

The GoodNews

Newsletter — March 2020

A Publication of University Baptist Church, Hattiesburg, MS

The purpose of University Baptist Church is, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to assemble and worship God, to love and encourage one another, to proclaim the gospel of Christ, to minister to all people, and to live in peace.

In a world where difficult issues remain, University Baptist Church continues its commitment to be a church where "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male or female, for (we) are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28)

Perspective

I think I spend a lot of my life just observing people, and never really getting to know any of them. I don't know if that's a safety measure, or if I'm just being lazy and not wanting to get involved. I think it could go either way. This past week, I talked to a man that I never thought would turn against God. Well, not really turn against him, but he was hurting and it seemed like his praying wasn't going anywhere. We have all been there, right? I know I have. His wife of several decades was diagnosed with breast cancer. He would pray, hour by hour. The members of his church would pray. The radio stations would pray. The list just kept growing, but still there was his wife, lying in a hospital bed, waiting for more news from the doctor. They would pray together, and he would pray on his own, but it just kept coming. The long hours of waiting at the hospital kept gnawing at him. How could God just let this happen to his wife? Couldn't He find someone else? What about the lady that never goes to church? Or the lady that takes her clothes off for money? Why not them? Over and over he would ask this question... Why?

His wife was in church every time the doors opened. She did charity work. She fed the homeless. She never cursed. She never lied. Why her? He just couldn't see the reasoning behind it. So he became jaded. Where is God in all of this? Is He there? Is He listening? Does He even care?

How do you tell someone that's hurting so much to open their eyes and quit focusing on the negative? To stop laying blame, and recognize what they have right in front of them. It's harder than you think. But somehow he did it. Instead of saying whoa is me, and laying down and letting that train run right over him, he said enough. Instead of God fix this or that, his prayer became, how can I use this Lord? How can I take this experience and glorify You? You should see him go! His trips to the hospital turned in to reaching out to the nursing staff. He thought: the other patients on the floor could use a little bit of the Lord, and he brought it! I wish you could have seen the joy coming from this man's face. Every second was another second he could use to glorify the Lord. Have you accepted Jesus as your Savior? Why yes sir I have! Well tell me about him! Just watching him gives me so much hope. In a world where it's every man for himself, this man was for the Lord.

It did my heart good to see that, and I hope that the world will see the Lord through him. Instead of being so sad, and afraid of everyone and everything, why don't we just jump in? The way I see it, if the world already thinks you're a lost cause, then what do you have to lose? That's right, absolutely nothing! So let's get to it! Jesus will give us the words we need, and He will give us the opportunity, we just have to take it!

Serving and Standing Firm: Part I

As I have gotten older I have become more interested in history and learning about the past. Recently, I did a study about Hanukkah, also called the Festival of Lights. Although Hanukkah is not a God-given holiday, it has at least two meaningful and personal applications for Christians. As you see from the title, this is part 1. This month we will be learning about where Hanukkah came from. Next month I will share two meaningful lessons I have learned in this study of Hanukkah.

Hanukkah is not a God-given holiday. It is a man-made holiday that celebrates a great military and spiritual victory by God through the Jewish people during what many would say was one of the darkest times in Jewish history.

There are about 400 years between the Old and New Testaments, and it was during this time that the nation of Israel was subjugated under the rule of Alexander the Great. Alexander was a relentless general but he was also very wise. After succeeding his father as king of Macedonia he quickly conquered the Persian Empire. He did all this by the age of 33. He also died at the age of 33. After his death, his kingdom was divided between the forces of his leading generals. Two of the resulting empires were known as the Ptolemaic and the Seleucid Empires. The Ptolemaic Empire was in Alexandria, Egypt. The Seleucid Empire was in Antioch, Syria, and located right in the middle of these warring Empires was little ole Israel. As the empires continued to grow with animosity toward each other, Israel caught the consequences of their animosity.

The darkest time for Israel came around 168 BC when Antiochus Epiphanes was ruler over Seleucid. It was during this time he tried to conquer Egypt. On his quest to deliver a knockout blow to Egypt, the Romans from the West stepped in and stopped his plans. Rome demanded he retreat to Syria or they would smash them. This of course infuriated Antiochus, sending him into an evil tempter tantrum. Traveling back through Israel he took actions that he thought would eliminate his troubles with the Jewish people while reaffirming the dream of Alexander the Great to create a one world people and culture. Antiochus decreed that the Jewish people had to change. If they did not comply, they would be executed. The Jewish people could no longer circumcise their children, celebrate their festivals, keep the Sabbath, offer sacrifices, read or even be in possession of the Torah. In addition to these prohibitions, they were commanded to build altars to Zeus, the main god of the Greeks. On these altars they would sacrifice swine, an unclean and abhorrent animal to the Jews. These changes stunned the Jewish people, but they were forced to show their allegiance anyway. There was no middle ground. Either they would serve Jehovah and keep His commandments, paying the penalty with their lives, or they would cave to pressure and follow the Greeks.

Without a doubt, this was a very difficult choice. Sadly, many of the Jews chose to compromise. They reasoned it would be better to be alive as an apostate than to die being faithful. Those who chose to compromise became known as Hellenized Jews, and they were not looked upon favorably by the faithful Jewish people. The tension between them can still be seen in the first century church (Acts 6:1). The faithful Jews who did not give into the decrees and culture under Antiochus were brutally tortured and executed. Thousands of Jewish people suffered under Antiochus' wicked and evil rule.

Not long after Antiochus set the decrees and the temple was defiled, he and his soldiers discovered a small town northwest of Jerusalem called Medin. It is here that we find a brave and noble man named Mattathias. Mattathias had five sons. Due to the decrees of Antiochus, Mattathias and his sons had fled to the hills, and many men had chosen to follow them. Over the next year Mattathias and his men attacked many Syrian outposts, destroying idols and alters. At the end of that year Mattathias died, but not before instructing his son Judah Maccabeus to continue the fight. The odds these men faced were overwhelming, but through this they became greater warriors. One of the missions was to finally go up to Jerusalem, and what they saw upon their arrival took their breath away. The holy curtains had been torn down, the temple doors burned, and the altar had been defiled with an idol of Zeus and the remains of swine. The temple had been neglected and desecrated for years.

Despite the circumstances, Judah Maccabeus and his men rose up. They cleaned the temple consecrating it again to the Lord. On the 25th day of Kislev (ninth month of the Jewish calendar after the exile) in 165 BC, exactly three years to the day the temple was destroyed by Antiochus and his men, Judah and all the people of Israel dedicated the temple to the God of Abraham, Issac, and Jacob. This was a great time in Israel, a time of rejoicing and feasting, a time of music, praying and worshipping God. The amazing celebration lasted for eight days. After the festival ended, Judah Maccabeus decreed that this festival should be instituted as an annual celebration. For eight days the Jewish people shall celebrate, memorializing the restoration of the temple and worship. This is where the Festival of Lights, or Hanukkah, comes from. The festival of Hanukkah is a joyful holiday!

Embodied in this joyful celebration are some great spiritual and meaningful lessons for Christians today. Next month we will explore two of these lessons to see what serving and standing firm looks like.

God bless you,

Job 28:28

Kingdom Kid
DPC

Christ's Coming

As Christians, we are looking forward to the return of Christ. What a glorious occasion that will be when we will see Him in his glory. When Christ came the first time, He came in humility to die for our sins. When He comes again, He will be seen as the bridegroom who comes seeking his bride. His people, those who have believed in him and have become children of God, will share His glory when He returns. 1Thess. 4:13-18; 1Cor. 15:51-58.

How we anticipate someone's arrival is determined by how we have been living. A child, who has surprised their parents by cleaning their room or even the whole house, can hardly wait until they get home because they'll be confident that the parents will be pleased! On the other hand, a child, who has broken an expensive vase or even a window will have an unpleasant sense of waiting for their parents to come home, knowing that discipline awaits them. Just the same, if Christians are doing what is pleasing to Christ, we can look forward in confidence for His return, but if we are doing what is displeasing, we are ashamed and dread to face Him. 1Cor. 13:11-12.

John challenges believers to prepare for the appearance of Christ. 1John. 2:27 - 3:3. If we abide in Him through faithful commitment to obedience, we will be confident when He appears. On the other hand, those who disobey God's Word will be ashamed at His coming. The Bible is clear in teaching that Jesus will come again. The question is whether or not we will be ready for His return. If we are, it will be a time of great rejoicing for us, but if we are unprepared, we will be very embarrassed to see Him. Isa. 65:11-16.

Obedience is not just an option for Christians to consider; it is an obligation for God's children. Only faithful commitment to obedience will produce a Christ likeness in our lives. 2Tim. 2:1-13. It is by obeying God's Word that Christians manifest the family trait of righteousness that assures us and give us confidence when He returns. When we see Christ, we will be transformed to be like Him by the gracious work of our Heavenly Father. Christians will be revealed in their identity as the children of God as we are faithful in living for god.

God Bless!

Justin Underwood

Christ's Coming

Christ's coming means the diffusion of light
for the man who does what
is right
For those whose hearts are honest, sincere,
and spiritually polite
We are not to become lost in Him, but He
is to be found in us
We are to reset in the fact that we are
enlived by Christ Jesus
For to me to live is Christ... —Philippians 1:20
It is true that He is our risen Lord—
the Bread of life
He must take us from milk to meat that we
may become spiritually responsible
There's a stillness in believers; something so
divinely incomprehensible—
We have sin in us, but not on us; always
indwelling, but never imputed
Christ is coming as our one, true King; often
despised, but never disputed
What we are in Him means spiritual growth
and righteous liberty
The emancipation proclamation was singed with
the blood of the lamb on the
Cross of Calvary
Our Heavenly Father accepts us not in ourselves,
but in his son
His love and life are free to flow in us due to
His work of justification and
reconciliation
If we walk in the light, we have fellowship one
with another and are sure to win
Christ is coming for his sheep to give them the
victory over death and sin — Isaiah 25:8-9

A DogPenChurch In Christ Prayer

Dear God,

We sit at Your feet this day looking up at Your beautiful face shining down upon us as we lead for the promises You made us (Jeremiah 31:33). We thank You for not valuing people based on their outward appearances, but instead by looking at their hearts. Thank You for making a way, through Your word for us to know You (John 14:6). Help us to grow closer to You as we feed on the word — Our Lord Jesus — and treasure the word in our hearts. Help us to explore the depths of Your love so that we can give to others what You've given to us. Teach us to not love just in words, but in our actions and in truth. Whatever it is that You ask of us today — whether big or small — help us to do it. May we all surrender our life and those we care about and love to You — our all-powerful God. Help us to cling to Your promise of comfort in our fearful moments and to experience Your loving provision as we trust in You (Isaiah 51:12-13). With all of the worldly distractions and persecutions, give us the strength, O Lord, to carry on and to keep our eyes fixed on You — true and lasting beauty. We praise You for being our Savior and our strength.

In Jesus's name we pray, Amen!

The Road Not Taken

By: Robert Frost

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim.
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black,
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Have you ever stopped to think about that poem? I know a lot of people will read it and say hmm, that's nice. But have you ever really thought about it? In high school, I loved Robert Frost. His poems always seemed to relate to something or someone, and it was so much easier to understand his works than a Russian or English Poet. I think we can all relate to this one. Have you ever been at a crossroads in your life? Having to make a choice — Right? Left? Up? Down? Do you take the easy route, or do you take your chances and go for the road not taken? As Christians, I think we all make that choice. We choose to follow God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Is it the easy way? The way with no judgment? No roadblocks? No trials? No tribulations? Not even close. Can you look back through the Bible and see if any characters chose to go down the road less traveled? It's just about every person. The one that stands out to me is, Jesus. Life could have been so much easier if he had taken the traveled road. The same goes for Saul/Paul, King David, Joseph, Ruth, Esther, Job, Daniel, and Stephen. If they had taken the more traveled road, where would we be today? Things may seem easier on that road, but they aren't always better. When you chose to worship the Lord, and decided to let Jesus' blood wash away all of your sins, it wasn't easy. Why did you choose to do it? I like to think that when I came to the Lord and said here I am God, please forgive me for all my sins, save me, because I can't do it on my own, that I chose that path. The only path. The one leading straight to the feet of Jesus.

In this age of convenience, the quick fix and instant gratification, do you choose to do what's right, wrong, or simply stick with what's easiest? Have we become lazy Christians? Have we chosen the path of least resistance? In my lifetime, I hope to see the Christian world stand up! Stand up and say I believe in God! I know the sacrifices Jesus made for me on that cross! I'm going to change my life, clean my heart and mind, and live every single day for Jesus. He died on that cross for me and you! He didn't take the easy way! He didn't choose the path more traveled! He took that pain, sorrow, and humiliation upon his shoulders for us. How could anyone ever be a lazy Christian? Please take a minute and read your Bible to see what I'm talking about. They did it back then, and we need to do it now! We need to be brave! We need to shout from the rooftops what Jesus has done for us! Tomorrow isn't promised, so why wait? Take that road not taken and you will never regret it, because at the end of that path is Jesus.

Jesus, and eternal salvation. It doesn't get any better than that. The road may be long, and the road may be hard, and there will always be someone to try to knock you down, but don't let that stop you. Jesus will be there to help you along the way. Step by step. We are never alone on our journey. Thank you Jesus! Thank you so much for the wonderful gift that you gave me. Thank you for knowing my heart even before I did. Take my hand and lead me home.

Examples:

The Stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:54-60)

David speaking to Solomon, his son (1 Chronicles 28:20)

Joshua and Caleb (Numbers 13-14)

David and Goliath (1 Samuel 16-17)

Peter and John (Acts 3-4)

Esther (Book of Esther)

Paul's Trip to Rome (Acts 27)

Moses and the burning bush (Exodus 3)

Ruth and Naomi (The book of Ruth)

Wasted Time

The time that I've spent wasted is my biggest regret, spent in these lonely dark places I'll never forget. I now sit and think about the things that I've done—the cries, the laughs, the pain and so called fun—I now realize the sinful life I lived only led to one thing, a broken heart full of guilt and shame stuck in this place where I wish I didn't remain.

I feel trapped in this grown body while wanting to run back to my youth where I remember laughter and fun. But the chase is over and there's no place to hide, everything's gone, including my pride. With reality now slapping me right in my face, I'm scared alone and stuck in this place. Now memories of the past flash threw my head and the pain is obvious by the tears that I shed. I ask myself why and where I went wrong for so long failing to realize it was my sinful life I needed to leave alone. So I guess I was weak when I should have been strong and not lived for the drugs streets. I now wish I had never known my feelings were lost smothered deep down for so long while all the time needing to be shown. As I look at my past its easy to see the fear that I had afraid to be me. I pretended to be hard, so fast and cool failing to realize I was living lost like a blinded fool. I now thank God for allowing me to see I was getting too old for that tiresome game of acting to know everything with sense of shame. It's time that I change and move on with my life putting God first where He should have been for so long in my life. What my future holds, I really don't know, but the years I have wasted are starting to show. So I now open my Bible read and pray that our Father in heaven will lead me through each day. Thank you Father for another blessed day. I pray you strengthen me along my way, lead, guide, protect and provide while I strive to be by your side at home in heaven hopefully one day, you will say welcome home son. Oh how I wish today was that day.

– Blake Dempsey –

Golden Nuggets from the DogPenChurch In Christ

Lamentations 3:40-41 “Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the LORD. Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens.”

Fellow believers in Christ,

As true believers in Christ Jesus our Lord and savior, we must honestly search ourselves every day as in the presence of God. We must seek truthful answers as to whether or not we are actually profiting from the word of God or just going through the motions. What we must all understand is that the more precious Christ is to us, the more delight He will have in us. The more delight that He has in us, the more we will trim our lamps in earnest expectation of His coming.

We would like to challenge each of you with some very important questions that each believer should ask themselves. Please ponder on one question each day of the week and find a scripture or scriptures that support the answer to the question. Remember to be brutally honest with yourself — the truth hurts, but it all sets you free from the toils, power and deceptions of Satan.

Day 1: Have you a deeper felt sense of our need of Christ?

Day 2: Is Christ becoming to you a brighter living reality?

Day 3: Are you finding increasing delight in being occupied with His lovely perfections?

Day 4: Is Christ becoming daily more precious to you?

Day 5: Is your faith in Him growing so that you confidently trust in Him for everything?

Day 6: Are you really seeking to please Him in all the details of your life?

Day 7: Are you so yearning for Him that you would be filled with joy knowing that He is coming within the next 24 hours?

We pray that all who participated feel the desperate need of Him — the Advocate with the Father — who pleads our cause when Satan accuses.

God Bless!

A Lenten Prayer

Reader God of life, do not darken your light to us,
do not limit your joy in us,
God of life, do not shut your door to us,
do not refuse us your mercy.

Let us pray.
O God of life,
eternity cannot hold you,
nor can our little words catch
the magnificence of your kindness.
Yet in the space of our hearts
and in silence
you come close and renew us.

Silent Prayer

Reader O God of life,
grant us your forgiveness
All **For our careless thoughts,
for our thoughtless deeds,
for our empty speech
and the words with which
we've wounded.**

Silent Prayer

Reader O God of life,
grant us your forgiveness,
All **For our false desires,
for our hateful actions,
for our wastefulness,
and for all we've left untended.**

Silent Prayer

Reader O loving Christ,
hanged on a tree
yet risen in the morning,
scatter the sin from our lives
as the mist from the hills;
begin what we do,
inform what we say,
redeem who we are.

All **In you we place our hope,
our great hope, our living hope,
this day and evermore
amen.**