many as possible? Surely you would. The gospel treats the most deadly disease of man – sin. The gospel is available for all and many don’t yet know it. Will you not tell it today?

- Dee Bowman