

Know Who You Are

-Pastor Jeffrey Hubers

This text follows Jesus' first appearance and first words in the Gospel of Mark. We go almost the entire passage, however, before Jesus even speaks. I find it interesting that Mark only records Jesus' words *after* He has been baptized and gone through the wilderness testing. It's almost like Jesus does not speak until "the time is fulfilled" (v. 14). As I think about the Lenten season, I wonder if I need to do more preparing, more listening, more waiting before the time is right/fulfilled before I speak.

When Jesus is baptized, a voice from heaven declares, "You are my Son, the Beloved" (v. 11). It's only after these words are spoken that Jesus faces the wilderness. In other words, Jesus knows who He is in the eyes of God the Father before facing temptation, trial, and testing.

As we look to the season before us, perhaps we also need to know who we are in the eyes of God. Because of what Jesus has done, we too are the "beloved" of God. With that identity upon us, we should not fear the desert places or the trials that go along with them. Christ has gone before us – our repentance can be nothing less than following Him where He goes.

*Prayer: Jesus, Beloved of God, remind me always of your faithful presence and your abiding strength in my seasons of weakness. Amen.*

Remember What He Has Done

-Gene Juffer

In the early verses we see that the Psalmist is going through a time of trouble. We are not told if that is a personal or national time of trouble. We also see that in this time the Psalmist looks to God. In his seeking, he is not able to find a solution, and he questions whether or not the Lord will help him. He remembers the great things his God has done in the past. In verses 16 through 18 he remembers the flood and thinks of the rescue of Noah. In verses 19 and 20 he remembers the salvation of the children of Israel from Egypt passing through the sea.

We are not told if the Psalmist finds peace in his remembering the great things of God, but we can see how these past rescues of God's people point to the plan of salvation that God had put in place for the redemption of us from our sins. Jesus is our rescuer in His suffering, death, and resurrection.

When we are in times of trouble and doubt we have but to remember the great works of our God and Father, and we can have the hope and peace that these times will come to an end. In this time of Lent we too look to the great deeds of our God. We know that our God had a plan to bring us back into a relationship with him. In that knowledge, there is no greater peace.

*Prayer: Lord, Help us at all times to remember Your faithfulness and to praise Your name. Amen.*

Thankful for the Little Things

-Kaitlyn Asmus

You got up this morning and made breakfast. You hopped in your car and went to work, praying for a good day. But did you think of all the things God had already done? He woke you up without sickness or a heavy heart. He granted you peace in your morning routine and energy to face your day. He created a beautiful sunrise (did you notice?) and provided a bright, beautiful (even if chilly) morning. He fought the demons that were waiting for you just past your doorway.

Job 5:9 says that God “does great things and unsearchable, marvelous things without number.” We easily recall His great miracles in our lives, but He does innumerable more things for us than that! We forget that he does even the simplest things. “He gives rain on the earth,” (verse 10); “He catches the wise in their own craftiness, and the schemes of the wily are brought to an end” (verse 13). God works behind the scenes, stopping bad circumstances from happening before we even realize there was a threat. He is constantly watching out for us. So why would we not try to build and strengthen a relationship with Someone who loves us that deeply?

During Lent we focus on drawing closer to God. One way to do this is to reflect on and appreciate all of the little things He has provided for us, as well as focusing on the greatest sacrifice He made for us: Christ’s death on the cross.

*Prayer: Lord, make us mindful of Your many blessings, including the little ones. Amen.*

Jesus Tempted

-Wayne Klinger

The time had come for Jesus to be tested and prepare for His ministry. By the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Jesus was led into the desert to be tempted by Satan for 40 days. Our first thought is a normal human thought - how could Jesus be tempted? Then we remember that He came to earth to be like us in every way, including all the temptations. He could feel the pain, yet He was also God in human form. Satan would try his usual tricks like he does with us, but he only found that Jesus would win the battle.

After three tries at temptation, including the basic human need to eat, Satan found out the Jesus would overcome him by using references from scripture: "Man does not live by bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." Then later when Satan tried to have him jump from the temple and the angels would save him, He said, "it is also written, do not put the Lord your God to the test." He definitely passed the test! Satan was defeated again.

We are called to resist the devil's schemes the same way Jesus did – by turning to God for our strength.

*Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank You for coming to save us, for Your ultimate sacrifice, for Your wonderful plan of salvation. You have set the example for us. Please help us live according to Your will, and praise You always. Amen.*

The Faith of Our Fathers Isn't Enough

-Flora Tieszen

Five months ago my family stood around my father's hospital bed, watching his breathing become shallow and irregular. After awhile, his spirit left his body and went to heaven.

Let's pause right there. When people talk about loved ones going to heaven, do you wonder (like me) if they know what they're talking about? Some people reason that since God is love, everyone will go to heaven. Some think heaven is an idea man created to help us deal with our loss. Others believe we go to heaven if we were good enough here on earth.

"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (verse 23). My father was a good man, but since he wasn't perfect, his good works didn't earn him a spot in heaven. Thankfully, verse 24 says that "all are justified by his [God's] grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." Because my father talked about this gift of salvation and his personal relationship with Jesus Christ, I am confident that I will see him again one day in heaven.

However, just because my father accepted God's gift of salvation and is now in heaven, that doesn't guarantee that I will automatically be saved. Each one of us must decide on our own to accept God's gift of salvation through Christ's sacrifice "by faith" (vs 25).

Thankfully, through God's grace, I have accepted that gift of salvation for myself and am assured of seeing my father again someday.

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, I ask that You will help my children, grandchildren, and all who read this to accept and receive Your free gift of everlasting life. Amen.*

A Speck on a Speck

-Steven W. Huber

These scriptures remind us of our Creator's glory and power and the respect that is due to God. "All...nations will bow down before Him" (vv.27-28).

Lent is a time to contemplate who God is and to appreciate what He has done for those who fear Him. This fear comes from reverence for God's power, which sustains our earthly lives (v.29). As we prepare for Easter, we reflect on the Lord's awesomeness and the price He paid to make it possible for us to join Him in heaven one day. Fear and revere the Lord (v. 23) and bow down before the Creator (vs. 27), who has given us everything we need to survive and more.

Compared to God, who are we? Only a speck on a speck in the midst of the never-ending universe. Yet God's love, mercy, and grace are as unending as the universe is big. We have done nothing to deserve this; it is His gift to us!

Are you truly grateful for your life? Or do you waste time complaining about how things aren't good enough...things that, in life's grand scheme, are meaningless? Approach every day, especially during Lent, with a grateful, thankful heart that Jesus shed His blood for the entire world.

*Prayer: Father, help us to stay grounded and not self-absorbed, grateful for our lives on earth and the eternity you have provided for us. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Be an Angel of God for Others

-Beth Walz

This scripture passage (and a few earlier ones) remind us that our lives are based in choices. Sarai chose to send her servant to Abram. Abram chose to sleep with her. Abram chose to give Sarai complete control over Hagar. Sarai chose to mistreat Hagar. Hagar chose to run away.

Our choices can be either good or bad, God-honoring or not. In this scripture, many wrong choices led Hagar to the spring. When the angel of the Lord appeared and told Hagar to return to Abram and Sarai, she probably felt fear, anger, and maybe defiance. As the angel continues to talk, Hagar understands the angel's words. She realizes the words spoken reflect all that she has been feeling. The understanding and reflection of her feelings are very important. It allows Hagar to make the right choice.

How can we be more like that - understanding and reflecting the feelings of people that are hurting, whether physically, emotionally, or spiritually? We have all made bad choices, or fallen short. Like Hagar, we as individuals need to be heard and understood. All of us at some point need someone to be the "angel of God." We need someone to listen, to reflect, and withhold judgment and criticism, but most of all, to show God's love. So my question today is, "Have you been or are you being an 'angel of God' for someone - or do you need that angel to walk with you now?"

*Prayer: Father God, Show us how to help the hurting, to encourage and not condemn, to love and not judge, to listen and reflect, to be your angel for someone hurting. In Jesus' name, Amen.*