

What Brings Glory to God?

-Pastor Jeffrey Hubers

The image of Jesus we are presented with here doesn't sit nicely with all the serene pictures of Jesus dining with His disciples or carrying lambs in His arms. Jesus overthrowing tables and driving out the money changers is a scene of "righteous anger." The God With Us does not make light of the distortion of worship. Perhaps that statement makes us think of everyone dressed in their Sunday best, arms at their side, silence except for hymns. Perhaps others think of everyone's arms raised and eyes closed, swaying to an electric guitar.

Whatever our ideas of the sanctity of worship, we must remember that all of them fall short of glorifying God. What brings God glory is not the amount of "sheep and cattle" we can bring, nor the pristineness of our appearance or even our own "zeal." What brings God glory are hearts and lives turned over to God's Kingdom. We shouldn't treat God's Kingdom like a "marketplace" where we exchange our "Jesus coins" for an experience of God or divine favor. " 'What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?' says the LORD. "Learn to do good; seek justice; rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow' " (Isaiah 1:11; 17).

*Prayer: Holy God, you call us out of our sin to live restored for your Kingdom. May our daily actions speak louder than any praise we can offer Sunday morning, and help us always to offer you our hearts and lives as a living sacrifice for your glory.*

My Soul Longs for the Courts of the Lord

-Betty Hieb

Psalm 84 is a psalm of pilgrimage, known to be a song the Jewish people sang on the road during their annual trip (pilgrimage) to the temple of Jerusalem. The trip was probably difficult at times, and this song tells of seeking refuge with God, the Creator of all things. They made a once a year pilgrimage to their temple, while we have the privilege of weekly visits to our church to seek the blessings of God's grace, love and mercy. Every week, not just once a year, we have the benefit of being among God's people to listen together to God's Word and especially now, during Lent, to hear again the promise of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and the joy of His resurrection.

Every week, we are blessed to be able to sing praises to God, worship with fellow church members, and blessed to be able to gain strength in our faith. As we open our hearts, the strength of our faith is being renewed so that we can continually focus on Jesus' life, death and resurrection. This allows us to find the contentment of knowing God's claim on our lives. As verse 10 of Psalm 84 reminds us, "a day in the court (church) of our Lord is better than 1000 days elsewhere."

*Father, we thank you that we can draw our hearts closer to God through regular worship and fellowship in the community of the Church of our Lord.*

Begin with God

-Gary Van Roekel

What is Lent? It is a period of spiritual discipline, fasting, and penance starting on Ash Wednesday and leading up to Easter.

King Hezekiah was one of Judah's greatest kings. No doubt his mother was a godly and important influence on his life. He opened the temple doors and restored the Lord's house. He cleansed the temple and restored religion back to Judah. He sought "first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness." As verse 2 tells us, he did that which was right. King Hezekiah had a desire to turn away the fierce anger of the Lord and turn Judah back to worshipping the one true God.

Today's text shows a spiritual renewal that comes through commitment and cleansing .During this Lenten season, we should examine ourselves spiritually. We should seek to draw closer to Jesus, remembering His death on that cruel cross for us, as well as that great Easter morning, when He rose from the dead!

Scripture says that those who begin with God will prosper accordingly. Our God is a loving and merciful God. Judah had turned to idol worship. What are the idols in your life? As we prepare for this Easter, let us take a look at the sin in our lives and, through God's grace, try to live a more disciplined life.

*Prayer: Thank you for sending Your Son to die on that cross for my sins. Christ has risen! Amen.*

Righteous Anger

-Carly Hubers

What a surprising Messiah Jesus continues to be for the people of Israel! Just a few verses prior, as Jesus enters Jerusalem, the people “gave him a wonderful welcome,” laying their coats at His feet and shouting “Hosanna!” (verses 8-10). They are thrilled to have a King in their midst—someone who they are hoping will defeat their enemies and reclaim their power.

Now, just a day or two later, Jesus has come to the temple and created a chaotic scene. This is not the King they expected at all! He seems to have angrily disrupted their system!

This story of “righteous anger” gives us more than just permission to be occasionally angry. Jesus, once again, is illustrating to the people in the temple courts that He is more than they have come to expect. Jesus is more concerned with the hearts of the religious leaders-- and not with the Roman authorities like the people expect him to be. Jesus flips over the world’s understanding of social boundaries. Jesus reminds those who have forgotten that the invitation to come to His table does not depend on financial or social standing. What was once reserved only for the religious or financially elite is made open to all God’s people. Author Christian Piatt writes, “In one dramatic gesture...he hits the reset button on how we approach and engage church, God, political authority, and the economic system.”

We are called to be stewards of a disruptive, life-changing truth-- Jesus enters the world not as we expect, but as we so desperately need.

*Prayer: Jesus, You are everything we need, and so much more. Empower us through Your Spirit to devote our lives to knowing You more and loving others more powerfully. Amen.*

Speak Out!

-Laurie Kent

Psalm 107 was written by King David as a song of thanks to God for His mercy to His people – thanksgiving for God's benevolence to people who had cried out to Him at difficult points in their lives.

Verse 2 (NIV) says, “Let the redeemed of the Lord say this..” I checked other versions of the Bible that said, “Tell their story,” or “Make known His deeds.” But my favorite is, “Has the Lord redeemed you? THEN SPEAK OUT!” (NLT) Wow! As Christians we're in the middle of a very special time of the church year. But do we speak out?

We've been redeemed by the blood shed for us on the cross. But how long has it been since we've shared the story of that incredible gift? It seems like we always want to claim we would share, but we're just never in a situation where we could.

A couple years ago I had a new coworker ask the week before Easter, “So, can you explain the whole Easter thing to me?” Since I was in a camper at Jack's Campers, I did my best to answer with a ‘Jack Veldheer’ answer! (I'm sure he would have done better, but I tried.)

When opportunities arise, we need to be open to share. We've been given the gift of eternal life through Jesus! Let's do our best to let His love show through our actions and words! So SPEAK OUT and share our hope and the reason for celebration as we move toward Easter!

*Prayer: Lord, give us opportunities to share Your good news and the boldness to tell Your story. Amen.*

The Great Exchange

-Debbie Asmus

Imagine yourself on Christmas morning. You have thoughtfully chosen gifts for your family because you love them. Your daughter opens the beautiful blouse you gave her and beams with joy. You then open her gift to you and find – a torn, muddy shirt. What on earth, you wonder??

This is a parable of our salvation. I, a sinful, self-centered human being, have been saved through the blood sacrifice of a Savior who chose me LONG before I chose Him. In fact, in my sin, I never would have chosen Him. Yet this scripture tells us that He predestined me (along with all believers) to receive salvation in accordance with His will, though I had never done (and could never do) anything to earn this.

Basically, I gave Christ my dirty, torn, smelly, filthy shirt, and He in return gave me a beautiful robe of righteousness. In fact, as verse 8 says, he LAVISHED the riches of His grace on us. “Lavished” means He poured out extra, more than the minimum, far more than expected, simply because He loves us!

Surely this is the most unfair exchange ever - that the Creator of the universe has taken our sin and, through Christ’s death and resurrection, given us in return His righteousness. Oh, how blessed and grateful we are!

*Prayer: Father, thank You for Your overflowing love. Help us to share Your great love and mercy with a world that desperately needs You. Amen.*

Born Again

-Dan Moller

Ever messed up in life? Ever have any guilt or remorse about a specific act or lifestyle that you've participated in? Have you let the world's cultural or social teachings lead you into behavior that is contrary to the gospel? The good news is that today's reading tells us that we can CHANGE. We can be forgiven and thus receive a new and better life.

This passage first tells us the consequences if we do not invite change into our lives. Jesus is very clear that without change, we will not be given the opportunity to experience the Kingdom of God. That is to say, in order for us to see and be a part of the Kingdom of God, we MUST change.

In today's passage, Nicodemus has difficulty understanding this "born again" or "changing" process. But as Jesus explains in verses 3-5, change takes place through baptism. It is only through the obedience of Christ and the acceptance of the Holy Spirit that we are symbolically cleansed with water and "born again" of the Spirit, thus allowing us entry into the Kingdom of God.

Obviously we cannot be born again by way of flesh! But isn't it a great comfort knowing that Jesus has provided a perfect way for us to change – to be born again?

Ever messed up in life? Accept Jesus Christ – seek to be cleansed – invite the Spirit into your life - and I promise you that you will experience a CHANGE that will be eternal!

*Prayer: Thank you, Jesus, for providing a way to change. Forgive me for a past life of disobedience, and strengthen me to walk in the Spirit that will allow me one day to dwell in Your glorious Kingdom. Amen.*