

Death to Life

-Pastor Jeffrey Hubers

Death to life. This is the Christian journey in plainest terms, I think. We “were dead,” Paul writes – “but God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ” (v.1, 4-5). We all start out in the same place – the grave. But God draws us out of those depths, that darkness, and brings us into God’s own light.

From there it becomes a lifelong journey of transformation as God continues to draw us out of the death of sin into the life of Jesus Christ. Some days it feels like death seems more living than life – when we see loved ones depart from disease, violence, the chaos of a world racked by change. Yet we must always keep in mind that though our bodies, our ashes, whatever matter is left to us at our physical deaths, who we are as children of God will never return to the grave. Our future is now “seated...with him in the heavenly places” (v. 6). God’s grace has called us out of the grave into life – life that does not stop when our hearts eventually do, but life that will continue on in the resurrection of Jesus our Lord.

*Prayer: God, may this gift of life give us courage against death. May we take this gift of life and live it fully against the darkness still present in the world.*

Faithful God

-Matt Howlett

In today's passage we see the faithfulness of God, despite the Israelites' lack of faith. When they could not find water to drink, they complained to Moses before the LORD. While God could have rebuked the Israelites for their lack of faith, He did not. Instead He provided just what the people were wanting, and He did it in an amazing way. God allowed Moses to take a simple log and utilize it to make the water pure and sweet. God then went above and beyond to encourage the people to listen to God's voice and led them to a land of springs and palm trees to rest right by springs of water.

Centuries later, God would send His only Son into the world, not simply to purify water, but to purify our very souls in this fallen world. Just as the Israelites did not deserve the pure water God provided for them, we do not deserve the sacrifice Jesus made for us. Yet God faithfully provides just what we need and so much more.

Take time today and all throughout this important season to truly reflect on all the awesomeness that God has provided for us through Jesus' loving sacrifice.

*Prayer: Thank you, God, for sending your Son for our sins. When we did not deserve it, You were faithful, and we praise You for Your loving gift. Amen.*

Am I a Hypocrite?

-Kaitlyn Asmus

It's easy to be offended when someone calls you a hypocrite. I would definitely be offended if someone called me that. But would they be right?

We can get into such a routine with our lives that we fail to recognize when we commit a sin. It can be easy to be quick to judge someone, or to make a rude comment to someone we aren't on good terms with. A lot of times we don't realize our mistake until hours later, when it's too late to try and fix things.

God is always there to grant forgiveness when we need it, but before we can ask for forgiveness, we have to recognize and admit we are sinners. This way we know what we did wrong, and we won't keep doing it. The first step to change is admitting you have a problem, and then God will help you down the path of transformation. God will not let us be tempted with more than we can handle, but "He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" (verse 13).

This passage is written to help us recognize and repent from our sins. Once we are aware of our faults and choose NOT to act on those impulses, we are more able to avoid hypocrisy. We can explain how we understand the mistakes we've made but, through God's forgiveness, we are working to be an example of Christ for those around us.

*Prayer: Father, show me my sinfulness so that I can repent, and help me to model Christ's love to others. Amen.*

Let Your Light Shine

-Reed Overweg

*The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and Your God will be your glory.” (v. 19)*

Throughout the tiring and busy days that we encounter as humans every day, we often lose sight of the significance and opportunity that each and every day holds for us. God has given us opportunity, day in and day out, to succeed and help others do so as well.

He provides us with the tools and resources that we need to sustain and enjoy life, and it is our choice whether or not we choose to take advantage of the gifts. When we do so, we unconsciously let our own light shine, which is rather contagious to others around us.

It is easy to praise and thank God for the gifts He has given us when our day is going as planned, but it turns into a different story when we are faced with conflict and difficulties. Even though it is not always easy, remember to stay positive and remind yourself of all the beautiful gifts and blessings God has given in your life, and allow yourself to enjoy life in the moment.

*Prayer: God, help us to reflect on Your many blessings and to be a light to those around us, just as You are our light. Amen.*

Hiding from God

-Wyonne Kaemingk

I had a small dog who sometimes would misbehave when home alone. When I arrived home, she would slowly approach me with downcast eyes, tail between her legs. She would not perk up until I greeted her, pet her, and forgave her for whatever she had done. She then understood all was well, and she displayed her joy to see me.

At times we are like this with God. We know we have sinned; we feel guilt, conviction, condemnation. As sinners, we withdraw from God, trying to hide our shame. Instead of hiding, we must turn toward God, repent, and seek forgiveness. Psalm 51 gives us a great example of God's forgiveness if we repent. David asks for God's mercy according to His unfailing love. He understands that God has compassion for all sinners. Notice David asks that his sins be "blotted out" and "washed away," not just forgiven. God forgives and then forgets our sins; they are totally gone.

David then asks for assistance to live a life with a "pure heart" and "steadfast spirit" and to have the "joy of salvation" restored (vv. 10-12). This is a great example for us. We need to repent, accept God's mercy, and then move on to live lives that display God's love and grace to all.

Lent is a time to examine our lives and remember Jesus's great gift of forgiveness through His blood shed on the cross. Then we experience the great Easter morning joy of worshipping a risen Savior.

*Prayer: Lord, let us not try to hide our sins from You, but to seek Your forgiveness. Restore the joy of our salvation, that we may freely worship You. Amen.*

Using Our Weaknesses

-Kari Howlett

God knows us so well. He knew that, on my own, I could never draw near to the throne of grace - that I would struggle to receive His mercy and be unable to find His grace. He knew that I would allow my insecurities, struggles, failures, and sins to cause distance between us. He knew I would need a Savior who could understand my weaknesses, as only Jesus can. No matter where I've been, how badly I fail, or what trials I may endure here, God provided the way to approach Him. He planned it so that I could always look at Jesus and see Someone I can relate to - Someone who looks on brokenness with compassion and chooses to walk with me all the way to the throne of grace.

God knew I would need even more than this, and He brought me men and women with gifts and talents like Jesus. People called by God to guide and help me; people I can relate to because they have their own weaknesses, yet use them to serve God. I love how verse 14 says "let us hold fast our confession," to remind me to cling to my own confession of weaknesses – not as cause for continual shame, but as a reminder. The weaknesses that God forgives me for, Jesus saved me from, and that I can use to minister to others using the same compassion that Jesus gave me.

*Prayer: Jesus, let me freely tell of my weaknesses, knowing that You will use them to display Your strength in my life. Amen.*

Life and Gratitude

-Dillon Adams

This passage begins six days before the Passover, when Jesus travels to Bethany to be honored by Lazarus and his family. This is also the point in Scripture when Jesus seems to hint to His disciples that there will be an end to His time on earth.

This story takes place in the presence of Lazarus, who Jesus raised from the dead in John 11:38-43. Lazarus's incredible resurrection played a significant role in convincing many to believe in Christ, the Messiah. That particular miracle attracted many new followers, and shortly afterward, the plot to crucify the Son of God was put in place.

Mary shows her love and gratitude to Jesus that evening by pouring expensive perfume on His feet and wiping it with her hair. What an example of never-ending faith and trust in the Lord! Then Judas the betrayer interjects and shows displeasure over the woman's acts. Judas argued not because he actually cared for the poor, but because he was a selfish and greedy individual who only thought of himself. Jesus replies by standing up for Mary and saying that the act was intended for his burial, which was approaching quickly (as was Judas' betrayal of the Lord). Jesus declares that Judas will always have the poor around him to take advantage of and steal from, but he and the rest of his disciples will not always have Him among them to show them the Way, the Truth, and the Life that only He can provide.

*Prayer: Father God, give us hearts that yearn to show our gratitude to You as Mary did. Help us to give our lives to You as the only Way, Truth, and Life. Amen.*