

Saturday—July 10, 2021

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

Scripture: Hebrews 4:12

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

Today's devotion from Portals of Prayer is based on Hebrews 4:12 – “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” The author does a nice job of describing what the Word of God is. And she closes with a challenge.

“The Bible; what is it? Some say it's just a nice book; to others, it's only a gift to commemorate a religious event. Some see it as a hypocritical reminder of guilt, or just a catalog of impossible to-dos that a group of dead men wrote long ago. But the author of Hebrews describes it as none of those. Focus on the adjectives and verbs of the verse. The Bible is alive, just like Jesus. Can you pierce the exact spot where your soul, spirit, joints, and marrow divide? Certainly not, but God's Word can!

And frequency? Does your Bible get fresh air daily or weekly? Psalm 1:2 tells us that one will be blessed if ‘his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night.’ Blessing follows use. The Bible is a key to unlock the message of freedom, a guide for life's decisions, and a script for our speech and songs. It is truth, it is words for us to pray, and it is a prevailing sword. Most important of all, it is the Word of the living God that reveals our Savior, Jesus, to us. I challenge you to start discovering how sharp it really is!”

The challenge is to spend regular time in God's Word. It is especially true today when so many are telling us what God would never do – He would never judge, condemn, discriminate or fail to love. And while, to some extent, all of that is true, their opinions don't tell the whole story. God's Word does. It is Truth because Jesus, the living Word of God, is the Truth.

-Pastor Harmon

Friday—July 9, 2021

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

Scripture: Psalm 104:1

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

Today's devotion is based on a reading from Job (Job 38:1-11). This begins a section where God is speaking to Job. Job has endured great calamity and personal loss. He has been afflicted with boils. Like many today, Job wonders why such things have happened to him.

Job's friends are convinced that it is because of some unconfessed sin that Job is

suffering – that God is punishing him because of that sin. And while sin and its consequences does bring trouble and suffering, what Job is suffering is not a result of a particular sin of Job's. Suffering also most often because we live in a broken world where the devil is at work to destroy all that God has created. That is clear from the beginning of the Book of Job. God allows the devil to do what he does in this world to turn man away from God. But God also places limits on the devil's powers. And now God is speaking to Job about His power and about His will.

God asks Job a series of questions designed to answer the question why and to put Job in his place. Job wasn't around when God was creating the heavens and the earth. Job wasn't there when God set limits on the sea. While the heavens declare God's glory and Job is a witness to that, how God maintains that is beyond Job's (and ours) comprehension.

The answer to the question "why" is to trust in the One who has stretched out the heavens, who has created the world and all that is in it. We are to continue to trust in God who is at work at all times to preserve His creation and to restore it through His saving work accomplished in Jesus Christ. In Christ and by His power, sin and death and the devil are not only limited in what they can do to God's creation (including us), they have been defeated. Their power to separate and destroy has been conquered. By faith in Christ and His saving work, we too are set free from that power to live as children of God.

-Pastor Harmon

Thursday—July 8, 2021

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

Scripture: Proverbs 17:15

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

Today's devotion is based on Proverbs 17:15. In the ESV it reads, "He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike." In the NIV it reads, "Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent – the Lord detests them both." The ESV is the most recent translation and has the advantage of more source material than was available when the NIV translation was in process.

So we could say that the ESV is the more reliable translation – or not. But the bottom is that God works through them both to speak with us and instruct us. The focus of the ESV is that the same God justifies and condemns. That He justifies the wicked and condemns the righteous seems at the outset to be a bit troubling.

But God in fact does justify the wicked. We have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory. No one is good except God alone. God's justification – His declaration

that we are His – is based not on our work, but on the work of His Son, Jesus Christ. He became sin for us so that we could become the righteousness of God in Him – so that we, sinners that we are, might be made righteous by the power of God’s Word.

For the sake of Christ and by His work, our sin is forgiven. Jesus took that burden upon Himself and put it to death on the cross. He suffered the condemnation that we, as sinners, deserved. He, the innocent Son of God, took our place under that curse and died so that we could live.

As a result, God the Father looks upon us and declares us righteous. We have been cleansed of our sin. We have been covered in Christ’s righteous robes. We who were separated from God because of sin have now been brought home. That is our hope and it is certain and sure.

-Pastor Harmon

Wednesday—July 7, 2021

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

Scripture: Philippians 2:9

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

Today’s devotion is based on Philippians 2:9 – “The name that is above every name.” That is actually just part of the verse. The whole verse reads: “Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name.” The therefore raises the question, to what does Paul refer when he writes “therefore”?

He is referring to an aspect of Jesus’ saving work. He is referring to Jesus’ life of perfect obedience. The Son of God came into this world to do what we, as descendants of Adam, cannot. He came to fulfill the demands of God’s Law. God demands that we be perfect just as He is perfect. As children of Adam, we cannot. Our nature is broken and we can’t keep God’s Law perfectly.

Jesus did. He was tempted in every way just like we are, but He did not sin. He “became obedient to death – even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8). Because Jesus did what Adam (and we) cannot do, He was exalted. He was raised up to the place that Adam was meant to occupy. Because Jesus died the death that Adam (and we) deserved, man was once again the crown of God’s creation through the forgiveness of sin.

In baptism, we have been marked with Jesus’ name. We have been raised together with Him to a new life as children of God. We have been forgiven and restored to God. Our nature has been made new. In Christ and through the forgiveness of sin, we have been made whole. We are no longer broken. Therefore, we are dearly loved children of God.

-Pastor Harmon

Tuesday—July 6, 2021

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

Scripture: Psalm 27:8

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

The author of today's devotion from Portals of Prayer does a good job of writing about God's saving work. The devotion is based on Psalm 27:8 – "You have said, 'Seek My face.' My heart says to You, 'Your face, Lord, do I seek.'" She goes on to write about God's seeking activity. He is relentless.

"When the childhood game hide-and-seek is played correctly, there is one 'seeker' and several 'hidiers,' who attempt to find obscure hiding places and avoid being found by the 'seeker.' Obviously, the hidiers don't tell the seeker where they may be found; this would defeat the object of the game. But Jesus plays in a different way.

God promises in Proverbs 8:17, 'Those who seek Me diligently find Me.' To clarify, the verse doesn't continue with qualifiers such as 'you may find Me' or 'sometimes you'll find Me' or even 'if you've been good, you'll find Me.' God is emphatic here: You will find Me.

In the game above, Jesus represents the all-time and ultimate seeker – He never stops seeking us. Whether it's the lost coin, the lost son, the lost sheep, or the lost us. He's shown that when something is lost, the search begins and when the lost is found, rejoicing ensues.

And it is only because Jesus seeks and finds us that we can, in turn, find Him. And where do we find Him? In the very places He has told us He can be found: in His Word and Sacraments. He won't forsake us when we seek Him. He will be there."

-Pastor Harmon

Monday—July 5, 2021

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

Scripture: Psalm 139:17

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

Today's devotion from Portals of Prayer is based on Psalm 139:17 – "How precious to me are Your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!" The author focuses on God's thoughts toward us. And that's a good focus for us – especially when we are going through a particularly rough day.

She writes: "Guess who is always thinking about you? All the time, every day, every moment? Yes, it's Jesus, the Savior! He never stops thinking about you; He can't. His thoughts are precious and vast toward you."

Paul writes that Jesus sits at the right hand of His Father interceding for us daily. He is our intercessor – our mediator between us and God. His thoughts are always directed toward us. We are always in need of His daily supervision – His daily care. If Jesus' thoughts were not directed toward us every day, then we would become easy prey of the devil – that roaring lion who daily seeks whom he might devour.

His thoughts are spoken to us through His Word. He shares His thoughts with us. He shares what we need so that we have a defense against the devil and his temptations. He speaks to us of His promises of life and salvation that He has given to us and that we have received by faith. To defend us from the power of the devil, He continues to remind us of His promises. He continues to remind us that we are His – that we have been united to Him through Baptism.

He continually reminds us that because of that union, there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God that is ours in Him. He knows that we need to hear that Word – to be assured that we are His and that our future is secure.

-Pastor Harmon