

**Saturday—July 17, 2021**

**Devotional Series: Portals of Prayer (July—September 2021)**

**Scripture: Numbers 21:4-9 & Psalm 5:2**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Today's devotion is based on Numbers 21:4-9. The event described here occurred during the wilderness wanderings of the Israelites. They had been delivered from their slavery in Egypt and were on their way to the land of promise given by God to Abraham and his descendants.

And, as was too often the case, they grew impatient. The people of Israel grumbled against God and against Moses. They are convinced that God and Moses brought them out of Egypt so that they can starve in the desert. They complained that they had no food or water. They even came to despise the manna (bread from heaven) that had sustained them each day.

As a result, God sent venomous snakes among them. They bit the people and many died. The Law had its desired effect. The people confessed their sin that they had sinned when they spoke against the Lord. And they asked Moses to pray that God would remove the snakes.

But God did not remove the snakes. Instead He spoke a promise. God told Moses to make a bronze snake and put it up on a pole for the people to see. The promise was that anyone who was bitten by a snake could look at the bronze snake and live. The snakes remained to remind them of their sin and their absolute dependence upon God's and His mercy for deliverance. As baptized children of God, our old sinful nature remains as a reminder of our sin (of what we have been delivered) and of our absolute dependence upon God's mercy revealed to us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ who Himself was lifted up on a cross to rescue us from the deadly power of sin.

***-Pastor Harmon***

**Friday—July 16, 2021**

**Devotional Series: Portals of Prayer (July—September 2021)**

**Scripture: John 1:35-42**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Today's devotion from Portals of Prayer is entitled "Andrew, the LIFT Missionary." It is based on John 1:35-42. It is a recounting of Andrew's first encounter with Jesus. John the Baptist saw Jesus and announced, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." And Andrew followed Jesus. I reprint the devotion for your meditation.

"Certain words in the Bible strike me quiet deeply. The two words that impress

me about Andrew are the words first and said in the verse above [John 1:41]. The obvious may escape us in John's account of Jesus calling His first disciples. Notice Andrew's reaction to John the Baptist's announcement of Jesus walking by. He heard and followed Jesus (vs. 37), and then he stayed with Him. What impresses me about Andrew are his priorities. His first reaction to being with the Savior was to find and tell his brother (vs. 41). If you've ever played even a tiny part in witnessing about Jesus to a person whom God then brought to faith, verse 42 shows Andrew's heart: 'he brought him to Jesus.' Wow – our first missionary! Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist but also – and more important – of Jesus. Andrew was the one who found the boy with five loaves and two fish at the feeding of the five thousand (John 6:8-9). It was in Andrew's house that Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law (Mark 1:29-31). Andrew's example: (1) Listen, (2) Internalize, (3) Follow, (4) Tell. This is a great acronym for sharing the Gospel: LIFT."

***-Pastor Harmon***

**Thursday—July 15, 2021**

**Devotional Series: Portals of Prayer (July—September 2021)**

**Scripture: Psalm 90:12**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Today's devotion is based on Psalm 90:12 – "So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom." The context can be summarized with the phrase: You are God and we are not. The Psalmist recounts various examples of God's mighty power – His creative power, His eternal character, His anger against sin. In that context, when the Psalmist asks God to teach us to number our days that we might get a heart of wisdom, he is asking God to help us remember that He is God. He is the master of both life and death. We are mortal and must remain subject to Him. That's the wisdom that we need to acquire.

That is a wisdom that focuses on the cross. There we see the power of God's anger poured out against our sin. The devastation and condemnation is made crystal clear. It falls in all of its power. But we aren't the target. It is God's own Son who bears that curse – who endures that pain. He takes our place and dies so that we might live. God Himself received the penalty that we deserve so that He could have mercy on us.

By His death, He destroyed the power of death to hold us captive – to separate us from God. His resurrection is the sign that His sacrifice was accepted. His blood covers us and we are forgiven. By God's work through the waters of Baptism, we are united together with Christ in His death and life. We are given a new life that will never end.

***-Pastor Harmon***

**Wednesday—July 14, 2021**

**Devotional Series: Portals of Prayer (July—September 2021)**

**Scripture: Matthew 27:50**

Today's devotion is based on Matthew 27:50 – “And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up His spirit.” The context is the crucifixion. Jesus has been nailed to the cross. Already weakened by the scourging that He endured, He was subjected to the pain of crucifixion. The title of the devotion is “Jesus Surrendered.” And He did. But His surrender is not the typical surrender.

I have, in my time as a Pastor, watched people die. I have seen them breathe their last. And while my experience may be a limited sample size, I have never seen anyone cry out with a loud voice just before breathing their last. In most cases, the difference between life and death was imperceptible.

Jesus cried out with a loud voice. He surrendered Himself to sin, death and the devil. But He did not do that out of weakness. He did not do that in defeat. He submitted Himself to death, but He retained His power. He gave Himself up willingly so that He could then descend into hell to proclaim His victory.

Jesus did all of that for us. He subjected Himself to both physical and eternal death. He was forsaken and condemned in our place. He suffered the penalty that we deserved as children of Adam. He took our place in death so that He could swallow up death in His life. He died so that we could live. And He rose again to come and bring us that new life through the forgiveness of our sin.

***-Pastor Harmon***

**Tuesday—July 13, 2021**

**Devotional Series: Portals of Prayer (July—September 2021)**

**Scripture: Luke Acts 4:29**

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

Today's devotion from Portals of Prayer is based on Acts 4:29 – “And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to Your servants to continue to speak Your word with all boldness.” The context for this verse is a prayer spoken by the community of believers in Jerusalem when Peter and John were released from prison. They had been put in prison because they were proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.

There are some who believe that we are living in similar times and that proclaiming Jesus crucified and risen from the dead could result in those who make such proclamations being put in jail. These days are certainly trying times. Hostility against the proclamation of God's Word and against the Church is on the increase.

Our hope is the same as for Peter, John and those who gathered for prayer in Acts 4. They asked God for strength and endurance to continue to speak with boldness about Jesus and His saving work. And God gave them what they asked for. And He has given us the same. He has given us the Holy Spirit. He is our strength.

They didn't ask God to take away the troubles or the hostility. They asked for strength to continue to do what they have been called to do – to continue to proclaim the Truth of God's saving work and mankind's need for that saving work. For God desires that all would believe and come to the knowledge of Jesus Christ. God's desire is that even those who are hostile to the Truth would have their ears open to hear of that salvation that has come through Jesus' saving work done for them.

May God indeed strengthen us to continue to proclaim with boldness the hope that is ours in Jesus Christ and the resurrection that He has shared with us.

*-Pastor Harmon*

**Monday—July 12, 2021**

**Devotional Series: Portals of Prayer (July—September 2021)**

**Scripture: Luke 7:37**

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

Today's devotion is based on Luke 7:37 – “When she learned that He was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, [she] brought an alabaster flask of ointment.” The context is a dinner that takes place at this Pharisee's (whose name was Simon) house. Simon and this woman become a study in contrasts. Simon, the religious leader, does not offer Jesus any measures of hospitality expected in those days – no water for His feet, no kiss of welcome, no oil for His hair. This is not a friendly visit. Jesus is here to be tested. In contrast, this woman, who had lived a sinful life (and was therefore an outcast), wet Jesus' feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. She kissed His feet and anointed them with perfume.

Simon omitted those duties because he didn't believe Jesus to be a prophet or teacher. The woman does what she does because she believes that He is the deliverer – the One who comes to restore. That Jesus allows the woman to do that is evidence that He welcomes her (something that Simon would have never done). That welcome is confirmed when Jesus says to her that her sin is forgiven and that her faith has saved her.

Jesus comes to us right where we are – just as we are – but He loves us too much to leave us there. He is at work to restore this woman to God and He is at work to do the same for Simon. He deals gently with the woman because she is already broken. He is more direct and forceful with Simon because he is not yet broken. Jesus works in hope that Simon may yet be broken by his sin and submit to the

One who has come to welcome him into His home.

Because the woman believes that Jesus is the One to come and because she comes to Him broken by her sin, He is able to tell her to go in peace – to depart in the peace that only Jesus can give through the forgiveness of sin. He could not say the same to Simon.

***-Pastor Harmon***