
21 Days of Prayer & Fasting 2020

Daily Devotion Guide



GRACE CHURCH



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Focus on Prayer 2020

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A Word from Pastor Niall...

Dear Grace Family,

This month, we are embarking on a journey into the compassionate heart of our Lord. Yes, we are fasting and praying together for the next 21 days! And on Sundays, we will be looking at the Psalms to show us individuals who cried out to God for justice and how the Lord answered them.

Consider the story of Esther, a young Jewish woman who marries a foreign king. And then there is a plot by the wicked Haman to kill all the Jews in Persia. And in the middle of this terrifying threat, Esther shares this plan with her righteous cousin Mordecai:

“Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish.” Esther 4:16

We know the Lord answered their request. And a potentially enormous act of injustice was brought to nothing.

Each year, we give consideration to a particular prayer need that will be the focus of our fast. This year, I would encourage us to fast for a justice issue. It might be something that doesn't touch your life, but touches the lives of others. And of course, we will also offer our personal requests to the Lord.

Social justice is being talked about quite a bit in our culture. One definition of that term is “promoting a just society by challenging injustice and valuing diversity.” It sounds good, and yet there are so many different opinions about what that actually means and what we should do about it.

What we need is a biblical view, God's perspective on justice. No one is more just than our God! This kind of view sees each person as created in God's image with dignity and value. It is not a temporal perspective but an eternal perspective. “Justice” itself is a relational word that means “to make right.” And so we want to do right to people who are hurting and oppressed.

So for the month of February, we have chosen this theme: “Starving for Justice.” I hope you will join us in fasting and calling out to our righteous Lord this month to help those in need. And let us be open to how the Lord would use us to act justly (Micah 6:8) and to love our neighbor as we love ourself (Mark 12:31).

Blessings!

Pastor Niall



What is Biblical Fasting?

Fasting is a spiritual discipline in which believers abstain from food for the spiritual purpose of intensifying our hunger for God and aligning our hearts with His!

Fasting aligns our hearts with God by demonstrating our HUMILITY before Him (Ezra 8:21; Psalm 69:10)

Fasting aligns our hearts with God through our REPENTENCE and CONFESSION of sin (1 Samuel 7:6; 1 Kings 21:27)

Fasting aligns our hearts with God by acknowledging our sole DEPENDENCE on Him (Deuteronomy 8:2-3; Matthew 4:1-4)

Fasting aligns our hearts with God by discerning His WILL and DIRECTION in our lives (Judges 20:26-28; Acts 13:1-3)

Fasting aligns our hearts with God by increasing our appetite to PRAY (Mark 1:35)

Fasting aligns our hearts with God increasing our appetite for Him and His WORD (Matthew 4:1-4; John 4:31-35)



Physical Aspects of fasting

If you have specific health issues related to diet, check with a doctor before beginning a fast.

No matter what way you choose to fast make sure and drink fluids including water and fruit juices.

You may need to restrict some of your physical activity during a fast, especially rigorous exercise.

Sudden movements, especially standing up quickly, may cause dizziness or light-headedness.

Expect some physical, mental, and perhaps even some emotional discomfort during a fast.. Headaches, sleeplessness, and irritability often accompany a fast, but don't allow the fast to become an excuse for improper actions or attitudes.





Grace Church
21 Days of
Corporate
Fasting and
Prayer

Grace Church's time of corporate fasting and prayer begins on ***Sunday, February 2*** and continues through ***Sunday, February 23***.

You are encouraged to join us...
for weekly fasting on Wednesdays

February 5

February 12

February 19

During these 3 weeks, the elders are asking that we devote each Wednesday to fasting and prayer as a corporate effort to seek God.

Fasting on each of these Wednesdays will involve ***abstaining from food for breakfast and lunch. During the time we would normally spend in preparation or eating the meal, it is important to use that time to pray and to read God's Word.*** For example, if you normally spend 20 minutes preparing and eating breakfast, use that 20 minutes to pray and read Scripture instead.

If you are unable to participate in the corporate fast on Wednesdays, you are welcome to choose another day of the week to align your heart with God through fasting and prayer.

My Commitment to Fast and Pray

(As a way of bringing focus to your time of fasting and praying, answer the following questions.)

My Goal: I am asking God to _____

My Fast: (what I will withhold)

My Prayer: (When I will pray)

My Vow: God being my strength, and grace being my basis, I commit myself to this period of fasting so that God will answer my prayer and give the thing for which I trust Him. Not my will Oh God, but Yours be done.

Lord, I dedicate small things to express the greatness of Your supremacy in all of life.

Lord, I will be faithful in little expressions of my faith for great answers to prayer.

Lord, I vow to fulfill these small expressions of my love to You.
Amen.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Day 1

“The Lord saw it, and it DISPLEASED Him that there was no justice.”

Isaiah 59:15

Key Thought: God is aware of injustice and is DISPLEASED

We are the victims of injustice every day! Someone pulls in front of us in the Wal-Mart parking lot and takes our parking spot. A friend borrows a few dollars from us and never pays us back. The coffee we ordered doesn't have enough whipped cream or it was not the right temperature. The package we ordered from Amazon doesn't arrive on time. We provided supper for our family AND we had to do the dishes too. I hope you sensed the sarcasm in these examples. Most of the things we might consider injustice are really just inconveniences.

While most of us experience some minor inconveniences that might feel like injustice, ***there are some very real injustices going on all around us in the world.*** God in His Word includes widows, orphans, sojourners, wage earners (employees), prisoners, slaves, the poor and the sick on the top of His list of those who are most vulnerable to being the victims of injustice (Job 29:12–17; Ps. 146:7–9; Mal. 3:5). Some modern examples of injustice going on around the world today include poverty, racial discrimination, forced slave labor, land theft, corrupt government/law enforcement, citizenship right abuse, and sex violence/trafficking (www.ijm.org). Victims of true injustice are those who suffer from oppression and abuse at the hands of an individual or organization's sinful use of position/authority, race, finances, or physical strength for their own pleasure or advantage.

So, what is justice and where does it come from? The word translated “justice” most frequently in the Old Testament is the Hebrew word mishpat (מִשְׁפָּט) which means to “judge”, “govern”, or “rule”. In the New Testament, justice is expressed in the Greek word dikaiosune (δικαιοσύνη) which means “righteousness”. Both of these words describe the ability to relate with others in a right, good, and fair way.

God is just Himself – God said in Isaiah 61:8, “I the Lord love justice”. Again, in Isaiah 28:17 He says, “I will make justice the line, and righteousness the plumb line”. God relates to all humanity who He created with perfect justice and righteousness, always relating with us according to a His right, good, and fair standard. Because God is just, ***He requires humanity to be***

just (like Him) - As image bearers, God requires that humanity relate with one another according the same just and righteous standard that He exhibits toward us. Micah 6:8 says, “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

When God looks at our personal lives, our families, our community, our country, and our world He expects to see us living with justice and righteousness. Sadly, humanity is sinful and does not live by God’s standard of justice which is displeasing to Him. God practices and delights in justice, and when He sees those He created in His images relating to one another in unjust and unrighteous ways it causes Him displeasure (Jeremiah 9:24). As Christians, if we want to live lives that are pleasing to God, one of the best ways we can do that is by relating with others in a just and right manner and defending those who are victims of injustice.

Questions

1. When have you experienced real injustice in your own life?
2. When have you acted in an unjust manner toward another person?
3. What injustice do you see in your own life? In your family? In your community? In your country? In your world?

Prayers

1. Thank God for being just and righteous in the way He relates with you!
2. Pray that you would relate to others with justice and defend those who you witness being victims of injustice.
3. Pray for a heart like God’s that is displeased when you see injustice.

Day 2

“The Lord saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede.”

Isaiah 59:16

Key Thought: God is aware of injustice and the INACTION of men

In his song “Do Something”, popular Christian musician Matthew West writes a powerful lyric asking who is responsible for responding to injustice...

I woke up this morning
Saw a world full of trouble now, thought
How'd we ever get so far down, and
How's it ever gonna turn around
So I turned my eyes to Heaven
I thought, ***“God, why don't You do something?”***

It's easy, when we see the evil of injustice happening to say, “God, this is your fault!” ***It's natural for humanity to blame God or to question why He allows the evil of injustice to exist in our world.*** Job's wife expressed this attitude after they lost all of their children and possessions in Job 2:9 asking her husband, “do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die.” At worst, some believe that God is the source of evil and injustice. At best, others believe that God has the ability to do something about evil and injustice but uncaringly chooses not to. In either case, we shift the blame for injustice from ourselves and place all the responsibility on God. Matthew West continues writing . . .

Well, I just couldn't bear the thought of
People living in poverty
Children sold into slavery
The thought disgusted me
So, I shook my fist at Heaven
Said, “God, why don't You do something?”
He said, “I did, yeah, I created you”

In Isaiah 59:16 the question Matthew West asks is actually reversed and God is the one asking the question of humanity, “where is man?” “Why is there no man interceding?” The word intercede means to “bring two things

together". God has given humanity the responsibility of bringing His justice down from heaven to those who are the victims of injustice on the earth. God has given us His Word to know what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is evil, and we are to intercede on God's behalf when it is in our power to act. Rather than asking, "God, why don't you do something?" we should be asking, "God, what is it you want me to do?" The chorus of the song says . . .

If not us, then who, If not me and you
Right now, it's time for us to do something, yeah
If not now, then when, Will we see an end
To all this pain
Oh, it's not enough to do nothing
It's time for us to DO SOMETHING!

As a Christian, these are important questions we should be asking when we see the evil of injustice happening around us. If we do not intercede when we see injustice happening, who is going to? If we do not intercede right now, when is it going to happen? God is expecting humanity to act when there is injustice and unrighteousness going on. When there is evil or injustice going on, as God's image bearers, He expects us to act in the same just and righteous manner that He would act. As Christians, we truly are God's hands and feet, responsible for DOING SOMETHING on God's behalf! What is it that God wants you to do to intercede where there is no justice?

Questions

1. What ways have you blamed God or questioned God when you saw injustice happening?
2. What is it that prevents you from acting when you see the evil of injustice?
3. What are some practical things you can do to stop the injustice that is going on around you right now?

Prayers

1. Pray and confess any times you have blamed God or questioned His response to the injustice you see happening.
2. Pray for wisdom to know what to do when you see in justice happening.
3. Pray for the courage to do something when you see injustice happening.

Day 3

“Because the poor are plundered, because the needy groan, I will now arise,” says the Lord; “I will place him in the safety for which he longs.”

Psalm 12:5

Key Thought: God is aware of injustice and provides SAFETY for the poor and needy

Most of us would do anything necessary to keep our children safe from danger. When our son Zachary was 2 years old we had a golden retriever named Daisy. Daisy had a habit of running away when she would get outside. Zachary loved Daisy and on one particular day he decided to follow her out of our yard. Our house at the time was only one yard away from a very busy highway. When Marianne noticed where Zachary was headed, she sprinted as fast as she could, caught up to him and grabbed him just before he entered into the busy roadway. It was Marianne’s care for Zachary that ultimately moved her to bring him to safety!

It is evident from Scripture that ***God cares about the safety of all his children, but especially those who are poor and needy.*** Jesus said in John 12:8, “the poor you will always have among you.” In the United States, approximately 11% of the population lives in poverty, struggling financially to afford the basic necessities of housing, food, and clothing. On a global scale, approximately 10% of the population lives on less than \$2 per day. These statistics are disheartening. God sees them and is aware of the dangerous circumstances these individuals endure every day. God cares deeply about those who cannot provide for themselves the basic necessities for living.

Although we might be overwhelmed and feel helpless concerning the reality of poverty in our world, God is not . . .

“Blessed is the one who considers the poor! In the day of trouble the Lord delivers him; the LORD protects him and keeps him alive.” Psalm 41:1-2

“All my bones shall say, ‘O LORD, who is like you, delivering the poor from him who is too strong for him, the poor and needy from him who robs him?’” Psalm 35:10

“Who is like the LORD our God, who is seated on high, who looks far down on the heavens and the earth? He **raises the poor** from the dust and **lifts the needy** from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes, with the princes of his people.” Psalm 113:5-8

“For the **needy shall not always be forgotten**, and the **hope of the poor shall not perish forever**.” Psalm 9:18

God does not sit by and watch while His children suffer without food, without water, without clothes, and without shelter. When the poor are being taken advantage of, when God hears their cry, He rises up to protect them from danger and keep them safe. God may not always rescue the poor and needy from their circumstances, but He certainly offers safety through the cross of Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 8:9 says, “you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”

God willingly takes on our poverty of sin on Himself and generously offers to us the riches of forgiveness and eternal life. A gift God provides to rich and poor alike, in order to protect us and keep us safe!

Questions

1. Where have you seen poverty and neediness in Bloomington/Normal?
2. What are some ways you are aware of God providing for the safety of the poor and needy?
3. READ: Matthew 5:3 What does it mean to be poor in spirit?

Prayers

1. Pray and thank Jesus Christ for becoming poor by dying on the cross that you might become rich.
2. Pray that God would make you aware of where He is working to provide safety for the poor and needy.
3. Pray for the materially poor, and the spiritually poor alike, that God would rise and provide them with safety.

Day 4

“The Lord watches over the sojourners; he upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.”

Psalm 146:9

Key Thought: God is aware of injustice and watches over the SOJOURNER, the ORPHAN, and the WIDOW

Marianne and I (David) obeyed the call by God to adopt in January of 2007. There is no way I could share our entire adoption story in a paragraph or two so let me just say that God has undeniably woven His love for orphans firmly into the fabric of our marriage, family, and ministry. Our adoption story began in a difficult season of our ministry by asking God the question “where are you?” Part of the answer came while Marianne was on a mission trip to Jamaica through the Steven Curtis Chapman song “What Now?”. The lyrics of the song say “I saw the face of Jesus, in a little orphan girl. She was standing in the corner, on the other side of the world. And I heard the voice of Jesus, gently whisper to my heart. Didn't you say you wanted to find Me. Well, here I am . . . ***What will you do now that you've found me?***” God lead us to adopt by making it clear that caring for an orphan was caring for Jesus Himself.

God holds a special place in his heart for three specific types of people . . .

1) sojourners – individuals and families who have left or been removed from their home land, **2) orphans** – babies and children who have been left alone in the world without a father or a mother, and **3) widows** – aged women who have lost their husband and are without family or friends to help care for them. These three types of people show up side by side each other frequently in Scripture . . .

“(God) executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing.” Deut 10:18

“Do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart.” Zech 7:10

“Cursed be anyone who perverts the justice due to the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow.” Deut 27:19

What these three types of people have in common is . . . vulnerability. Because of circumstances beyond their control, they are unable to provide and care for themselves. They are vulnerable to selfish and cruel individuals who would misuse, abuse, and take advantage of them. As God's creation, He wants to protect them and provide for them.

God's plan to protect and provide for those who are the most vulnerable is His people. James 1:27 says, "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction." I'm not sure why God has James leave sojourners out of this passage, but he most definitely had the most vulnerable in mind. The most pure and sincere way we can express our religion, our Christianity, our love for God, and love for others is by purposefully taking responsibility in our lives for these vulnerable individuals.

Providing for and protecting sojourners, orphans, and widows is a challenging task. And yet, for followers of Christ it is to be close to our hearts because it is close to God's heart. What will your response be when God asks you, "What will YOU do now that you've found me?"

Questions

1. What opportunities do you see to provide for and protect sojourners in Bloomington/Normal?
2. What opportunities do you see to provide for and protect orphans in Bloomington/Normal?
3. What opportunities do you see to provide for and protect widows in Bloomington/Normal?

Prayers

1. Pray and thank God for making you a citizen of heaven and adopting you into His family through Jesus Christ.
2. Pray and ask God to give you the heart He has for sojourners, orphans, and widows.
3. Pray and ask God if there is anything specific He wants you to do to provide for and protect the sojourners, orphans, and widows in our church, in our community, or in our world .

Day 5

“Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him.”

Proverbs 14:21

Key Thought: God is aware of injustice and honors GENEROSITY to the needy

Whether you realized it or not, ***Grace Church is a generous church!*** Grace Church has a ministry called the Deacon Fund that provides for the material needs of those within our church as well as in our community. The ministry exists because members of the congregation donate money above and beyond their regular tithes and offerings. As one of the Pastors who oversees the Deacon Fund, I (David) have the opportunity to meet with individuals who come to us, often in desperate situations, asking for help to buy food or to pay for utilities, medical bills, or rent, etc. At the end of a conversation with someone in need, I always share that the money the church is giving to them comes from anonymous members of Grace Church who give out of their love for God and desire to help those going through difficult situations. Every time I help someone in need on behalf of Grace Church I am grateful to God because I know that we are honoring Him!

God has been abundantly generous to us. There is no way we could ever “repay” God for the rich generosity that He has extended toward us. As a response to God’s generosity toward us, we are to be generous to the poor and needy. In fact, when we are generous to the poor and needy we are being generous to God (Matthew 25:31-40).

*“Whoever is **generous to the poor** lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed.” Proverbs 19:17*

*“Whoever **gives to the poor** will not want, but he who hides his eyes will get many a curse.” Proverbs 28:7*

*“Whoever has a bountiful eye will be blessed, for he **shares his bread with the poor.**” Proverbs 22:9*

2 Corinthians 8:9 says that “God loves a cheerful giver.” Generosity does not come natural to many of us. We’ve worked hard, we’ve earned what we have and we deserve to enjoy it. At the same time, we often make the mistake of thinking that the poor are lazy and irresponsible and are reaping the consequences of their own poor choices. Although there is some truth to these thoughts, we must remember that often times poverty is the result of generational sin that they are an innocent victim.

No matter the reason, God clearly wants us to be generous toward the poor, especially those He has blessed with material possessions. 1 John 3:17 says, “If anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?” 1 Timothy 6:7-13 says, “As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to ***be generous and ready to share***, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.”

God loves the poor and needy and he wants His people to love them as well by being generous and sharing what we have been given by God with them!

Questions

1. Would you say that you possess the “world’s goods” or that you are “rich in this present age”?
2. What are some ways you are currently giving generously to the poor and needy?
3. Have you ever considered giving generously to the Grace Church Deacon Fund?

Prayers

1. Pray that God would give you a love for the poor and needy like He has.
2. Pray that God would help you to be a cheerful and generous giver.
3. Pray and ask God for some specific ways He would have you “share your bread” with the poor and needy.

Day 6

*“And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night?
Will he delay long over them?”
Luke 18:7*

Key Thought: God is aware of injustice and answers the persistent PRAYER of the oppressed

Mother Teresa was a Catholic Nun and missionary in India for 49 years from 1948 until her death in 1997. In her own words, she devoted her life to caring for the, "hungry, the naked, the homeless, the crippled, the blind, the lepers, all those people who feel unwanted, unloved, uncared for throughout society, people that have become a burden to the society and are shunned by everyone." Below is a powerful prayer she wrote asking God to bring about justice ...

O God, we pray for all those in our world
who are suffering from injustice:
because of their race, color, or religion;
for those imprisoned
for working for the relief of oppression;
for those who are hounded
for speaking the inconvenient truth;
for those tempted to violence
as a cry against overwhelming hardship;
for those deprived of reasonable health and education;
for those suffering from hunger and famine;
for those too weak to help themselves
and who have no one else to help them;
for the unemployed who cry out
for work but do not find it.
We pray for anyone of our acquaintance
who is personally affected by injustice.
Forgive us, Lord, if we unwittingly share in the conditions
or in a system that perpetuates injustice.
Show us how we can serve your children
and make your love practical by washing their feet.

READ : Luke 18:1-8

In Luke 18:1-8 Jesus told His disciples a parable about the importance of persistent prayer. In the parable there are two characters, a judge who had no fear of God or respect for men and a widow who was being treated unjustly by an adversary. The widow kept coming to the judge day after day after day, pleading her case, until he finally agreed to rule in her favor granting her relief so she would stop bothering him.

In this parable Jesus is not, of course, comparing God to an unrighteous judge. The parable is of the 'how much more ...' variety. If a wicked man will sometimes do good, even with the motivation to rid himself of an annoyance, how much MORE will God do what is right when we pray to Him with persistence? God is NOT an uncaring, unrighteous judge who ignores our cries, He is a caring compassionate God who listens and answers.

When we look at all the injustice that exists in our world it is easy to feel overwhelmed and give up thinking there is no way we could possibly make a difference. But the one thing we can do for sure is PRAY! We may not all be called to go and fight against injustice like Mother Teresa, but we can certainly PRAY against injustice with persistence like her.

Questions

1. Do you ever get overwhelmed with all the injustice that you hear and read about in our world?
2. Do you ever feel helpless wondering what you can do about all the injustice in our world?
3. What are some injustices happening in our world that you feel compelled to persistently pray to God about?

Prayers

1. Throughout the remainder of our time of prayer and fasting, pray the prayer of justice written by Mother Teresa every day.
2. Pray and thank God that He is not an unrighteous judge, but rather a loving judge who gives justice to those who ask.
3. Persistently pray day and night that God would give justice to His elect.

Day 7

“Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?”

Isaiah 58:6-7

Key Thought: God is aware of injustice and desires true FASTING from injustice

We are now 7 days into our 21 days of prayer and fasting as a church. I hope that God has been using this focus on praying for justice to speak to your heart. I pray that God is revealing Himself to you in new and fresh ways. Today’s devotion is an important one. Today’s passage exposes whether we are just going through the religious motions or whether we are truly allowing God to speak to us and make real changes in our lives.

READ: Isaiah 58:1-12

In this passage, speaking through the prophet Isaiah, God is rebuking the people of Israel for their external religious sacrifices which are void of any real heart or life change (cf Is 1:10-20). God wanted Israel to seek His face, and they do so with the words of their mouths but not the actions of their lives. The people were confused as to why they were praying and fasting but God was not responding to them. God makes known to them the reason why . . .

The WRONG way to fast (vss 3-5) – The reason Israel’s fasting was displeasing to God was because it was absent of any real heart and life change. While the Israelites performed the religious ritual of fasting they continued to seek their own pleasure, oppress their workers, quarrel, and fight with one another. Fasting, abstaining from food, is intended to be more than a religious ritual to appease God or to secure His favor and blessing. Fasting is intended to be a spiritual discipline that draws the attention of our hearts to God who reveals and convicts us of the injustice we are responsible for in our lives.

A fast of God's CHOOSING (vss 6-7) – Instead of fasting as religious ritual, God's expectation of a true fast for Israel included humbling themselves, repenting of sin, putting off wickedness, removing the yoke of slavery, freeing the oppressed, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and providing shelter for the homeless. A true fast is not merely abstaining from food, but rather reversing the injustices that we are personally responsible for or aware of.

The benefits/blessings of TRUE fasting (vss 8-12) – Something amazing happens when we truly fast in the manner God desires. God promised Israel that if they would truly fast their light would shine bright, they would experience healing, their righteousness would go before them, God's glory would protect them, their prayers would be answered, their sadness would be turned to joy, they would be satisfied, their bones would be made strong, they would produce fruit like a watered garden, what was broken would be repaired, and they would build a strong foundation for future generations to come! Wow, who wouldn't want to experience these great promises!?!

Fasting is so much more than abstaining from food to spend more time focusing on God. True fasting happens when we abstain from food, spend time focusing on God, AND are obedient to injustices He reveals to us in our lives. May God give us the courage to truly fast so that we can experience the benefits and blessings He has promised to us!

Questions

1. Have you committed any injustice toward anyone?
2. Is there any injustice going on that you are participating in or responsible for?
3. Are you committing any injustice that you need to stop and abstain from?

Prayers

1. Pray and ask God to reveal any injustice in your own life.
2. Pray and ask God to help you be obedient to repent of and reverse any injustice He has revealed in your life.
3. Pray and ask God to help you TRULY fast over the next 14 days.

Day 8

“Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?”

Genesis 18:25

Key Thought: God cannot be unjust

As a kid, I always hated it when a teacher would punish the entire class for the actions of an individual. “Who wrote this note?” (no answer...never an answer) “OK then, the whole class will be skipping recess.” What?! Why should I suffer for the actions of someone else? It always seemed so unfair to me. Maybe there’s a reason why teachers do this, but it’s lost on me.

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is a pretty well known and sobering biblical story. These cities were famous for their wickedness and immorality. It is also the place where Abraham’s nephew Lot lives with his family. But what precedes God’s judgment of fire and brimstone is a riveting conversation between Abraham and God.

Abraham wants to see God spare the city. So he asks God a series of questions in a humble manner. He asks if God would destroy the city if fifty righteous people are found there. He says “Far be if from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked...” The Lord agrees. Then Abraham drops the number to forty-five, forty, thirty, twenty, and finally ten! Ten is not very many good people! The threshold is quite low! And God agrees each time that if those few are found to be righteous, he would not destroy the city.

Abraham can ask these questions because he is confident in God's justice (even though he asks them in a careful and almost anxious manner). God, the Judge of all the earth, will do what is just. He cannot be unjust. Justice means “making something right.” It can refer to punishing the wicked. It can also refer to giving help to those in distress.

The depth of wickedness in the world today demands a just response from God. In His patience, He has not yet begun to send His final judgments on earth that are described in the book of Revelation. But even today, we can be confident that God is just, and that He acts justly. He cannot do

otherwise! This week, we will be looking at various ways that God serves justice in the world today.

Questions

1. When have you wondered whether God is just in His dealings with humans?
2. Can you name some modern day examples of God enforcing justice on the wicked?
3. How would this passage shape your prayers as you consider injustice in the world?

Prayers

1. Pray for someone you know who doubts whether God is just.
2. Pray for a friend to escape God's judgment through saving faith in Jesus Christ.
3. Pray for the moral condition of our nation, that the Lord would send revival!

Day 9

“For he [the ruler] is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.”

Romans 13:4

Key Thought: God gives justice through the government

The bright red and blue lights flash behind you. And you feel your stomach drop. You realize you have been driving a little too fast. But you were late for a meeting! With ticket in hand, you drive off and wonder why you got caught today. On the other side of this situation is a police officer, perhaps a believer, who has asked the Lord that morning for wisdom and discernment in enforcing the law. God heard that prayer and answered it.

We know that all authority in heaven and earth belongs to Christ (Matt 28:18). And so earthly authorities “borrow” their authority from God. It is not permanent, but it is a present reality. None of these governments use their authority to enforce justice perfectly. Just consider the Roman government, led by Emperor Nero, that persecuted Christians by dipping them in tar and lighting them as torches for dinner parties. Horrific and wicked! And yet, Paul can write with confidence that the governing authorities have been established by God.

God clearly doesn't approve of governments misusing their authority and causing injustice. We are reminded in Psalm 2:2 that some rulers set themselves up against the Lord and against His Anointed (the Messiah). So God doesn't condone or overlook the wickedness that is carried out by governments and rulers. In fact, since the Lord lends some of His authority to rulers, that also means that He hold those rulers accountable for how they use it.

Remember Old Testament prophets like Habakkuk who struggled with God using an evil empire like Babylon to judge Israel. Habakkuk discovers that God will use Babylon for His purposes, but He will also bring judgment to Babylon. Clearly, God does not endorse everything that Babylon does.

But governments still serve God's just purposes. They bear the sword and carry out wrath on the wrongdoer. We can be thankful for agents of the

government like police officers and the military who oppose evil in our country and around the world. When they act rightly, God is carrying out justice through them.

Questions

1. Are you thankful that God has established our governing authorities?
2. Can you think of a misuse of authority in our present day?
3. Can you imagine what our country would be like if the governing authorities did not wield their power?

Prayers

1. Pray for the police officers in our community, that the Lord would protect them and that they would uphold justice.
2. Pray for our military, that the Lord would protect them and use them in the cause of righteousness.
3. Pray for our President and other political leaders, that they would govern with wisdom and justice.

Day 10

And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

Matthew 25:40

Key Thought: God gives justice through his church

“Where is God?” It is one of the main questions that people ask when they hear about a terrible injustice. Perhaps a more appropriate follow up would be: where is the church?

When Jesus returned to heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father in glory, he left behind his body, the church. And one of our primary concerns is to be Jesus hands in caring for people who are suffering or facing injustice. Jesus encourages us in this work by linking it with the final judgment, the separation of sheep and goats. (pro tip: you don't want to be a goat). And when he separates his people, the sheep, he tells them that they are the ones who fed the hungry, gave a drink to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger, and visited the prisoner.

So who are the “least of these?” Jesus calls them “my brothers.” He does not mean his physical brothers. Or the Jewish people in general. Remember that earlier in Matthew 12:46-50 he says that whoever does the will of the Father is his “brother and sister and mother.” So Jesus is referring to the family of God that we are called to look after.

Some would object to this interpretation and desire to include all people in the term “least of these.” But we don't need to be concerned that Jesus only cares about believers. Let us keep in mind that we have passages like Galatians 6:10 “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” We do not withhold help from those outside the church! But the world should see that God's family takes care of one another. This is the love of God that is shared between believers.

And so one key way that God serves justice is through the body of Christ, the church. We are not to abdicate this work to the government, even if some helpful programs exist. The surprising element of this story is in the reaction of the sheep when they hear that they did this to Jesus. How easy

it is to forget that when we help “the least of these,” we are helping Jesus himself!

Questions

1. Have you had a moment where you felt in your heart that your service was to Jesus?
2. Has Jesus laid certain injustices on your heart that you should address?
3. Is there someone in the church that needs your help?

Prayers

1. Pray for someone who does not believe, that he or she would notice the church caring for needs and begin to seek Christ.
2. Pray that you would notice the needs around you and have the boldness to do what you can to help.

Day 11

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.

Psalms 91:1-2,4

Key Thought: God gives justice through protection

Young parents know all about baby proofing the house. You plug plastic stoppers in the outlets. You install childproof locks on cupboards that contain household cleaners. You buy a brand new car seat. And yet you still scratch your head when that bundle of joy finds a way to escape the crib! I remember one night my wife had a terrible feeling in her stomach and decided to check the bassinet where our baby was sleeping. To her horror, she saw a giant spider right next to the baby! Obviously, she sprung into action. I can report that the spider didn't survive!

The world is much like this. We do what we can to make things safe. We have laws and people dedicated to our safety. We have guardrails for our cars. And yet there are dangerous people who intend to harm others. People do such terrible acts of injustice to other people. And the Lord knows this. That is why he is our refuge and fortress. We find safety under his wings. Every day, our God is rescuing people!

It is God's faithfulness to his people that provides this safety. We will never know on this side of life all the ways he has protected us from harm or injustice. And yet, we recognize that believers regularly suffer injustice at the hands of violent men. We might be tempted to question God's faithfulness in these circumstances. But let us instead trust in his sovereignty over the events of our life.

"But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect," 1 Peter 3:14-15

God's people need not be fearful or troubled by the suffering they undergo. Instead, they should continue to honor Christ as if he is the master of their lives...because he is! They will have such a powerful hope that other people will ask about it. And then they can speak up! If Christ is indeed the master of our lives, then we can run to him for protection and refuge, and trust him the face of danger.

Questions

1. Can you think about someone that was protected from injustice by Jesus?
2. We all want to trust God for protection. Do you really trust him? How do you know?

Prayers

1. Praise God for his wonderful protection!
2. Pray for believers who face persecution, that they would remain faithful to Christ and be able to share their hope.

Day 12

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Key Thought: God gives justice through comfort

Every time I read verse 4, I think to myself “there’s a lot of comfort in that verse!” No, I mean literally, the word “comfort” is used like 5 times! Let’s take a closer look at what the Apostle Paul is telling us.

First, God is called “the God of all comfort.” It is in his nature to comfort. He is the source and origin of all comfort. Consider all the things we turn to in order to be comforted. We jokingly say that we engage in “retail therapy.” And then there’s hobbies, sports, exercise, time with friends, and the list could go on! And there’s nothing wrong with these activities. But the best and longest lasting comfort comes from the Father of mercies and God of all comfort.

Second, God freely gives comfort in all of our affliction. This is a promise that we can count on! And it is a merciful comfort from our God. It is a free gift to us that we have not deserved, but God gladly and abundantly gives to us.

Third, the purpose for his comfort is so that we might comfort others. Isn’t that interesting? The comforted will become the comforters. Later in this passage, we see that we share in Jesus’ afflictions. And we know that Jesus suffered to bring everlasting comfort and salvation to believing sinners. Likewise, we also suffer so that we can receive comfort from God so that we can turn around and give it away to others.

So Jesus’ church is given the task to bring merciful comfort to people who are suffering in big ways and small ways. This is a wonderful task and sacred calling, to enter into the suffering of others with hope and encouragement. No suffering will overwhelm because the Lord’s comfort is equal to the task.

In the end, when we see Jesus face to face, he will wipe away every tear (Revelation 21:4), a reference to the powerful comfort we will receive in the new heaven and new earth. Imagine every single sorrow in your life being wiped away instantly and forever! Now that is just!

Questions

1. What do you think about God's purpose in giving you comfort so that you might comfort others?
2. How have you received comfort from the Lord?
3. How have you been able to give comfort to someone?

Prayers

1. Pray for someone who is sorrowful, that the Lord would comfort to them.
2. Thank God for his deep comfort that overflows during our sorrow.

Day 13

And the Lord said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground.

Genesis 4:10

Key Thought: God gives justice through eternal life and death

Have you heard of Olympic athlete Ben Johnson?

"After smashing a world record to win the most anticipated event of the 1988 Seoul Olympics, the 100-meter dash, the Canadian sprinter told a press conference, "A gold medal—that's something no one can take away from you." Not exactly. A day later, Johnson tested positive for an anabolic steroid and was stripped of the gold medal, which was awarded to American Carl Lewis."

<https://www.history.com/news/shortcuts-to-the-gold-9-cheaters-in-olympic-history>

It is not surprising to hear reports of athletes cheating to excel. And perhaps some believe they have "gotten away with it." But they have not considered God's justice. One of the first recorded acts of injustice is the murder of Abel. It is a familiar story, and yet it is still surprising that human history didn't have to progress far before an innocent life was taken. Abel's blood did indeed cry out for justice. And God stepped in to deal with Cain, the murderer, personally.

Now someone might say that Cain got away with it and built a city (Gen4:17), had a family, and lived a long life. But let us not forget that he was confronted by God himself. He was cursed to be a fugitive and wanderer on the earth. And the ground that he once worked was now cursed. Cain saw this as a great punishment (Gen4:13), even more than he could bear. But God was merciful in putting a mysterious mark on Cain so that he would not be killed.

Now cheating to win a medal is not on the same level as a murder! But whether the act is large or small, we serve a God who gets personally involved with the perpetrators of injustice. And we can trust God's wisdom and power to carry out the consequences of sin, even if we don't see it right away. The Lord judges sin in his own way and not in ours. Let us trust him for that.

Questions

1. How was God's treatment of Cain just? How was it merciful?
2. Can you think of other biblical stories where someone received both justice and mercy from God?
3. Do you ever try to "get away" with things? Why?

Prayers

1. Pray that you would have a heart that is fully devoted to God and not try to "get away" with sin.
2. Pray that you might trust the Lord's justice and mercy to appropriately handle the perpetrators of injustice.

Day 14

But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

Matthew 5:44 45

Key Thought: God gives both love and justice

Here is a challenging thought: it is right for God to send rain on the unjust. Jesus is not referring to sending a dark storm cloud that would follow a bad person around like in a cartoon! (even if we would enjoy seeing that) No, he is referring to an unjust person who needs rain for his crops. And God sends it! He loves people who are opposed to him and curse him and act unjustly towards others. Remember that God loves the whole world (John 3:16). When John uses the word “world” in his gospel, he is most often emphasizing the “badness” of the world as opposed to the “bigness” of the world. God loves terrible, wicked people. And he shows love to them by the offer of forgiveness through Jesus. He also shows love through sending rain.

God’s love and justice are not in conflict. Consider what theological Millard Erickson has to say:

"Justice means that love must always be shown, whether or not a situation of immediate need presents itself in pressing and vivid fashion. Love in the biblical sense, then, is not merely to indulge someone near at hand. Rather, it inherently involves justice as well. This means there will be a concern for the ultimate welfare of all humanity, a passion to do what is right, and enforcement of appropriate consequences for wrong action. Actually, love and justice have worked together in God's dealing with the human race. God's justice requires that there be payment of the penalty for sin. God's love, however, desires humans to be restored to fellowship with him. The offer of Jesus Christ as the atonement for sin means that both the justice and the love of God have been maintained."¹

When we consider God's love and justice in isolation, we get the idea that they are in conflict. But that is not the case. All we have to do is consider the cross, where God's justice and love are clearly visible.

So love your enemies for that is what God does. And do not take revenge but leave room for God's wrath. He will settle things in the end.

Questions

1. How would you explain the connection between God's love and justice?
2. Why should we be thankful that God loves his enemies?
3. What can you do this week on behalf of an enemy?

Prayers

1. Pray for one of your enemies that they would experience the kindness of God and that kindness would draw them to Jesus.
2. Pray that you would have a miraculous love for someone who is challenging.
3. Pray that you would deepen in your own understanding of God's wonderful attributes.

1 Enns, Paul. The Moody Handbook of Theology, (Chicago: Moody Press), 324.

Day 15

And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

Isaiah 11:2

Key Thought: Looking to Christ's Kingdom for today's HOPE

It only takes a few minutes looking at the news headlines on any given day to see that we live in a broken world. In fact, there are times when I (Pastor Len) take a break from the news for a while – it is just too unsettling. Our sin nature as human beings are on full display. Our hearts as Christians yearn for a world where unborn babies are allowed the gift of life; where all children are loved and cared for in relationally healthy homes; where all people are treated with respect and cared for as God's 'image bearers'; where economic opportunities are afforded to everyone and our resources shared; where there are no more wars being waged and peace reigns instead.

The prophet Isaiah would have understood all of this, and his heart would have yearned for these same things. His God-given ministry was to warn the people of God of His coming judgment. This judgment would first fall on the northern kingdom of Israel, and then later the kingdom of Judah. God's people had fallen into the sins of idolatry, materialism, sensuality, child-sacrifices, enslaving their fellow Jews and trusting in alliances with Egypt and Assyria for their protection instead of trusting God. After repeated warnings to repent and return to loving and worshipping the One True God, this judgement would indeed come.

Stop for a moment and imagine being Isaiah or one of the other faithful God Followers in Israel during this time. Surrounded by a culture and people who had once loved and followed God but who now lived in opposition to Him and His Word. The effect of this sin would impact you as well as those living outside of a relationship with God. The coming judgement would affect you as well as those whose sin was being punished. You would desire to continue to love, praise and serve God during this challenging time. At the same time your heart would yearn for a time when God's righteous and just rule would be established once and for all.

Then God gives Isaiah, and through him us, a glimpse into the future and a ray of hope. In Isaiah 11, God gives us a glimpse of the coming Kingdom of the Messiah – Jesus Christ our Lord! Everything our hearts are yearning for will be realized in His coming Kingdom! We are to faithfully continue to love, praise and serve the Lord today out of the hope we have waiting for us

in Christ's Kingdom reign!

- Jesus will reign with wisdom and understanding
- Jesus will reign with might and power
- Jesus will reign and draw everyone to fear and follow the Father
- Jesus will reign with justice and righteousness
- Jesus' reign will bring peace and harmony among people and God
- Jesus' reign will bring relief from all pain and suffering
- Jesus' reign will give everyone a full knowledge of God

As the song declares, "Our God Reigns!". How we wait for that day when Jesus Christ will reign on His throne.

I encourage you to take a moment to turn off the news of the day. Let your thoughts focus on these verses and soak in them. While we get glimpses and tastes of His Kingdom in this life, we will know its fulfillment only when Jesus returns and these verses in Isaiah 11 take place. So, give yourself some time right now to let the HOPE we have in Jesus Christ and His Kingdom to fill you with His joy and peace. Then take that Christ-given hope into this broken world which desperately needs Him.

Looking to Christ's Kingdom for today's HOPE.

Questions

1. When you look at our broken world, what brings you the greatest discouragement?
2. How does looking at Isaiah's description of Jesus and His Kingdom bring you renewed hope?
3. What can you begin to do to bring the joy and hope of Jesus into our broken world?

Prayers

1. As you reflect on the coming Kingdom of Jesus Christ, ask God to fill you with faith, hope and love.
2. Take a moment to remember the answer to Question #1 above. Now pray for God to be in the midst of that situation, to bring His grace and mercy.
3. Ask God to prepare you to *'give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.'* (1 Peter 3:15)

Day 16

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Matthew 6:9-10

Key Thought: As we wait for Christ's Kingdom, we are to be a people of PRAYER

The 12 Disciples were just starting to stir. A fire is started to fight off the early morning chill and they start to pull themselves together for another day. Then Jesus, who has already been up for hours, returns from His daily conversation with the Father. As one of the men watch Him approach, they realize the importance of these early morning prayer times in the life and ministry of Jesus. In a moment of spiritual inspiration directly from God, he asks, 'Jesus, teach us to pray!' Jesus teaches them what we now know as 'The Lord's Prayer', undoubtedly an outline of themes Jesus Himself prayed each day. The 12 have heard this outline before, years earlier, at the Sermon on the Mount. Only now, some 2 years later, do they finally recognize the importance of these words and this practice.

The Disciples learn this lesson well, as the book of Acts attests. We will find prayer meetings in Acts 1, 4, 9, 10, 12 and 13. As you and I wait for the return of Jesus to establish His Kingdom, living to praise, love and serve the Lord, we can learn an important lesson from the early church. We are to be a people of prayer! What better person to look to as an example than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself! So, let's go back to Matthew 6:9-13 and allow Jesus to teach us to pray.

"Our Father" – Jesus has us start with the pronoun, 'we', not 'I'. We are not living out our relationship with God alone and in isolation. We are a member of the Body of Christ, with spiritual brothers and sisters around the world! All of us who have put Saving Faith in Jesus Christ call the great Creator God, 'Father', 'Abba', our loving, affectionate Father.

"In heaven" – Our loving, affectionate Father is also the sovereign God of heaven. He is transcendent, all powerful and all knowing. We can entrust ourselves into His care.

"Hallowed be your name" – God is also worthy of our praise and worship. In addition, our lives should be a testimony of His holiness, righteousness and justice. As the Apostle Paul says, we are 'to live a life worthy of the calling you have received'.

“Your Kingdom Come” – There are at least two aspects of this request. First, we are joining the Apostle John in asking Jesus to return to establish His perfect kingdom; ‘Amen, come Lord Jesus!’ (Rev. 22:20) Second, we, the church of Jesus, bring a touch of Jesus’ kingdom through our lives as we live as salt and light in this world.

“Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” – Here is how we bring that touch of Jesus and His Kingdom into the world around us – by seeking to fulfill His will through our lives. Praying for the grace to fulfill the Great Commandment to love God fully and love people in His name is a great place to start! Then there is the Great Commission, our mission to make disciples, bringing others into Christ’s Kingdom as they hear the Gospel and place Saving Faith in Him.

Then we trust God for our daily needs, confess sin, recognizing God’s gift of forgiveness, forgive those who have sinned against us, and ask for the enablement of God’s grace for the spiritual battle we fight each day.

We are to pray first, for without the presence of God and His enabling grace in our lives, we cannot live this life He is calling us to. Then, we walk in the midst of this broken world as the aroma of Jesus, the light of God’s truth, the seasoning of Christ’s love, bringing a touch of His Kingdom as we wait for His return, and His perfect reign!

Questions

1. Do you have a balance of worship, confession, submission, requests in your prayer time with God?
2. How would your life be impacted if you saw yourself as bringing a touch of Jesus and His Kingdom to the people and situations in your daily life?
3. Is there a situation or relationship that you need to entrust to God?

Prayers

1. Pray for the grace to fully live as the beloved child of God that you are.
2. Pray for the grace to see life through the lens of God’s love and sovereign power for you and the world.
3. Pray that you will live in the hope of Christ and His Kingdom, bringing that hope to others around you.

Day 17

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Colossians 1:13-14

Key Thought: We have already been TRANSFERRED into Christ's Kingdom

There are times and situations when it can be a challenge to remember that God is still on the throne. When the question, "Why" can seem louder than the voice of God assuring us He has this. Sometimes it is a health crisis that we or a loved one is facing. Denise and I have experienced that with both of our daughters as Hannah went through heart surgery and Sarah endured 6 months of cancer treatments. Sometimes it is seeing a natural disaster strike and thousands are impacted. The tyranny of war as it impacts innocent civilians simply caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. We look up and ask God 'Why? When will You make all these things right? When will we see justice?'

As we saw on Day 15, the ultimate answer to those questions is when Jesus Christ returns and establishes His Kingdom. However, as Believers, we do not have to wait until His return to enter His Kingdom. As Colossians 1:13-14 tell us, the moment we place Saving Faith in Jesus Christ, we are delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred to the Kingdom of Jesus! Reflecting on this truth leads us first to rest in our wonderful salvation. The battles wage on, but the war has been won! Second, we are encouraged and emboldened to live out our Faith with passion and devotion. Paul has both goals in mind as he prays for the Colossians in Col.1:9-14.

Let's start with the conclusion of Paul's prayer in verses 13 and 14, where Paul describes the wonderful salvation we have through Jesus Christ.

- He has 'delivered us' – rescued us from danger. We are no longer under the dominion of Satan and sin.
- He has 'transferred us' – literally deported us from our place of separation from Him to the Kingdom of His beloved Son. 'Beloved Son' reminds us that a great price was paid for our salvation – the death of God's own beloved Son, Jesus.
- We have experienced God's 'redemption' - this word means to release a prisoner by paying a ransom. We are chosen and purchased by God.

- We have experienced God's 'forgiveness' – this word means to cancel a debt. Because of our sin, we owed a debt we could never pay. So, Jesus Christ paid the price of our redemption on the Cross, and that debt we owed was declared 'paid in full'!

Our relationship with God is secure. Our eternal destiny is settled. We can rest in our relationship with our eternal, loving Father. We have already been 'deported' to the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, and now wait for that Kingdom to be fulfilled at His return.

Based on the confidence we have in this relationship and destiny, Paul prays that we will live out our Faith, our relationship with God, with passion and devotion in verses 9-12.

- That we will be people of the Word, allowing the Holy Spirit to give us understanding and wisdom in living it out. In this way we will understand the Lord's will for our lives. (vs.9)
- That we will be people of obedience, living out the truths God has given us in His Word. In this way, Jesus will be seen through our lives. (vs. 10)
- That we will be people of character, showing the true fruit of the Spirit: endurance, patience, joy and thanksgiving. (vs.11-12)

May you experience this wonderful prayer of Paul in your life today. Confident in who you are in Jesus Christ. Passionate in 'walking (living) in a manner worthy of the Lord'.

Questions

1. Do you live each day as the beloved, redeemed child of God?
How would doing so impact your outlook on life?
2. Are you a person of the Word?
Are you asking the Holy Spirit to give you understanding and wisdom?
3. Do your attitudes, motivations, thoughts and actions reflect the truths of the Bible and character of Jesus? What adjustments does God want to make?

Prayers

1. Pray for the grace to know the peace, joy and love of God as His child.
2. Pray for the grace to be a person of the Word – experiencing the work of the Holy Spirit in your life through understanding and applying it in your life.
3. Pray for the grace to live a life that shows the character of Jesus Christ.

Day 18

Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over 10 cities.

Luke 19:17

Key Thought: We are called to be FAITHFUL SERVANTS

Have you ever known something big was going to happen, but you were powerless to hurry it along? There is a lot of truth to the saying, “The hardest part is the waiting”!

As we read Luke 19:11-27, Jesus is approaching the city of Jerusalem for the Passover, the celebration of God’s deliverance of their ancestors from slavery in Egypt. This would have made their present situation of being under the authority of Rome that much more difficult to handle. They longed for the day when God would send the Messiah to once again deliver them. Some Jews were wondering if Jesus was going to do just that. Was He the long-awaited Messiah? Was this the Passover when God would act? Was their long wait about to end?

Jesus knows that He is one week away from dying on the Cross and rising from the dead. He was indeed the Messiah! However, He had come to provide salvation and redemption for all people who would place Saving Faith in Him. Establishing the long-awaited Kingdom was going to have to wait until His return.

So, Jesus tells them a parable to answer this very important question: What are we, His followers, to do while we wait for His return? What does Jesus expect from us? The short answer? We are to be Faithful Servants.

Jesus is the nobleman in the story. Each Follower of Christ has received gifts, abilities and opportunities we are to invest on His behalf. We are to Love God, Love People and Share the Gospel. We are to live out the Great Commandment and fulfill the Great Commission. Verse 14 points to the Jews rejecting Him as their king and Messiah before Pilate in just 5 days.

Living as a faithful servant. Two of the servants are highlighted as being faithful. They use what they have been given wisely and have earned a profit for their king. We are called to do the same. We are to use our time, finances, abilities and spiritual gifts to honor God, bless people and share

the Gospel. As we faithfully and wisely use our lives to do this, God Himself will bring the increase – the fruit – the results. Everything we do in our daily lives can be an investment for God and His work. Every ministry we are involved with inside and outside of the church is to be done faithfully and wisely to His glory and for His Kingdom. And as we live as a faithful servant, we also grow in spiritual depth and closeness with God. And most importantly, we will hear the words, “Well done, good servant!”

We will be held accountable for how faithfully we serve. The warning we see in verses 20-26 is that Jesus will hold us accountable for how we use our lives to serve Him and invest in His Kingdom. How we have loved God – and loved people – and shared the Gospel. When we fail to use our resources and opportunities wisely for Him, they will be taken from us and given to others.

There is a connection between faithful service now and our role in the Kingdom in eternity. Faithful servants of Christ in this life will be given greater responsibilities in the Kingdom of Christ when He returns. While the Bible doesn't give the details, the point is clearly made in verses 17 and 19.

Those who reject Jesus Christ will face His judgement. Verse 27 reminds us that salvation and eternal life only come through faith in Jesus Christ. How important it is that we be faithful in sharing the life-giving message of Jesus Christ and His Gospel!

It has been said that one cannot stand still in their walk with God. We are either moving forward and growing in Christ or falling back and more distant from Him. Let's encourage each other to live as faithful servants, gifted and called to invest ourselves in His Kingdom work!

Questions

1. What skills and abilities has God given to you? How are you using them to Love God, Love People and Share the Gospel?
2. Looking back over the past 6 months, how have you grown closer to God?
3. Who are 6 to 8 people you know who need to place Saving Faith in Jesus Christ? Write down their names and commit to pray for their salvation, looking for opportunities to share the Gospel.

Prayers

1. Pray for God to show you the ways you can use your gifts and abilities to serve Him.
2. Pray for the people you listed in #3 above.
3. Pray for the grace to live your life to the glory of God and His Kingdom, hearing the words, “Well done, good servant!”.

Day 19

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

Colossians 3:1-2

Key Thought: We are to set our minds on CHRISTLIKENESS

I enjoy working with wood. Sometimes that means taking new wood and building something. Other times it means taking the finish off an existing piece of furniture and re-finishing. Recently I was taking the finish off a piece of furniture. Before long, I was covered in saw dust (Yes, I was wearing a proper mask!). When I was finished, I went directly to our bathroom, took a nice hot shower and put on fresh, clean clothes. I didn't want to track sawdust throughout the house.

This is a picture of what the Apostle Paul is telling us in this passage of Colossians. When we put Saving Faith in Jesus Christ, we do not want to keep 'tracking sin' in our lives. So, we 'take off' our old mindset and desires and put on Christlikeness. That means we grow in thinking like Jesus, desiring the same things as Jesus, loving others like Jesus, acting like Jesus and seeking the Father like Jesus. How do we go about experiencing this change of heart?

We seek and set our minds on Christ and being like Him. (vs. 1-4)

Paul lays out a detailed case for seeking and desiring Christlikeness. We have died with Christ, which means our sins have been forgiven. We have been raised with Christ and given eternal life in Him. We sit with Christ at the right hand of the Father, a position of authority so Satan and sin no longer have dominion over us. Finally, one day we will appear with Christ and fully experience glory. With all this blessing being given to us through grace, why wouldn't we now take our focus from ourselves and our sinful desires and put it on 'things above'? As we will see in the rest of the passage, 'things above' refers to Christ and His character.

We put to death (put off the old self) our old sinful desires and mindset. (vs. 5-11)

Paul starts out with sensual sins in verse 5. 'Sexual immorality' is the general word any form of sexual sin. 'Impurity' refers to seeking to satisfy any impure urge for pleasure and satisfaction. 'Passion' refers to anything that excites sensual desires in us. "Evil desires" refers to any evil desire that leads to sinful actions. Then Paul calls out 'covetousness', the sin of always wanting more

than God has given to us. This can be more possessions, more pleasures, more attention, more power or more prestige. These are the sins that will lead to God's judgement. Why would we, Believers in Jesus Christ, choose to keep these on?

We put on the character of Jesus Christ, or Christlikeness. (vs. 12-17)

As beloved, chosen, adopted children of God, we choose to put on the character of Jesus. That includes compassion, kindness, humility, meekness (using our strengths and resources to help others instead of ourselves), patience, bearing with one another (accepting others for who they are), and forgiving those who wrong us in the same way the Lord has forgiven us. Above all else, we are to love as Jesus has loved us. Like a carpenter's belt holds his or her tools together, so love motivates and enables all the other character traits mentioned by Paul. Without love, we are left with self-effort, which cannot be sustained.

As we put on Christlikeness, we will experience His peace in our life and in our church. As we gather, we share the Word and Worship as we praise and thank God together for all we have in Jesus Christ. And as we go through our daily lives, everything we do is to be done in the name of the Lord Jesus with thankful hearts. I have discovered that the peace of Christ and a thankful attitude towards life are good gauges as to whether I have put on Christlikeness, or if I am still living for myself and my own pleasures and desires.

This change of heart will not happen in my life automatically when I become a Christian. It takes an intentional decision to seek Christlikeness. Then, as I look to God and His enabling grace and walk in obedience, my new spiritual 'wardrobe' will allow others to see Jesus in me.

Questions

1. Where do you see your old nature in your life?
What attitudes, motives or actions need to be changed?
2. As you look over the list of qualities in verses 12-17, which ones need to be more fully developed in your life?
3. Are you experiencing the peace of Christ in your heart? Do you have an attitude of thankfulness? Do you do everything in the name of Jesus?

Prayers

1. Pray for God to give you the desire and the grace to take off self and sin and put on Christlikeness.
2. Pray for the Lord to give you His peace and a thankful attitude towards your life.
3. Pray for the wisdom to know how to live your daily life as an offering to the Lord, as you do everything in His name and for His glory.

Day 20

Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his saints; but let them not turn back to folly. Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him, that glory may dwell in our land. Steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other.

Psalm 85:8-10

Key Thought: In Christ, we experience the RIGHTEOUSNESS and PEACE of God.

Perhaps the best-known Bible verse is John 3:16. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.” This truth should never get old for us!

However, John 3:16 also leads me to a question; ‘If God loves us and wants to bring us into a right relationship with Him, why not simply declare it? His Word was powerful enough to create the universe, so why didn’t God use His Word to declare us forgiven and restored? The answer? God’s Righteousness and Justice. He couldn’t simply ignore our sin and rebellion against Him. His righteousness and justice demanded that our sin be judged, and punishment be dealt out.

So, God the Father sent Jesus the Son to die on the cross for us. To be the perfect sacrifice for us. To pay the penalty for our sin in our place. To be the source of forgiveness and eternal life. God’s love and mercy and God’s righteousness and justice meet at the cross, and humankind’s redemption is accomplished!

This is beautifully pictured in Psalm 85:10; “Steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other”. The righteousness and justice of God are satisfied at the cross. His steadfast love and faithfulness are seen in giving Jesus as the sacrifice for our sin. The result is peace – we are at peace with God through Saving Faith in Jesus Christ. The righteousness and peace of God meet at the cross and ‘kiss’ each other.

The 19th century Welch hymn writer, William Rees, had Psalm 85:10 in mind when he wrote the second verse of “Here Is Love Vast as the Ocean”:

*On the mount of crucifixion
Fountains opened deep and wide;
Through the floodgates of God's mercy
Flowed a vast and gracious tide.
Grace and love, like mighty rivers,
Poured incessant from above,
And heave'n's peace and perfect justice
Kissed a guilty world in love.*

Psalm 85 also looks ahead to the time when God's righteousness, justice, love, faithfulness and peace will be fully realized on earth – in the Kingdom of His Son, Jesus Christ. Everyone will know the reality of "Faithfulness springs up from the ground, and righteousness looks down from the sky." (vs. 11). O how we look forward to that day when Jesus rules over this earth!

As we live as witnesses of Jesus Christ in a broken world, desperate to know the love and redemption of God, we are encouraged and energized by the love we have received from the Lord through the cross of Jesus Christ. Through Jesus, we are at peace with God! (Romans 5:1) Our purpose is to live our lives to the glory and honor of Christ in all we do. Our mission is making disciples, beginning by sharing the good news of the Gospel to the people around us and around the world. They need to experience the forgiving love of the One Who "Kissed a guilty world in love" at the cross.

Questions

1. When was the last time you gave thanks to God for your salvation?
When did you put Saving Faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior?
2. How does the coming Kingdom of Jesus Christ encourage and motivate you in your Christian life?
3. Who are the people around you who need to know Jesus as their Savior?
What step can you take to share the Gospel with them?

Prayers

1. Reflecting on the cross and Jesus dying for you, take a moment to thank God for your salvation.
2. Pray for the Lord to renew your passion for following Jesus Christ and sharing Him with the people around you.
3. Pray for the Lord to refresh your hope in the coming Kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Day 21

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.'

Revelation 21:3

Key Thought: Jesus will make all things RIGHT

Today we come to the close of our 21 days of 'Praying for Justice'. We (Pastors Niall, David and Len) have been praying that you have been meeting with God, hearing His voice and being drawn closer to Him and His heart for justice.

We have seen that God is aware of the injustice in our world. He cares and is actively involved. Sometimes He uses institutions like government, and other times delivers His personal touch of comfort, protection and love. Often, His desire is to use us, His people, to touch those who are suffering injustice and persecution. Sometimes we intervene through our prayers, other times we can actively be involved. In either case we are to bring the compassion and love of Jesus to this broken world.

Over this past week, we have looked ahead, to the coming Kingdom of Jesus Christ and how our hope in His Kingdom should affect our lives today. The HOPE we have in the coming Kingdom; being motivated to be a people of PRAYER; living as one who has already been TRANSFERRED into this Kingdom; being FAITHFUL SERVANTS; setting our minds on CHRISTLIKENESS and experiencing the RIGHTEOUSNESS and PEACE of God.

Today's Scripture Passage takes us beyond even the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, all the way to Eternity and the New Heavens and New Earth. We give ourselves a few moments to reflect on what we will experience when all traces of sin and its effects are forever removed!

First note that what makes this New Creation so special is the presence of God Himself! Verse 3 declares that, *'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.'* We will be taken back to before the Fall in Genesis 3, when God walked with Adam and Eve 'in the cool of the day'. We will see Him, hear His voice, feel His touch. What we have experienced in our spirit and hearts in this life will take on the physical reality we often desire now.

Then we see the reality of pain, injustice and death itself dealt with and removed, as everything is made right. God will reach out and wipe away the tears and remove the sting and grief of death. He Himself will remove the cries and pain of those who have experienced the brokenness of life and the injustices of this world. All these things will be done away with.

We will look up, and see Jesus Christ on His throne, and He will declare that He has made all things new – all things RIGHT. He, the eternal Alpha and Omega is the eternal supply of living water that will refresh us with life, joy, love and now happiness forever. We will know the fullness of what we know in part now - what it means to be a son or daughter of God.

Verse 8 brings us back to the present, and the mission we have as the Church of Jesus Christ. Only those who know Jesus Christ as their Savior have the Hope of eternity with Him. Our mission is to bring the Gospel to this world through the testimony of our Christlike lives and the witness of our lips explaining the Good News of Jesus Christ. As we faithfully live out this mission, our hearts join in the prayer of the Apostle John in Revelation 22:20 – *'Amen, come Lord Jesus!'*.

Questions

1. How does the promise of Eternity and the hope it brings impact your perspective towards life today?
2. How are you involved in relieving the pain and injustices in this world? Are you praying? Are you looking for ways you can be involved in bringing help and relief?
3. How does your privilege of being a son or daughter impact the way you are living life? How should it?

Prayers

1. Take a moment and thank God for the Hope He has given us in the coming Kingdom of Christ and the New Creation we will enjoy for eternity.
2. Pray for the Lord to give you the compassion of Jesus Christ for this broken world. Ask for the grace to be His hands, feet and voice to this world.
3. Join the Apostle John in praying, *'Amen, come Lord Jesus!'*

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