

Monday, February 19

Psalm 43

The world can be an unjust place filled with all kinds of evil. There are people that seek to devour us personally through the tarnishing of our reputations. There are groups of people that seek to oppress those that God has called to be liberated. Regardless of the evils and injustices, we ought to remember that God is still present and still worthy of the praise.

In Psalm 43, we see the Psalmist crying out for God. There are people speaking evils about the Psalmist. The Psalmist's faith in God redirects the Psalmist to turn to God directly. There is a line of questioning of where is God in all of this? We've all been in that place where we are crying out for God because we cannot see the hand of God at work. Even when we cannot see or feel God at work, we must trust and believe that God has not turned a deaf ear to us and begin to cry out, asking God to send the light and to lead us to a place of peace. However, we must not stay in that place of weeping forever. The Psalmist makes a shift in declaring that he will make offerings of song and sacrifices. The Psalmist expresses a deep desire to commune with God at all costs. There is a desire to go deeper with God. We must go deeper in our commitments to God during this Lenten season. It is when we push through the uncomfortable places and stand on what we know to be true, (that God has never left nor forsaken us), that we can begin to have a renewed sense of commitment to God that resets in the expectation that God will renew, restore, and rescue us from troubles and evils. We can remain confident, as this Psalmist is at the end, in praising God for who God is and for what God has already done. If God can do it before, surely our faith should remind us that God can do it again.

Meditation: In what moments during this Lenten season have you found yourself crying out for God? How have you been able to maintain a positive posture towards worship and sacrifices of praise in the midst of the uncomfortable silences of God?

Prayer: God, we can honestly admit that there are moments when we are unable to see Your hand at work in the midst of evil and injustice. But God, help us to praise You anyhow. Show us Your light and remind us of how You've been faithful through the years. We bless Your name, again. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Rev. Porsha Williams

Tuesday, February 20

Psalm 105

Do this in remembrance of Me!

Do we need reminders to say Thank You; are we stingy about our praise? Maybe we have forgotten where we have come from and what we have been through to get to here.

Is the Lenten sojourn just an annual church endeavor that we must endure on our way to the celebration of Resurrection Sunday or does the Lenten season offer us an opportunity to say *THANK YOU* to the God who kept us? Thank You for promises kept, Thank You for revelation, Thank You for peace in the face of chaos, Thank You for provision when we were convinced *ALL* was lost. Thanks for saying *NO* to requests that would do us harm, Thank You for bail bondsmen (in heaven and on earth) who freed us from spiritual, mental and physical bondage. Thank You for guidance when we were confused and wandering, Thank You for comfort and strength when our hearts broke and tears flowed without ceasing.

There is something rude about being rescued, forgiven and healed without saying Thank You. This is what David knew when he wrote this *Historical Psalm*. Sometimes, we have to take the time to go back, look back at the *GRACE*, the *INTERCESSION* that delivered us from evil and evil-doers and just say Thank You. David knew then and we know, we prefer to forget. Our modern parlance says "get over it", "move on", yet, we must remember for the sake of our souls. We are humbled in the face of God miracles, we are unworthy of mercy, we should have fallen down and not gotten up but God lifted us. Thank You, Holy God!

Meditation: What has God done for you? Do you remember? What sins have you done that God has shown you mercy and forgiveness? What Egypt did, God brought you out of it without your asking? Whom do you tell of God's greatness in your life? The details are important. If we remember, we will be compelled to give Thanks, if we remember how we cannot glorify *HIS* Name. If we remember what could possibly hinder our praise?

Prayer: Oh Lord, our God in times past and present, we give Thanks in humble remembrance of You. Before we knew You - You knew us. Your merciful kindness envelopes us even when we don't see it. Thank You for keeping us, for forgiving us, for cleaning us up and reminding us if it wasn't for you, we would indeed be lost. Then too Lord, we Thank You for giving us the opportunity to PRAISE You because Your patience went before our PRAISE.

Thank You for accepting us even when we forget to Thank You. Amen and Amen.

Minister Renee Brown Johnson

Wednesday, February 21
Deuteronomy 11:18-28

Obedience is better than sacrifice, and we see that so clearly in today's scripture. The only thing these commandments require of us is to love God, to walk in the ways of God and to continuously trust in God. When we think about the goodness of God and all that God has done for us, that's the least we can do. How could we not love God when we think about how God has first loved us? How could we not love God when we think about where God has brought us from; how God has kept us and shielded us from hurt, harm, and danger? Why wouldn't we want to follow the footsteps of a loving, holy and righteous God? And why wouldn't we continue to trust God, when the Lord our God has always been faithful to us? Even when we are not faithful, God is yet faithful. By following these commandments wherever we go we will be blessed because God has promised. By following these commandments our enemies will not be able to stand up against us because the hedge of God will protect us. Oh, yes, there's just one other little thing that God requires – that you not put any other gods before the Lord your God. Let us be reminded, there is only ONE true and living God. There is only ONE God who can save your soul! There is only ONE God who can protect you. There is only ONE God who can give you eternal life. There is only ONE God who loves you unconditionally. There is only ONE God who died on the Cross for your sins.

Meditation: What other gods do you have? Are you putting other gods before the Lord your God? If so, is it the god of pride? Is it the god of money? Are other people and relationships your god? Do you worship other gods at the mall? In times of trouble can those other gods hear your prayers and answer them?

Prayer: God, our Father, our Mother, our Provider, our Hope, our Sustainer, help us to follow Your commandments. Help us to be careful not to put any other gods before You. Let us always be mindful of Your promises. May Your Words and Promises always comfort us. You are the True and Living God and besides You, there is no other. In the matchless name of Jesus, we pray, Amen.

Minister Upshaw

Thursday, February 22

Psalm 119: 73-80

God has fashioned us into His own image from the very footprints of our feet to the fingerprints of our hands. He has made us in such an excellent way that He expects our Praise and Worship. And God expects us to follow His commandments. But sometimes obstacles get in our way and sometimes we become that obstacle. Even when trials and tribulations become our shortcomings, we must remember God's commandments that God has instructed in the Book-Instructions-Before-Leaving Earth (Bible). For no matter what kind of afflictions we may encounter in life, whether they may be setbacks, adversity or distress none are too big or too small for God to handle. God's love for us has always been unfailing. Even in our darkest moments when we were disobedient to God's laws. God, still in spite of all the mess, we may have or may not have created for ourselves, God has shown us, unconditional love. After God has delivered us through the afflictions, we should always meditate on His precepts.

Meditation: Are you looking for a way out of your affliction? Are obstacles blocking your blessings? Are you meditating on God's Word?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, when trials and tribulations come into our lives help us to call upon Your Holy Name. Help us to step out of the way so that You may step in. Continue to shower us with your compassion and love. In Jesus's Name. Amen.

MIT Crispin Johnson

Friday, February 23
Psalm 34

David wrote Psalm 34 after escaping death. Two points struck me when reading the Psalm. First, David reminds us that we must make time to praise God daily and often. We must make God a part of everything that we do. In doing so, we will develop a relationship with God and believe that He will always be there for us, especially in times of need. David had experienced a great deal of pain and suffering. Some of it was unjustly done to him, while some were the result of his own foolish choices. Often, we find ourselves in a place where we need God's help. Perhaps a loved one is terminally ill, a wayward child is living a dangerous lifestyle, someone wants to harm us, or to pay the bills, we did things that could jeopardize our freedom. Even if we are in a place of our own doing, our sin must not deter us from calling on God in

our hour of need. When we are delivered from our fears, we are not only safe - we are secure. While God may not provide us with answers to why bad things happen, He does offer us a refuge in confusing times.

Next, David encourages us to “taste and see that the Lord is good.” To taste, you must make God a part of everything that you do. You must read His word daily, talk to Him daily, and trust Him to guide you in everything that you do. You will never know God’s goodness unless you try Him out.

Currently, I am raising my two-year-old nephew. Like many children, he refuses to eat green vegetables. As soon as he spots one in his bowl, he clenches his teeth, squints his eyes, and prepares for battle. You see, he has decided that because of the way veggies look, they must be bad. Since I refuse to battle a toddler or to force him to eat, I learned to be creative. Now, I mix in the vegetables with his other food or pretend that the spoon is an airplane – and his mouth is a landing strip. Amazingly, once he tries the veggies he likes them.

In many ways, adults are like children. So many have the wrong impression of what it is like to follow Christ. They believe that the church has lost its way, so it’s not healthy to be a Christian. Psalm 34 is an invitation to take God at His word, to trust in the Lord and experience His goodness firsthand, to know God personally. “Taste and see that the Lord is good.”

Meditation: What is happening in your life that is causing you to doubt the goodness of God? How have you made Him a daily part of your life? Where have you tasted His goodness today?

Prayer: Father, I have tasted and seen that you are good. I have sampled the finer things of this world. Yet, none can compare to you. I do not seek refuge in friends, money, cars, clothing, or job security. For they come and go. Instead, I take refuge in You.

Dr. Donna Beck

Jeremiah 22:13-23

It is clear from this segment of scripture that God is a God of justice and righteousness. God exalts a nation and people of righteousness and justice. And casts down the nation and people who are unjust. How we see and respond to the needs of the poor and needy is an indication of how well we know the Lord. If we say we do not love our brother or sister whom we have seen, how can we love God whom we haven’t seen? Our faith and Christian work do not stop when we exit the doors of the church. In fact, that’s where the real work begins outside the four walls of the church, away from the brick and mortar of the building. We often hear it said that politics and social justice issues should have no part in the Christian agenda. The scriptures and the life of Jesus vehemently contradict that. In today’s reading, we see that God is warning the King of Judah to execute judgment and righteousness, to do no wrong or violence to the stranger, the fatherless or the widow. Jesus also speaks of how we should treat the stranger and traveler in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Proverbs 14:34: Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people. Another way of seeing it is that righteousness exalts a nation and the godliness of its people is a sin-offering. Is the treatment of the Undocumented Immigrant and the DACA children an example of the unrighteousness of our nation? Unlike the Good Samaritan, are we continuing to walk by and not help because it’s not our problem? In the 1990s there was a motto that became popular: What would Jesus do (WWJD)? During our fasting and praying let us ask ourselves the same question.

Meditation: In looking back on recent weeks, has God placed in front of you opportunities to help a stranger in need and you just walked by? Have you seen others being treated unjustly and you determined that it was not your problem? Is injustice only a problem when it affects you directly?

Prayer: Most loving God and Creator of us all, help us to be instruments of your peace and justice. Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Protect this nation and the people you have placed in it. Let us lift up a standard of Godliness and Justice for all, regardless of color, race, creed or national origin. For Yours is the Earth, and the fullness thereof. Amen & Amen

Minister Upshaw

Saturday, February 24

Bethany Baptist Church

Lenten Program

February 18, 2018 — February 24, 2018

“Being Faithful Over a Few”



Matthew 25:23

²³His Lord said to him, ‘Well *done*, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’

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