

What “Must” Be Done?

-Pastor Jeffrey Hubers

The word “must” is one that I feel often accompanies a lot of my actions and ideas. I “must” do this; I “must” get this project done; I “must” reach out to this or that person. Yet, I don’t think any of the things I do carry the same powerful necessity and importance than those the “Son of Man” pursues. Jesus *had* to undergo suffering – why, we often ask? Why did Jesus have to suffer? Because God With Us *must* do these things – the Savior of the world must suffer, die, and after three days rise again (v.31) and with that rising, grant us the hope of life everlasting with Him.

God chose this path because God refused to let us perish – God walked down the avenues of our despair and destruction and conquered them in the life of God’s Son. When we’re faced with this brutal truth, we often try and rebuke God for such action. But then our Savior reminds us that we are setting our minds “not on divine things but on human things” (v. 33).

And the most “divine” thing of all? Denying ourselves, picking up our crosses, and following the Son of Man into our redemption and restoration.

*Prayer: Lord, though I do not understand it, You refuse to let me believe I am worth anything less than the life of Your own Son. Give me the strength to let this gift change everything and follow You always, even when that means facing suffering and death.*

Glory in His Holy Name

-Dan Pranger

Lent brings to mind Jesus's incredible sacrifice for us, and we marvel in the miracle of His resurrection. It defies human understanding to contemplate such deep love and care for an inherently sinful people.

Psalm 105 reminds us of the importance of praising and serving the Lord. This is a salvation-history psalm, exhorting Israel to worship and trust in God because of His saving acts in fulfillment of His promissory covenant with Abraham. We are reminded – exhorted - to praise God for His wondrous works. “Glory in His holy name” (verse 3) suggests that, through public worship, we can express awe for God and help others understand his grace and mercy. We are also to “*remember the works He has done,*” a personal challenge to believers to gain a better understanding of scripture, which will increase our faith and help others better understand God's actions and His Word.

Our neighbors, co-workers, and friends already have an impression of God, but their impression may or may not be accurate. Our responsibility, our mission work, is to help them discover the God of scripture by showing them His goodness through the good he instructs us to do.

Psalm 105 reveals that God kept His promise to deliver Canaan to His people so that they might keep His statutes and observe His laws. In this Lenten season, may our thoughts center on the love and mercy of a God Who has done so much for us, while requiring so little of us.

*Prayer: Father, thank You for Your faithfulness and Your goodness. Help us to praise You all the days of our lives. Amen.*

Sacrifices

-Tom Stevens

This story of Abraham may not be the first passage in the Bible that comes to mind when thinking about the Lenten Season, but it definitely ties right in. Many people will sacrifice something in their lives during these weeks: meat, sweets, alcohol, Facebook, etc. But none of these are nearly as important to them as what Abraham was asked to sacrifice - His own child! (Although there have been times I have wondered if I could give up a child for Lent; you parents know what I'm talking about... there are those days!)

Abraham was willing to do anything for God. Lucky for us, Jesus just asks us to believe in Him and follow His teachings. However, I think a little more sacrifice than that would help people, especially me. Perhaps we could sacrifice a little bit of that precious time everyone seems to be short of these days in order to pray and praise the Lord.

Jesus sacrificed Himself so my sins can be forgiven (and boy, are there plenty of those), and this passage reminds me that the little things I may give up or change, pale in comparison to this. So hopefully I can follow my own advice and sacrifice a little time, not only during Lent, but throughout the year, and give it to Him and come closer to Jesus.

*Prayer: Lord, help us to sacrifice our time and ourselves to grow closer to You. Amen.*

A Day Without Sinning

-Scott Pietz

Judah protested its punishment, even though the sin that caused the pain was scandalous. But punishment is an opportunity for us to see what we did wrong and to change. It helps us be aware of our sins and to correct them.

I sin daily. It is hard to say about myself, but it is true. Not a day that goes by that I can honestly say I didn't make fun of someone, act greedily, try to control something, become angry without cause...the list goes on and on. Then there are the side effects of my sins, which may be headaches, pains, or guilty feelings.

Some of these side effects may feel medical, but they are not. No doctor can help us get rid of our sins. That's why we feel guilty. God is not hurting us; we are doing these things to ourselves. God is helping us correct our behaviors. He does this out of love to help us learn and make us better Christians. Only the one true Father knows us this deeply and tries to help us.

Usually I tell a story about how I relate in life with this verse, but there are just too many. We all have these stories. But stories are not what we need to tell. The answer is what we need; the answer is God. It is about God, and it is how His love for us is everlasting. Thanks be to God!

*Prayer: Lord, I pray that one day I will be sinless and in Your presence, because only then will I know Your true glory. Amen.*

Living Stones

-Kim Vermeulen

Have you ever stumbled and fallen, maybe skinning a knee or an elbow? And then you maybe wanted to take that stone or rock you stumbled over and just throw it!

In today's passage, the stone is Jesus Christ. Some who stumble over Christ refuse to believe in Him or choose to reject Him.

Just as Jesus Christ is the Living Stone, the cornerstone of the church, we too as believers are also living stones. But we can't build a wall or a church with just one stone; it takes many living stones (believers) to join together to make a church. God calls each of us to work together, and our efforts will be multiplied.

As living stones, we are God's people, and as we praise God, we are brought into His beautiful light and receive His mercy through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

*Prayer: Thank you, God, for making us living stones and bringing us together to praise your Holy Name. Amen.*

Benefits of Holy Living

-Seth Severtson

In Psalm 19 David passionately puts God over every aspect of the universe, praising Him as righteous, faithful, and holy. Back in Psalm 13 David was depressed – “How long...will I have sorrow in my heart all the day?” – but he doesn’t stay there. He preaches to himself, praises God, and it lifts his spirits. This is David’s pattern in life.

God’s Truth is not an abstract, amorphous, spiritual nothing. It’s real! Here each line praises God’s character and extols the benefits of holy living: gives you rest - informs our life - brings life penetrating joy.

David’s respect and worship for God go deep; he even pleads to be kept from “hidden faults.” God’s holy character is no laughing matter. His deep love and promises are not flippant. David takes his God seriously. God is a big deal, and sin is a big deal. That’s why redeeming that sin through Christ is such a big deal.

David doesn’t want “accidental” sins around. He doesn’t want to come off wrong; presumptuous. He’s serious about his reverence and the rewards for holy living. Are we?

Are we serious about our reverence for a Holy God? What would our faith, our family, our marriages, our city look like if we Christians took the same passionate posture David takes here? If we started each day placing God on His throne, taking His holiness and character seriously, and then pursued Him with a fervor... I wonder what could happen.

*Prayer: Lord, help us seek You with all that is within us. Amen.*

The Fear of the Lord

-Debbie Asmus

In this passage, the Israelites have consecrated themselves to receive God's law, and today is the day. God makes Himself known to them with thunder and lightning, a loud trumpet blast, and warnings not to touch the mountain. The result? "Everyone in the camp trembled" (v.16).

I was raised Catholic and often felt in that church a "layer" between me and God, since I needed to talk to a priest (rather than God directly) to confess my sins. As a believer, I now rejoice that I have direct access to God (Hebrews 4:16), as do all of His children. But sometimes that familiarity – that ability to talk to God anytime about anything – leads me to forget that He is not just my Savior – He is THE MOST HOLY GOD!

When did I last tremble in fear at His holiness as I confessed my sins? How often do I complain to Him in prayer when He does not act as I expect - as if somehow the Creator of the universe must answer to ME?

Though Christ has enabled us to approach God directly, we must never lose sight of God's holiness! How amazing it is that a holy God made a way for unholy mankind to be reconciled to Him forever, through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.

*Father, Help me remember always that You are Holy, to be revered and praised. Thank You for Your promise to make us holy and more Christlike as we walk with You. Amen.*