

Saturday—April 17, 2021

Devotional Series: Portals of Prayer (April—June 2021)

Scripture: Proverbs 26:12

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today's Scripture reading from Proverbs is a difficult one. Basically it says that the one who thinks they know everything, has a closed mind to God's Word and the message of salvation that comes to us in Jesus Christ. If one believes that they know more than Christ, who is the only hope for this fallen world, then they place themselves outside of that hope by their rejection of Christ and His Word.

The sinful nature that we inherited from Adam is the reason for such a mindset. By his rebellion, Adam raised himself above the authority of God's Word. And when confronted, he tried to justify himself by pointing first to Eve and then to God who created Eve and gave her to Adam as his helpmate.

If knowledge becomes our means of self-justification, then we commit ourselves to relying on our own reason and wisdom for justification. Arrogance is really a position of weakness born out of the need to justify myself. I have to be better than everyone. I have to know more than everyone. Even if it is a delusion (and it is), I can't entertain the possibility that I am a fallen human being.

And if so, then I truly am without hope because I will turn a deaf ear to God's invitation to come and sit at His feet and learn from Him through His Word. And when I talk about God's Word, that is first and foremost the Word of God made flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. By His words and actions, He revealed to us God's plan for our salvation – for our justification. By His perfect life, His sacrificial death and His victorious resurrection, Jesus brought to completion God's saving work. He opened to us the way to come home. And that is simply hearing and responding to His invitation when He say to us, "Come to me all of you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Listen to His voice. Hear His Word of life and hope that comes to us through the forgiveness of our sin. And come to Him who is our life and hope.

-Pastor Harmon

Friday—April 16, 2021

Devotional Series: Portals of Prayer (April—June 2021)

Scripture: Proverbs 25:15

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today's Scripture passage from Proverbs is very appropriate for our times and how to navigate in days when the Church is viewed by many as irrelevant and by some as the enemy. Proverbs 25:15 says, "With patience a ruler may be persuaded, and a soft tongue will break a bone." We live in a time when hostility

toward the Church is on the rise – especially from those in authority. And patience is a key to our response to that hostility.

Patience is a guard against overreactions. It is a means by which our emotions can be taken out of the issues at hand so that reasoned conversations can take place. Patience is not simply sitting still and hoping that it will all go away – an excuse for doing nothing. It is a purposeful response to the emotional issues that confront us today.

And we can afford to be patient because the tomb is empty. Jesus lives as King. The battle is over. We've won. The enemies of God have been defeated – those enemies (sin, death and the devil) that use others as pawns in their war against God and the truth of His Word. We are not victims. Joined together with Christ in His death and life, we are more than conquerors. We are dearly loved children of God.

-Pastor Harmon

Thursday—April 15, 2021

Devotional Series: Portals of Prayer (April—June 2021)

Scripture: Proverbs 19:27

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Proverbs 19:27 tells us that if we cease to hear instruction, we will stray from the words of knowledge. Any parent would understand the wisdom of those words. Whenever your children failed to listen to your words of warning, bad things happened. Such instruction was always given to protect them from harm – physically or emotionally. It was always meant for good.

Today, the question should be asked, “Who is doing the instruction?” Because truth has, in the eyes of many, become a subjective thing, instruction can come from a variety of sources – even contradictory sources. In such a context, it is almost impossible to stray from the words of knowledge. Knowledge itself has become a subjective thing.

So the real issue is truth – what it is and where it comes from. Because the empty tomb is an historical fact, I choose to listen to the words of Jesus when he says in John 14: “I am the way and the truth and the life.” Jesus is the Truth. Everything else is false. If you cease to listen to His voice, if you cease to listen to the Truth, then you will indeed stray from the Truth. You will find yourself walking on a false way – a way that leads to destruction.

That's what Adam and Eve did. They failed to listen to God's instruction and they strayed from the truth. They became prisoners of sin and death. Jesus came, as a second Adam, to do what the first Adam could not do. He kept the Law of God. He did not fail to listen to instruction. He became the perfect sacrifice needed to gain for us the forgiveness of sin.

United together with Jesus in His death and life through the waters of Baptism, we have been united with the Truth. We have been brought into the Truth. Continue to listen to His voice. Continue to listen to God's Word so that you remain in the Truth and walk on solid ground.

-Pastor Harmon

Wednesday—April 14, 2021

Devotional Series: Portals of Prayer (April—June 2021)

Scripture: Matthew 9:18

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Today's devotion is based on Matthew 9:18. The context is the encounter that Jesus had with Jairus. He was the ruler of the synagogue – an important official. His position may have influenced his view of Jesus. It would be his job to determine the validity of Jesus' ministry in this place. It would be his duty to determine whether Jesus was speaking the truth.

That may account for the fact that he comes to Jesus after his daughter has died rather than while she was sick or near death. We could say that this may have been a last resort kind of thing. But it could also be an example of God working for good in the midst of tragedy. Often people turn to God in the midst of tragedy. Church attendance soared in the aftermath of 9/11.

That Jairus says that if Jesus will just come and touch his daughter, he knows that she will live, suggests a faith that trusts Jesus has the power to raise the dead. So it would seem that this is one turning in faith to God and trusting Him for the results rather than as a last resort.

And that faith trusts God to work according to His timing. Our hope in Christ is not for this world only. He comes to touch us through the waters of Baptism. He comes to raise us from death in sin to life in Him. The physical healing that we see in this episode is a glimpse into the eternal – a foretaste of what is to come. Our life is in God's hands and not even death can rob that from us.

-Pastor Harmon

Tuesday—April 13, 2021

Devotional Series: Portals of Prayer (April—June 2021)

Scripture: Matthew 26:35

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Today's devotion is based on Matthew 26:35 where, after Jesus told him that he would deny knowing Jesus before the cock crowed, Peter told Jesus that even if he had to die, he would not deny Him. And we all know how that turned out. This conversation focuses on how we often think and act concerning out

relationship with God. We want to do something that will please Him. We want to demonstrate our devotion – our commitment. We want to show our strength and resolve. And those are all good things that are worth aspiring to.

But they also put the focus on us – on what are doing or what we desire to do. That can be a dangerous place to be. In the best light, such a focus will always show us our sin and our absolute need for Jesus' gift of His righteousness through the forgiveness of our sin. In the worst light, we fall into a works righteousness response to our sin. We'll just do a better job. We'll make up for any discretions.

And when we find ourselves there, we become easy prey for the devil who is always at work to convince us that salvation depends on our work. He works to convince us that it's our job to make ourselves worthy of God's love.

The truth is that we have always been loved – even when we were enemies of God. Jesus, by His saving work, has made us worthy to receive His love. He has taken us, the unlovable, and made us lovable. He has taken us who were dead in our trespasses and sin and made us alive in Him. In Baptism, we have been united together with Him in His death and life. And we rest in that union today and forever. There is nothing for us to prove.

-Pastor Harmon

Monday—April 12, 2021

Devotional Series: Portals of Prayer (April—June 2021)

Scripture: Matthew 16:23

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today's devotion is based on Matthew 16:23 – But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a hindrance to Me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." This is a time of testing for Jesus and the success of His mission to save the world from the power of sin hangs in the balance.

Prior to this, Jesus laid out for the Twelve what would happen to Him in Jerusalem. He would be arrested, beaten, put on trial and be put to death. All of this, Jesus would suffer at the hands of the religious leaders in Jerusalem and Pilate, the Roman governor.

Peter had just confessed Jesus to be the Messiah – the Savior of God's people. And death was not part of that plan. The Messiah wasn't supposed to die in Jerusalem. He was supposed to declare Himself king, set up His kingdom and raise up Israel to the status that it enjoyed in the days of King David.

Jesus would go to Jerusalem and He would indeed establish His kingdom. But it would have to go through the cross. Jesus would have to die the death that sinful man deserved. He would have to suffer the condemnation that God's law

demands. He would have to pay the wage that is owed to sin. He would do all of that in our place. He would be condemned and die so that we can live.

It is through that sacrifice that forgiveness comes. It is through Jesus joining us together with Him in that death and His resurrection that we are raised to new life in Him – that we are clothed in His righteousness and our sin is forgiven.

Through Jesus saving work, we are raised to life and welcomed into His Kingdom of light.

-Pastor Harmon