

Day 36

Pastoral Letters: From ICU to You.

Jesus answered, "Were not ten cleansed of leprosy? Where are the nine?" -Luke 17:17

How many Old Testament idols can you name?

Let's see...

*Baal. The god of the Canaanites.

*Dagon. The god of the Philistines.

*Chemosh. The god of the Moabites.

Can you name an idol in our everyday life?

Let's see...

How about an idol named, Normal.

Remember the Sunday School story when Jesus cleansed 10 lepers? We recall that only one returned to give thanks and glory to God.

Why?

I think it has everything to do with the idol called: Normal.

What do we want more than anything when we experience setbacks, sickness, or suffering?
Normalcy!

We just want life to return to normal.

We covet and crave for life to go back to our normal daily routines and rituals.

I think the nine lepers who went on their way without acknowledging Jesus simply succumbed to the idol worship of Normalcy.

So overjoyed that their suffering had ended they began worshipping the creation over the Creator.

Finally, they could be just like everyone else. Kiss their wife. Hug their kids. Sleep in their own bed. Go out to their favorite restaurant. Walk their dog in the park. Hang out at the pool.

How extraordinary is the ordinary when it is taken away! So when the Son of God gave them back normalcy, the temptation was just too great. Mammon was too much. Too much to even just stop for a moment and say thanks to God. So off they went chasing the idol of normalcy, leaving Jesus in the dust and the rear view mirror.

I have to be honest. I too have found myself dabbling in idol worship over the course of the last few months. I just want to live a normal life so bad that I've missed the blessings around me. I

focus on what I don't have instead of what I do have. I'm blinded by what has gone wrong that I miss what has gone right. I want so bad certain gifts from God that I can easily turn from God in my obsession to chase the wind. In the absence of normal I've missed at times the presence of Christ.

Maybe you can relate? Maybe you too have bowed a knee to the idol of Normal. Maybe you too have worshipped the gifts rather than the Giver.

In this fallen world, there is no such thing as normal. Normalcy was lost in the first paradise of Eden and will not be fully restored until the final paradise of heaven. It is a chasing after the wind.

Jesus never instructed us to pray, "May normalcy be done."

Jesus moves us to pray, "Thy will be done."

I know. Believe me, I know! Nothing is more aggravating in a day like a schedule gone bonkers and berserk!

But it is OK. Hang in there. Hang tight.

It might actually be good, or Godly.

After all, our faith is not in the false idols of Normalcy. Our trust is in the Lord.

Are you part of the nine? Or are you the one who returned to give thanks and praise to the Lord?

+To God be the glory!

Day 37

Pastoral Letters: From ICU to You

*"For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him?"
- I Corinthians 2:11*

You want to watch a husband and wife fight like cats and dogs?
You want to watch brothers fight like Cain and Abel?
You want to watch a functional family become dysfunctional?

Easy! Just judge the heart.

I'm not talking about the fruit of faith. We can judge the fruit according to the standard of God's Word.

But you will drive your loved one bananas when you question the motive of their actions!

When a loved one is sick it changes life for spouses, family and friends. Not just the one receiving care but also for the one giving care.

And love comes in many, many different flavors. Maybe just as many as Baskin-Robbins famous 31 different flavors.

Consider the following:

Sometimes the care giver needs to push when the care receiver wants to be pulled.

Tough love vs. Tender love.

Which one? And when? How?

Is it time to be patient or is it about time for a sense of urgency?

Should I just listen or do I need to say something?

Do I make them do it on their own or do I continue to do it for them?

And a whole lot more....

Loving someone is never easy. Giving love is not easy. Receiving love, especially if it is not our favorite flavor, is also not easy. It's one of the reasons why repentance is hard to swallow. It's not on the menu or palate of the Old Adam's taste buds!

Our relationships in a sinful world are already challenging.

Ascribing motives and judging the heart just makes the challenging even more of a challenge.

Maybe you and your loved one can agree on one thing. Less judging the heart and more grace given and received from the heart.

Our Father in heaven is a God of long-suffering. His children can also, by His Spirit, be forbearing in grace even when they might not always agree on the flavor of the love that needs to be dished out.

Give a little grace to your loved one. It goes a long way!

+To God be the glory!

Day 38
Pastoral Letters: From ICU to You
"Scripture cannot be broken." - John 10:35

We all know a comfortable pillow can give you sweat dreams. We all know a night at a bad hotel can cause you to toss and turn, beating your pillow to death, giving you nightmares.

Dear Christian! The authority of Scripture is the pillow on which you find your rest. Your peace. Your comfort.

The authority of Scripture is the pillow of the worn and weary.

It is the pillow of the deathbed.

It is the pillow of the sickbed.

It is the pillow of those exhausted by the dangers, toils, and snares of this world.

Knowing that the promises of God revealed to us in Scripture cannot be broken is our great confidence. Knowing that the salvation plan of a gracious God recorded in the Bible is inspired, inerrant, and infallible is our great comfort.

What happens if you believe the Bible is the word of man? What happens if you believe the Bible is anything less than the full word of God? What if you believe the Bible is lore or legend, fable or fiction, myth or tale? What if you believe the Bible has errors?

You have no where to rest your head!

But if the promises of God are sure and certain you can have peace at the last!

Pastors, encourage one another to preach on the authority of Scripture!

Laypeople, encourage your pastor to preach on the authority of Scripture!

The person facing trials and troubles is not looking for a question mark, but an exclamation mark. Not a cup half full, but the promise that the cup overflows!

The authority of Scripture is not some academic exercise. It is not some archaic dogma. It is not about conservative vs. liberal or traditionalist vs. progressive.

It is the pillow on which the pilgrim rests.

Read the account of Jacob's Dream in Genesis 28. Otherwise known as Jacob's Ladder. Jacob placed his pillow under his head. A stone. And he received the sure and certain promise that the Lord would be with him. So he took that pillow, or stone, and set it up as a pillar and called that place Bethel!

Why? Because Jacob believed the promise of God could not be broken.

"Behold, I am with you Jacob and I will keep you wherever you go. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." (Genesis 28:15)

Pastors don't leave your people empty handed. Put in their hands the full confidence of the Word of God.

For the ivory tower of theologians who play word games with the inspiration of Scripture are far from ICU.

"For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." (2 Peter 1:21)

This promise carries you to the promise of the cross which carries you to life everlasting.
"Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy burdened, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

Lord, let your servant depart in peace!

+To God alone be the glory.

Day 39

Pastoral Letters: From ICU to You

"We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame."

-Romans 5:3-5

Our youngest son runs cross country. He came home the other day wearing a classic T-shirt from his coach:

"My Sport Is Your Sports Punishment."

Suffering for the unbeliever serves no purpose. Just an evil we have to face in the game called life. Just like athletic conditioning is a necessary evil to play your favorite game.

Romans! What a letter!

Luther said: "Every Christian should know it word by word, by heart, and occupy himself with it, as the daily bread of the soul."

So, let's look at this verse in Romans word by word by word by word.

Suffering = Endurance = Character = Hope

This is not an audition for the Christian to play the role of the Happy Warrior.

What bothered me the most in my battle with Covid? When someone said: "It is all ok."

My reply: "No. It's not all ok. Look! I'm hooked up to literally a dozen machines! Does this look ok to you?"

So, is Paul the religious fanatic? The out of touch Happy Warrior, walking the halls of the hospital, telling every patient that everything is just fine and dandy? No.

Christians don't rejoice in THE suffering. They rejoice in knowing that God can work THROUGH the suffering. Read Romans 5:3 again. Maybe one more time. After all, the third time is the charm, right?

Paul lays it out there for all eyes to see and all ears to hear. We rejoice in the knowing! The confidence that God is working through the suffering.

Suffering alone produces nothing. Suffering with Christ Jesus produces many things.

Key thought: Our relationship with Christ transforms suffering.

As God leads us through suffering, He teaches endurance, He develops character, and blesses us with hope!

This is sometimes why God doesn't remove the hardship from our life.

When we face the shadows of death? The Lord is working in your life. The Lord never promises that He will take us around, over, or under. In Psalm 23, the Good Shepherd promises He will take us through the shadow of death to the green pastures of life everlasting.

Don't sell God short. Don't act as if God can only work in one way. Your way. Or my way. Or the way of the world. God can bring blessings even out of curses.

Nothing is outside of His handiwork.
Even suffering.

Enough said. Why?
For you have a hope that doesn't disappoint!

+To God be the glory!

Day 40

Pastoral Letters: From ICU to You

"Who has known the mind of God?" -Romans 11:34

Life.

Filled with the good, the bad, and the ugly.

Why is life filled with the good?

In the silliness of our sinful state we think we know the answer. Drum roll please!
In the folly of our fallen nature we actually believe we deserve the good!

Wrong answer. But it makes sense to the Old Adam. Because this is how the Old Man rolls!

But what about the bad and the ugly? The Old Man wants to know! Even the New Man wants to know! Because inquiring minds want to know!

Like Adam we want to take a taste from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. At the very least, we want to know why the bad and the ugly show up and crash our party called life.

So we ask the age old question: "Why the bad? Why the ugly?" We know the short answer: sin. But we want longer answers. We want answers that satisfy our curiosities. We want answers that we can rationalize and reason. We want answers that make sense to our sensibilities. But Paul reminds us there is one huge challenge. There is one big obstacle.

Here it is...

"Who knows the mind of God?"

We want more than anything to understand the mind of God!

But have we thought this through?

If we understand God, we have an even bigger problem. And what would that be?

God would not be much of a God!

If God is on our level or we are on His level, we have a puny God! We now have a God who can't even get an "A" on an Algebra I test. We have a God who can't even replace the light bulb. We have a God who can't even remember to pick up milk from the grocery store after being reminded by the wife for the zillionth time.

If the mind of God is on our level, He is no God to be worshipped or praised in the very end!

Part of the comfort for the Christian, oddly enough, is knowing that "His paths are beyond our tracing out" and His judgments are unsearchable. (Romans 11:33)

Knowing that God is above us, brings confidence to the Christian. We need and should want a God whose thoughts and ways are not bound to our thoughts and ways.

Key question: Would our way be the way of the cross? Would our way be the way of grace? Would our way be the way of love for the unlovable? Be honest!

Thank God today that His ways and His thoughts are not ours. For His ways are graciously different! Even in the bad and ugly. Even for the bad and the ugly!

You know the way to the Father. You know in the Father's house there are many rooms and He has gone to prepare a place for you.

Do you know everything? No. But you don't have to know everything. In fact, it might be better if you don't know!

You know enough. More than enough.
For you know Jesus!

+To God be the glory!