



SUMMER STUDY GUIDE

Introduction

The mission of Vintage Church is to make disciples who know, live, and advance the gospel. After “Know 2016” and “Live 2017”, we are focusing on advancing the gospel throughout 2018.

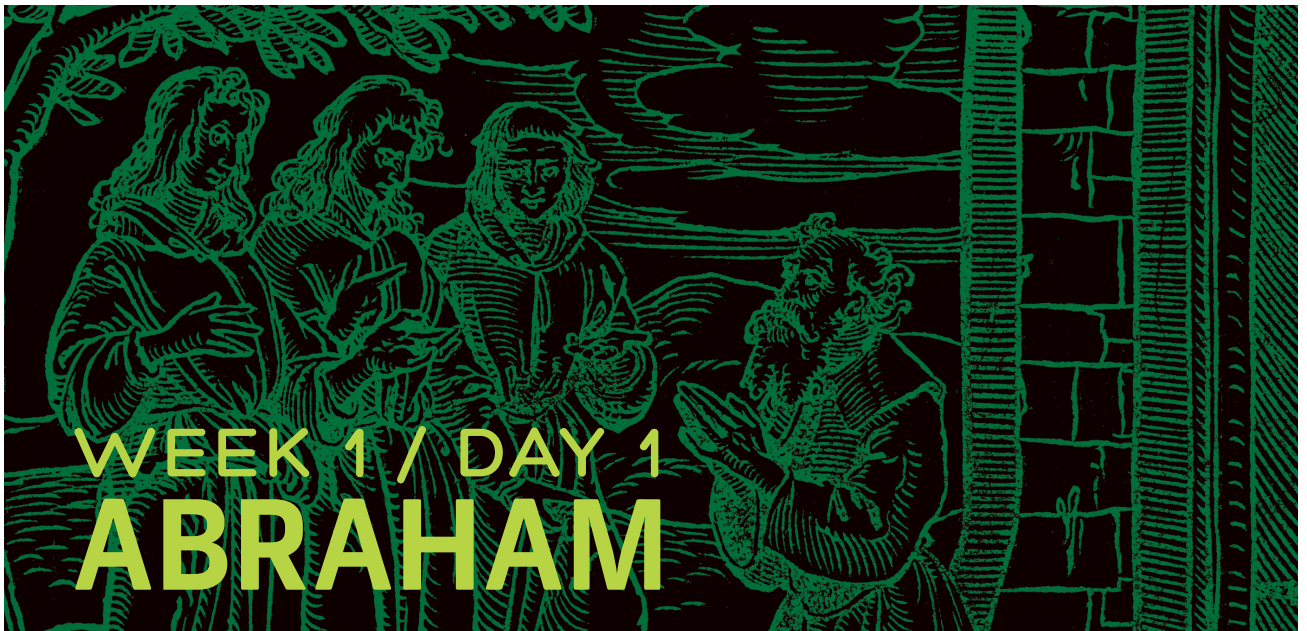
Over the summer we will study ten characters in the Old Testament and how they advanced God’s Kingdom. They are a varied group: women, men, Jews, gentiles, rulers, slaves, widows, prophets, rich, and poor. Like each one of us, they have their flaws, and our goal is not to lift them up as heroes. Instead, we will see how God’s love moved them to action, changing their lives and the lives of those around them.

What follows is meant as a guide in the journey. You can take this journey as individuals, in groups, or as families. This guide will have four days of devotions for each week of the sermon series. The idea is that there is one devotion for each weekday, with Community Group as a night of discussion, and the weekend off. Each study will take about fifteen minutes, but our hope is that you will meditate and pray throughout the day about the Scripture and the thoughts presented in this guide.

Be blessed, encouraged, and challenged by the stories of Old Testament characters. They’re ordinary people impacted by an extraordinary God. Just like us.

*Oh give thanks to the Lord; call upon his name;
make known his deeds among the peoples!
Sing to him, sing praises to him;
tell of all his wondrous works!
Glory in his holy name;
let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice!
Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his presence continually!
Remember the wondrous works that he has done,
his miracles, and the judgments he uttered,
O offspring of Abraham, his servant, children of Jacob, his chosen ones!*

PSALM 105:1-6



“Just trust me” – three words no one likes to hear. This probably means someone wants you to do something you don’t want to do. The natural human response is to not trust that which one cannot see and to not travel a path when the destination is yet unknown. You may have experienced in your relationship with the Lord the same thing that is seen repeatedly in Scripture – that trust doesn’t come automatically just because it is God who is asking for it. When it comes to trusting God, Abraham sometimes gets it right, and sometimes misses it completely.

Read Genesis 12:1-9. God called Abraham out of his country, away from his family to a new land. What land? To *“the land that I will show you” (12:1)*. God promises him that he will make his descendants into a great nation. What descendants? The ones God will give him.

“Trust me.”

Abraham does. He goes on a journey without a determined destination because God tells him to. One thing we see in Scripture is that God reveals himself and his plan most clearly to those to whom he gives the most daunting tasks. God repeats his promise to Abraham multiple times as a reminder – trust me. The most memorable of these repeated promises comes in Genesis 15.

Read Genesis 15. God “cut” a covenant with Abraham. A covenant was a way of saying *all that I have is yours, and all that you have is mine*. This is certainly not an equitable deal, as Abraham (and all of humanity as a result) receive the grace of God. Praise the Lord! God promises Abraham three things: 1) land, 2) descendants, and 3) that all nations on earth would be blessed through him. The land and the nations are not an end in themselves, they are way that God can bless all the nations of earth – through Abraham’s descendant – Jesus.

In what ways has the Lord called you to trust him? Where you have been resistant? What promises has the Lord given you that you know are true but in which you are not walking in victory? Spend time today listing those things and confessing/committing them to the Lord.

June 3-9

Abraham has seen God direct him to a land which would be the inheritance of his ancestors. He has also seen God miraculously provide his wife and him with a child – in their nineties. But this story is not without Abraham and Sarah interjecting their own sinfulness. In an attempt to speed along the process Abraham has a child with his wife’s servant, Hagar (16:4). It is understandable how this situation adds tension between Sarah and Hagar (16:6). It is not difficult for us to relate to many of these biblical characters’ shortcomings – especially when they exhibit a lack of faith. But the theme continues – God provides. God had made it clear that Isaac was the covenant son – the one promised and the one through whom all nations would be blessed. And now this...

BUT THE THEME CONTINUES – GOD PROVIDES.

Read Genesis 22:1-19.

This is one of the most puzzling and even infuriating passages in Scripture. God tells Abraham to sacrifice his son, his long ago promised and miraculously provided son, the one through whom all nations on earth would be blessed, the one Abraham loved more than his own life. God tests Abraham in this most extreme way. Why? To see if he would do it? To make him sweat for a bit? To test the breaking point of Abraham and Sarah’s marriage? To make him appreciate his son more? Or was it so that we could get a glimpse of the pain, and indeed a picture of the love poured out by the Father when he sent his Son to be crucified.



“On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided” (22:14). On that day God provided a ram in the thicket. A few millennia later, on a mount very near the one in this story, God provided a sacrifice, the promised descendant of Abraham, that would bring us life.

It is impossible to imagine what was going through Abraham’s mind on that three day journey. Did he trust God would intervene? Was he thinking God would provide him another son? Or was it as the author of Hebrews presents, that Abraham trusted that God would raise Isaac from the dead (Heb. 11:19)? Abraham had seen God provide every time he made a promise – why should Abraham think this instance would be any different?

Spend a few minutes remembering and writing down times in your life when the Lord has provided. Next, write down all of the ways that you are trusting the Lord to provide where you have not yet seen his provision.



The Bible is an amazing collection of stories about amazing people. One of the most fascinating aspects of Scripture is the layers of depth of the characters. A fun thought experiment is to think of the people in the Bible about whom nothing negative is mentioned. It is a very short list. The authors of the Bible make it clear that the only one to be worshiped is God himself – not Abraham (we have already mentioned his lack of faith), not David (adulterer), not Moses (murderer), not Peter (take your pick). A proper approach to the entirety of Scripture is that Jesus is the hero. As the Jesus Storybook Bible says, “every story whispers his name” – and many of them even shout it.

Every week of this devotional guide is going to be focused on one Old Testament character. At the end of each week we are going to be reminded that Jesus is the focus of the story. We will then finish each week with a Psalm that will direct our worship and prayer.

Jesus is the greater Abraham, who fulfills the conditions of both sides of the covenant. In Genesis 15, which we read on Day 1, God cuts a covenant with Abraham. It’s a pretty bloody scene with animal halves separated to make a walkway of sorts. In this culture two parties would walk through the sacrificed animals and enter into a covenant – all I have is yours, and all you have is mine. In so doing they were promising that if they failed to hold up their end of the covenant they would be cut in half like these animals. Abraham was in a deep sleep, and God sealed both sides of the covenant. In covenantal language God was saying, “if I break this covenant the punishment is on me, and if you break this covenant, the punishment is on me.”

JESUS IS THE GREATER ABRAHAM

Read Luke 22:1-23.

We see God’s faithfulness in Abraham’s story as you have seen God’s faithfulness in your story. Jesus came to fulfill the requirements of the covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants, which they broke time and time again. Jesus came to be the one through whom “all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” Jesus gave us, his church, a new covenant through his life, death, and resurrection. Our mission is to advance the gospel so that all the families of the earth shall be blessed in Jesus. All he has is ours, and all we have is his. As with Abraham, this is an inequitable deal. God gets our mess and sin, we get the keys to the Kingdom. And when we break our side of the covenant – Jesus has already paid the price for that.

Take some time today and meditate on the grace that is ours through Jesus. Let us also think and pray through our role in advancing the gospel so that all the earth will be blessed through Jesus.

The Psalms are a collection of prayers and songs which run the gamut of human emotions. John Calvin calls the Psalms “an Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul.” As a part of Scripture we would call the Psalms God’s Word but the reality is that the Psalms are a collection of man’s words to God. As the Psalms are prayers recorded in Scripture it is good and healthy to use them to frame our prayers to God. Each week we will end with a Psalm that will shape and direct our prayers that day as we read them in light of the character we studied that week and place our own lives and emotions in them.

Read Psalm 105.

One of the greatest and most oft-repeated commands in the Old Testament is to remember. This psalm tells us to “Remember the wondrous works that he has done.” We can do this because the Lord our God “remembers his covenant forever.” Praise the Lord!





WEEK 2 / DAY 1 JOSEPH

God fulfills his promise to Abraham. He becomes the father of Isaac, who becomes the father of Jacob, whose name God changes to Israel, who has 12 sons. Joseph is the 2nd youngest and is Jacob's favorite (37:2). As is often the case in youth, Joseph lacked in wisdom. He flaunted before his brothers dreams of their bowing down to him. No doubt that was not all he flaunted, as we see that the brothers' extreme response to his youthful arrogance is to sell him into slavery and tell their father that he is dead.

But the Lord was with Joseph. A man named Potiphar ends up purchasing him. **Read what happens next in Genesis 39.**

Did you notice how many times the phrase "the Lord was with Joseph" appears in this chapter? In Potiphar's house, Potiphar notices it, Potiphar's house is blessed because of it, and it says it twice as Joseph ends up in jail. Does this not shake up our picture of God's "steadfast love?" The Lord was with Joseph – and he ended up in slavery. Because the Lord was with Joseph, and because Joseph exhibited extreme integrity, he ended up in prison. The case could certainly be made that Joseph ended up in prison instead of beheaded (which is what probably should have happened to a slave accused by the master's wife of rape) only because the Lord was with him.

Jesus promises to be with his people "always, even to the end of the age." After being falsely accused and shipped off to prison, Joseph was probably questioning God's presence...or his goodness... or his steadfast love. We have the unfair advantage of seeing the end of Joseph's story – Joseph did not. Likewise, in our trials, whether they be self-induced or brought on by the sinfulness of others, we can be assured that the Lord is with us, and that his steadfast love knows no bounds. But we, like Joseph, usually cannot see the big picture – and sometimes we never will. Know this: God will work in and through your circumstances to make the Gospel known and to bring about his Kingdom here on earth.

For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Philippians 2:13

June 10-16

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT IS A STORY OF GOD USING JOSEPH TO ACCOMPLISH HIS WORK.

The point is made very clear – people trust Joseph. Potiphar trusted him because he saw that the Lord was with him. The pattern continues when Joseph is thrown into prison, as the warden puts Joseph in charge of all the prisoners.

God revealed himself and his plan to Joseph through dreams. He notices the cupbearer and the baker are troubled one morning and asks them about it. They are troubled because of their dreams (and it turns out the baker had good reason to be troubled). Joseph interprets their dreams – one is on his way back to the palace and the other on his way to a hangman’s noose. As the cupbearer heads back to the palace Joseph must be thinking this is his ticket out jail. But then the cupbearer forgets Joseph... for 2 years! What happens next is a story of God using Joseph to accomplish his work.

Read Genesis 41.

More dreams come into play in this story, this time dreamt by Pharaoh himself. Pharaoh is looking for someone to interpret his dreams and this jogs the cupbearer’s memory, who tells Pharaoh about Joseph. The pattern of Joseph’s life continues, and now Pharaoh places him in charge of all of Egypt! Being warned of an impending famine through Pharaoh’s dreams, Joseph puts into action a savings plan to save not only Egypt, but people from all over the region. Through Pharaoh’s dream God revealed that there would be seven years of abundance followed by seven years of famine. During the seven years of famine Joseph’s brothers came to Egypt looking for food.

The Joseph story is one of the longest single narratives in Scripture. The odd thing is that if we follow the ever-important covenantal descendant from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob... Joseph is not the next in line. The line of David, which is the line of Jesus, does not come from Joseph but instead comes through his brother Judah. This lengthy story of Joseph takes us away from the main point of Genesis (which is to follow the promised descendant) and even away from the promised land (Israel) into Egypt to see God’s working. He works through dreams, through suffering, through an arrogant young boy, through bullying, through pagan kings, through his faithful servant. Much later on, after the story has come to a conclusion, Joseph shares words of redemption with his brothers.

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. Genesis 50:20

Search for Jesus in your suffering. Leverage whatever position or resources you have to advance the gospel. Embrace the waiting. Trust that God is working in you to will and to work for his good pleasure.





***THIS MAY BE A COMPLETE
SHIFT OF PERSPECTIVE FOR
YOU. WRESTLE WITH IT.
TAKE IT TO JESUS.***

Joseph is a picture of Jesus. Jesus was falsely accused and the result was suffering; suffering that was followed not only with exaltation but also with God working for the salvation of the world.

Read 1 Peter 3:8-22.

Peter wrote this letter to a church that was suffering for Christ's sake. His words for them are "do not repay evil for evil... on the contrary, bless", "have no fear of them", be "prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you."

The Kingdom of God is full of people who entered as a result of witnessing followers of Jesus suffer with grace, peace, and hope.

Have you ever considered your trials and suffering as a tool that God can use to advance the gospel? This is not to treat your struggle as trite, or to downplay the difficulty of trials – some of the things people in our church have suffered are horrible. Christ also suffered (1 Peter 3:18). Lean hard into him. Imagine; could there be any more gracious gift of redemption than for Jesus to use our suffering to advance his Kingdom? This may be a complete shift of perspective for you. Wrestle with it. Take it to Jesus. Read Joseph's story again (we will also see other people this Summer whose suffering led to the advancement of God's Kingdom).

June 10-16

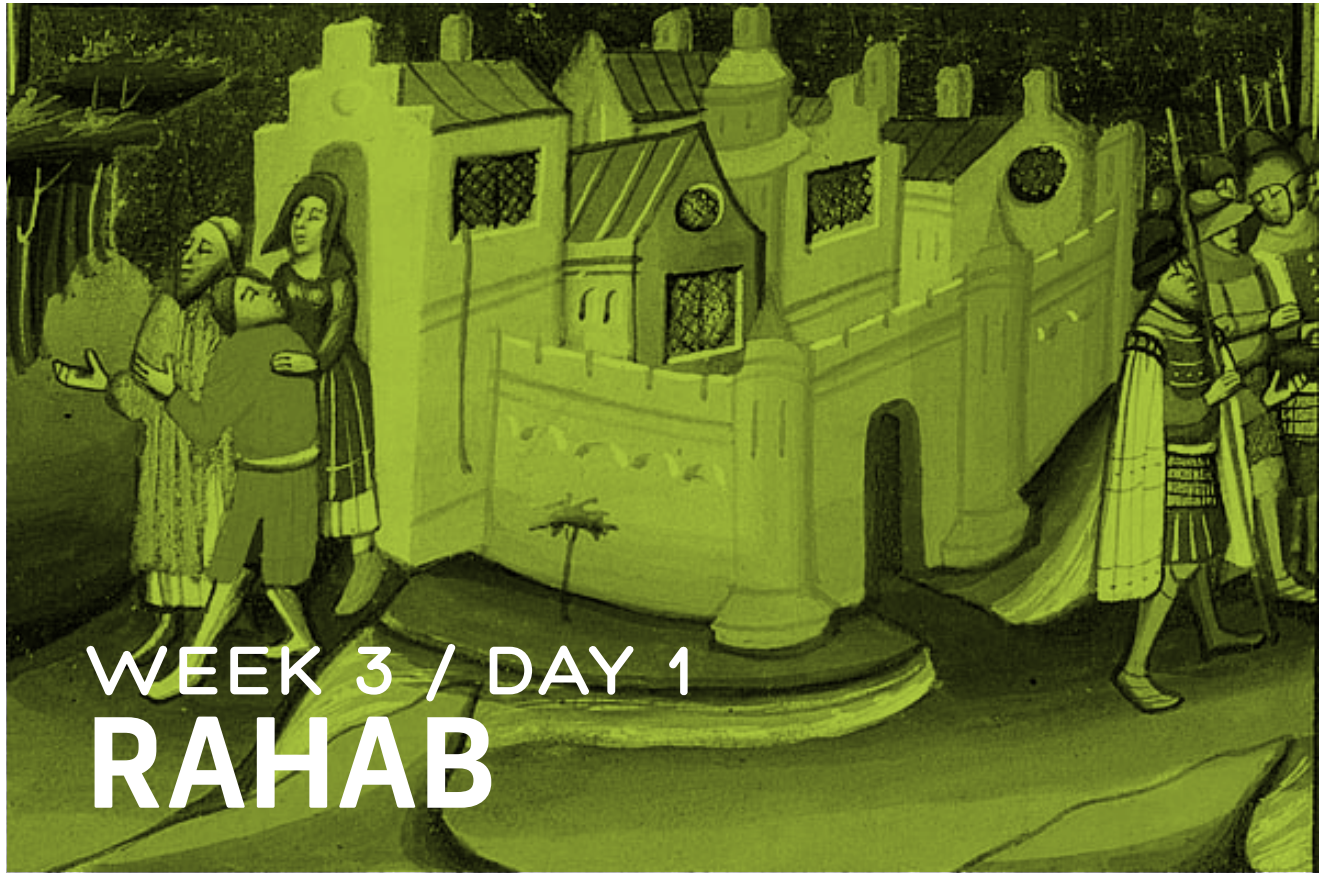


The pit is a common setting for the Psalms. Many are written either in the pit or shortly after coming out of the pit. Today's psalm, perhaps more vividly than any other, is written from the despairing depths of the pit.

Read Psalm 22.

Joseph could have written Psalm 22 when he was in a pit in Dothan, thrown into it by his brothers who wanted to kill him – “O you my help, come quickly to my aid.” He could have written it when he was sitting in a jail cell as a result of false accusations – “Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?” This Psalm was written by David, who may have been thinking of Joseph when he wrote, “In you our fathers trusted; they trusted and you delivered them.” This is a Psalm of anger and despair, yet trust and hope. It is also a Psalm of advance – “I will tell of your name to my brothers...All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you.”

Use Psalm 22 to direct your prayers today.



WEEK 3 / DAY 1

RAHAB

We don't see many surnames in the Bible. Because of this, descriptors are added to people's names for clarity. The descriptor may be the town they are from (Mary Magdalene) or their family member's name (Joshua son of Nun). Rahab's main descriptor was her occupation – and she was a prostitute. Every time her name is mentioned, both here in the book of Joshua and even in the New Testament where her faith is praised and her legacy remembered, she is named "Rahab the prostitute" (every time except for one – which we will look at tomorrow). Some of you may think you have an unfortunate surname... it could be worse.

In our context we might call Rahab a seeker. She is an outsider (a Gentile who lives in Jericho) who has been observing and hearing about God's dealings with his people. We already know her occupation, and her hometown is Jericho, which is a well-fortified city located just beyond the Jordan River – beyond from the perspective of the Israelites, who are on the "outside" looking in. The Jordan River is the eastern border of the land God promised his people. Since God made that promise to Abraham hundreds of years earlier, his people have never possessed the land. Jericho is the first city they must take in their conquest of the land.

June 17-23

Read Joshua 2.

Rahab risked everything, indeed her very life, because she trusted in the Lord. The juxtaposition of Rahab's being a prostitute against her incredible trust is not accidental. Rahab is not praised for her moral righteousness. Quite the opposite is true as her moniker sticks with her even into the New Testament. Her knowledge of the Lord was surely deficient at this point in her life, but she trusted him to the point of risking her life.

She was remembered not for her works but for her works.

No, that was not a typo. **Read James 2:18-26.** Rahab was not justified by her works of righteousness (notice how James keeps her surname), she was justified because she trusted in the God of Israel, and her trust necessarily led her to action. You cannot justify yourself, that is to say you cannot make yourself "not guilty" in the presence of a holy God. Jesus alone can do that. Romans 4:5 says, "And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness." As a follower of Jesus, one who has been justified by his grace, you can have the freedom to risk everything in faith knowing that because have been justified you cannot fail.

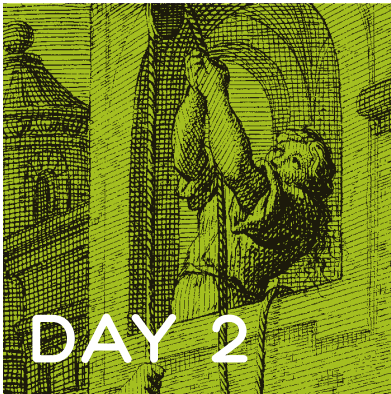
***SHE WAS REMEMBERED
NOT FOR HER WORKS
BUT FOR HER WORKS.***

Complete trust in the Lord means the future is history. When the spies returned to Joshua to give their report they said with all confidence, “the Lord has given all the land into our hands” (2:24). Upon hearing this report the Israelites cross over the Jordan River, set up stones as a memorial of that day, renew their covenant with the Lord by circumcising the new generation, and set their sights on Jericho. Chapter 6 begins with the Lord assuring Joshua of victory, “See, I have given Jericho into your hand.” The future is history.

Read Joshua 6.

The walls fall flat, and in such a way that not a single person, in Jericho or in the army of Israel, could say that it was anyone other than the Lord who won the victory. As promised, Rahab and her family are spared. They are not just shown mercy (withholding deserved punishment), but they are given abundant grace (receiving that which they do not deserve). Rahab’s family is spared the destruction of the city, and they are welcomed into the people of Israel – but the story does not stop there. Matthew 1 tells us that Rahab joins in the line of the Messiah (side note – Matthew 1 is the only place in Scripture Rahab is named without mention of her former profession). She marries Salmon and becomes the father of Boaz (we will come back to him in 2 weeks), who is King David’s great grandfather, and eventually Jesus’ ancestor.

A non-Jew who the biblical authors just can’t let us forget is a prostitute bears the covenant child. The fruit of her womb is the promised Messiah, through whom it was said all nations would be blessed.



Rahab trusted the Lord and risked her life to advance his Kingdom. The irony, of course, is that in risking her life it was saved. However, we could also cite many instances in Scripture and in church history (and in the present-day church) where people risked their lives to advance the gospel and their lives were not saved. As our church saw in Acts this Spring, Stephen’s life was taken while Peter was miraculously rescued from prison. Paul escapes death chapter after chapter but James

did not. All of them knew the promises of God are so assured that the future is history. And so it is with us. Romans 6:13 says we “*have been* brought from death to life.” Ephesians 1:11 tells those who trust in Jesus that they “*have obtained* an inheritance.” Paul writes in Ephesians 2:8 that “by grace you have been saved” – the future is history. We, like Rahab, don’t fight for victory, we fight because Jesus has already won the victory!

Where in your life are you experiencing defeat? Where is your life exhibiting a lack of trust in the victory of Jesus? Spend time meditating on the completed work of Jesus as mentioned in Romans 6, Ephesians 2:8–9, and Ephesians 1:11.

**THE FRUIT OF
HER WOMB IS
THE PROMISED
MESSIAH.**



It is certainly appropriate to carry the Old Testament picture of salvation into the New Testament – Jesus does. The Passover story, for example, is one of salvation. The firstborn from every house in Egypt was rescued by sprinkling blood on the doorposts. The blood in itself had no intrinsic saving value, it only saved insofar as the sprinkling family was trusting and obeying God’s command to do so. Rahab was saved by trusting in the Lord. And so it is with us, “believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31).

Read Romans 10:1-17.

We are not living in a city that is about to be under siege from God’s army. But for Jericho the punishment for their sin is death (Romans 6:23), and so it is with us. Romans 10 gives a very simple statement about salvation – “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Our salvation is not all that different from Rahab’s.

Romans 10 also paints a wonderful picture of what it means to advance the gospel – “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” There are two things that must first happen in the heart of a follower of Jesus before that person will ever advance the gospel. The first is that you must grow to treasure your own salvation. Until we hold onto our salvation as if it is the most valuable thing in our lives we won’t share it with others. The second is that we most properly see the devastation of sin and the lostness of those living without Jesus. If we don’t see the hopelessness in being lost we will never do anything to help them be found.

Take some time today to meditate on all the Lord has done to save you. Remember who it was who introduced you to Jesus and how thankful you are for that person. Thank Jesus for rescuing you from the destruction of your own sin. Dwell for a bit on the the goodness that Jesus has shown to you because of his grace.

June 17-23



Many of the Psalms are salvation songs. One way to learn to treasure your own salvation is to invest in the Psalms. Psalm 18 is one in which the psalmist experiences salvation from the Lord and must sing and shout about it – “I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies.” So great is his gratitude for his salvation that he declares, “For this I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations, and sing to your name.” He has experienced salvation from the Lord and he wants the whole world to hear about it!

Read Psalm 18.

Allow this psalm to direct your prayers today as you spend time rejoicing in salvation.



WEEK 4 / DAY 1 DEBORAH

In the book of Joshua God's people conquer the land that was promised to them. In the book of Judges we see this young nation take root and grow, but we also hear about their continued struggle with worshipping God alone. This is before Israel had a king – they were ruled by judges. The book of Judges follows a repeated pattern of turning away from the Lord and being delivered by him – it is a repeated A, B, C, D, E pattern. First there is Apostasy – the people turn away from the Lord and worship the gods of their neighbors. Next comes Bondage – God's people end up serving other kings. Then they Cry out to God, who sends a Deliver, and there is Ease in the land. We then see Apostasy, and on and on it goes. As soon as we shake our heads and criticize the nearsighted and forgetful Israelites we are reminded of our own cycle of sin. Apostasy in the book of Judges is usually summed up with, "And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord," and so begins Judges 4.

Read Judges 4.

Deborah was a judge. God had given his law to Israel but they needed people to make sure the justice given in God's law was being carried out. She was also a prophetess. As chapter 4 tells us, Deborah is courageous, a warrior, and God's provision to rescue his people from Jabin king of Canaan. And in case you missed it – yes, Deborah is a woman in a culture of male leadership. She was the only female judge in Israel. In this chapter she even goes into battle with Barak. However, she is not the only female warrior in this story. Jael, fulfilling the words of Deborah to Barak, shows her might as well as she nails Sisera to the ground.

Why did Deborah step forward to lead Israel in justice and battle? Because Israel needed leading, and she trusted God. What can we learn and apply from this chapter? The church is God's plan to advance the gospel, as we make Jesus known and live out the Kingdom of God here in our time. Are there areas of need that you can fulfill? If you see an area lacking in the church, it may be God is calling you to step into that area. It may not be easy, it may not seem like you have time. Then again, it wasn't easy or convenient for Deborah. Close out your time by praying and asking God to show you where your gifts are needed. Talk to a community group leader, pastor, or fill out a connect card to take a next step!

June 24-30

SHE CANNOT HELP BUT SING ABOUT WHAT THE LORD HAS DONE

So great was God's deliverance of his people from the hand of their enemy that Deborah and Barak could not help but write a song of praise to the Lord.

Read Judges 5.

The best songs paint pictures and tell stories. Songs are written and sung to be heard. Deborah has to tell her story, she cannot help but sing about what the Lord has done in Israel. "Hear, O kings; give ear, O princes," – she wants the whole world to hear. "Tell of it," (v. 10) – she wants the righteous triumphs of the Lord to be put to music and repeated over and over again. You may not be a musician, or a writer, but we all must be storytellers. You may not have a platform, and you may not even be on social media but God's goodness in our lives is too great to not be proclaimed. If you are a follower of Jesus then you have a story of deliverance that needs to be heard.

Remember! God gave his people lots of object lessons so that they could remember. Stones made into monuments, tassels tied onto shirts, festivals celebrated throughout the year, bread baked without leaven, even Sabbath days spent without work – these were all things God gave his people to remember who he is and what he has done for his people. And these were not just for Israel to remember, but so that God's story could be told.

Parents – what objects do you have around your house that teach your kids about the love of Jesus? Neighbor, how do you celebrate the Lord in a way that would be a testament to those on your street? Follower – have those closest to you heard your story of salvation?

"I will make melody to the Lord, the God of Israel."





Jesus is the greater Deborah – he is the ultimate judge and the conquering warrior. When Jesus came on Christmas day he came as suffering servant. He was born to die. In so doing he conquered, to be sure. He conquered sin and death. There has been much debate about the specifics of the book of Revelation and the return of Jesus but there are a few things that all Bible believers agree on – Jesus is coming back, and when he returns it will not be as a suffering servant, but to reign forever.

JESUS IS THE GREATER DEBORAH – HE IS THE ULTIMATE JUDGE AND THE CONQUERING WARRIOR

Read Revelation 19:11-16. Jesus looks different than last time we saw him, but he is the same – Faithful and True, the Word of God, King of kings and Lord of Lords.

Read Revelation 20:11-21:8.

Jesus is conquering king but he is also righteous judge. His perfect holiness is the standard. Our sinfulness makes us guilty. The punishment for guilt is death. But praise be to Jesus, the lamb who was slain, who paid the penalty for our sin and gives us his holiness. “Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered” (5:5), and voices in heaven sing “for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom of priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth” (5:9-10). “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” (7:10).

Let these be the most encouraging words you hear this series – Jesus is King, he is judge, he has paid the price for your guilt, and not because you deserved it, but because of his great love for you!

June 24-30



In God's great love he is also a God of justice. Justice is a recurring theme in the Psalms. As you read about God's justice in the Psalms be always mindful that to those who trust in him Jesus gives his righteousness. The Judge judges us based on the righteousness of Jesus!

Read Psalm 9

"The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed,
a stronghold in times of trouble.
And those who know your name put their trust in you,
for you, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you."



WEEK 5 / DAY 1 RUTH

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Phil. 2:3-4).

“If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all” (Mark 9:35).

“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

Selflessness, putting others first is the way God created us to live. We often have to fight against ourselves and our sinful self-centeredness to make it happen, but humility is good and right and true. The words of Paul and Jesus we just read sum up our prescription for others-centeredness. Ruth is an excellent picture of this.

Read Ruth 1-2.

Ruth was a foreigner – a Gentile – from Moab. She married into a family from Israel and all the men died. She is still young and is childless. Naomi, Ruth’s mother-in-law, tells her to stay in her country (Moab) and find herself a new husband. Ruth then says the most important words in this short book – “For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God” (1:16). She put her own needs and her own future aside to serve Naomi and Naomi’s God. Ruth is a picture of loyalty and self-sacrifice. God honors her in an amazing way (which we will see tomorrow). Ruth sacrificed it all for the Lord, even her well-being and future, to remain loyal to Naomi and her God.

As we follow Jesus’ example and teaching to love others by serving them, what things keep you from this? Who can you name that God has in your life for you to serve and love? What needs, desires, sins, future aspirations – maybe even good things – are you holding with a clenched fist which may be a barrier to you selflessly giving to others so they may know God?

July 1-7

Redemption = to buy back. Ruth is a story of redemption. In this story Boaz is the redeemer.

Read Ruth 3-4.

Sometimes bad things happen to us – losing a job, losing a loved one, abuse – and sometimes the bad things happen as a result of our sin. Jesus can redeem these things.

In this story something horrible has happened – Ruth’s husband, father-in-law, and brother-in-law have all died. There are a number of things going on in this story from an Old Testament Law perspective. Simply put, there are two things that need to be redeemed. The first is lineage – Ruth’s husband died without any children, as did his

brother, so there was no one left to carry on Elimilech’s lineage. The second is land – with the passing of Elimilech and both his sons someone needed to purchase his land, the land God gave them. Enter Boaz.



of Abraham, and the ancestor of Jesus the Messiah!

Keep following Jesus, one foot in front of the other, even when you cannot see any hint of redemption in sight. He loves you more than you know, and you can trust him even with what you are enduring.

WHEN RUTH FIRST SURRENDERED HER LIFE TO THE LORD SHE COULD NOT SEE ANY WAY THE LORD WOULD REDEEM HER SITUATION

Boaz is not only a close relative who would be able to redeem both of these things, but he is also falling in love with Ruth.

In chapter 4 we see Boaz do all he can to marry Ruth but only after he does what is right. He offers it all to the nearest relative (who wants the land but not Ruth as his wife).

When Ruth first surrendered her life to the Lord she could not see any way the Lord would redeem her situation, but she trusted anyway, and kept on doing what she needed to do – one foot in front of the other, left foot, right foot, simply, obediently walking in faith. In Ruth’s case, God redeemed her in a way she could not have imagined. Ruth, not even an Israelite, whose husband died before she had children, became the grandmother of David – King David – the covenant descendant



Ultimate redemption has been accomplished through Jesus. In Ruth we see God working redemption through Boaz. Boaz bought Ruth back, purchased the land, married her, gave her children. We are also in need of redemption. Our sin is an offense against God – an offense we could never do enough to repay or redeem ourselves.

Read Hebrews 9:11-23.

You may want to read that again. It's heavy.

The redemption seen in Ruth is a picture of Jesus on multiple levels. God sent a redeemer for Ruth (in Bethlehem no less), and continued his promise to Abraham to provide a redeemer for Israel, who would be born in Bethlehem centuries later. Jesus' blood provides, for those who trust in him, "eternal redemption." Jesus "once for all...put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." Jesus paid the price to purchase salvation for his followers, to buy us back from sin, death, and separation. "The wages of sin is death." As a sinner you are in need of a savior, a redeemer. "But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Close out this time by praying thanks to God for his salvation.

***THE REDEMPTION SEEN IN
RUTH IS A PICTURE OF JESUS
ON MULTIPLE LEVELS***

July 1-7

In speaking of God’s Word Eugene Peterson says, “The word that God speaks originates, initiates, shapes, provides, orders, commands, and blesses. God’s word is the creative means by which everything comes into existence.” Because of this, Peterson also says, “God has the first word. Prayer is answering speech; it is not primarily ‘address’ but ‘response.’” When we pray through God’s Word, particularly in the Psalms, we are praying in response to God. We are allowing God’s Word to direct our response.

Read Psalm 130.

This psalm is written from the depths. It is written by someone who has experienced redemption (For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption), yet is also in need of redemption (And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities). That perfectly sums up our experience of trials. We serve a God who has won the victory, yet we cry out when we are in the depths for mercy.





The story of Jonah tells of what might possibly be the greatest movement of salvation in history; in one month an entire city repents. Jonah, God's chosen instrument to turn the city of Nineveh to himself, pouts about it. God uses Jonah to advance his Kingdom in spite of Jonah. Jonah is also an amazing picture of God's grace.

Read Jonah 1-2.

Before we throw Jonah overboard and criticize him as a disobedient coward let's consider his position. What we know about Nineveh is that it is a large city that is extremely evil, and Jonah's task is to travel there and "call out against it," to tell them that they are evil and God is going to destroy them. Surely Jonah is not the only who would have said "no thanks" given this gargantuan, not to mention dangerous, task. But God is going to advance his Kingdom.

Jonah runs the opposite direction, God sends a storm, Jonah confesses to his shipmates and proposes they throw him overboard. It cannot be overstated how ludicrous the next part of the story is.

God shows his great grace to Jonah and his sovereignty in salvation by sending a fish to save Jonah's life and ultimately to lead to the salvation of the great and horrible city of Nineveh.

Jonah praises God for his grace, his deliverance, his salvation – "Salvation belongs to the Lord!" We will see God's grace on an even larger scale tomorrow.

How has God shown his grace in your life? If the gospel says we are deserving of separation from God, yet through Jesus we can have a relationship with him, it is impossible to list all of God's graces in our life. Grace is receiving that which we do not deserve. Today, as an exercise in gratitude and perspective, as you see God's grace in your life thank him for it. It may be as small as the beauty of a butterfly fluttering on your porch, or as great as his giving you new life. Today let us practice thanking God for his grace.

July 8-14

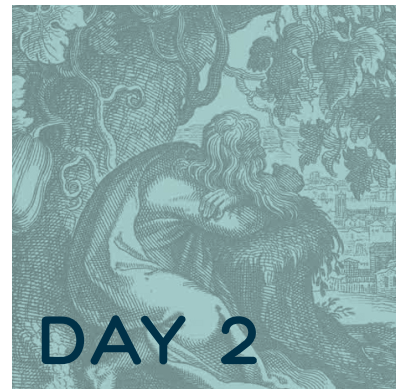
GOD USED JONAH AS HIS INSTRUMENT NOT BECAUSE OF JONAH'S ABILITY

Having learned his lesson, and experienced God's grace, Jonah finally makes it to Nineveh. Perhaps his fear has decreased, knowing that if God sent a fish to rescue him then maybe God would also protect him as he took the message of destruction to this large and violent city.

Read Jonah 3-4.

God pours out his grace on Nineveh. Jonah praised God for the grace and salvation he received in the form of a fish, but he pouts to the point that he wishes he would die because God showed his grace to the city of Nineveh. God used Jonah as his instrument not because of Jonah's ability, not because of his obedience, not because of his eloquence, and certainly not because of his pure heart or good intentions. God used Jonah because God is mighty to save. Jonah had the opportunity to experience the joy of being used by God, but even when he did not God still moved in power not because of Jonah but in spite of Jonah.

God will advance his gospel. His church is his plan to advance his gospel. We have the joy and privilege of being a part of his work of redemption. May we as a church be about the advancement of the gospel because Jesus is worthy of our lives and he is mighty to save.





Every story whispers his name. All of the Old Testament characters we have looked at thus far have pointed to Jesus. We have taken each story and each character and seen that Jesus is the greater _____ . In the case of Jonah, Jesus does it for us.

Read Matthew 12:38-42.

Jesus, the Son of Man, compares his death and burial with Jonah's being swallowed by a fish. He contrasts his current audience's response to the truth with that of Nineveh's. This would have sounded extra harsh to the scribes and Pharisees – that the Gentile, great, and evil Ninevites would “rise up at the judgement with this generation and condemn it.” Jesus' message was simple, and it was the same as Jonah's – “repent” (Mat. 4:17).

Certainly a comparison between Jonah and Jesus is a bad one. There is not much admirable about Jonah in his story. However, Jesus' practice of using Old Testament truths to point to the ultimate truth of his death, burial, and resurrection is one we see all throughout the gospels. In fact, the Old Testament is cited over 80 times in the gospels alone. From the beginning God's loving, gracious plan of salvation included Jesus' death. That's why the Old Testament Scriptures so clearly point to Jesus. And, from the beginning his loving, gracious plan of salvation included you. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved” (Ephesians 1:3-6).

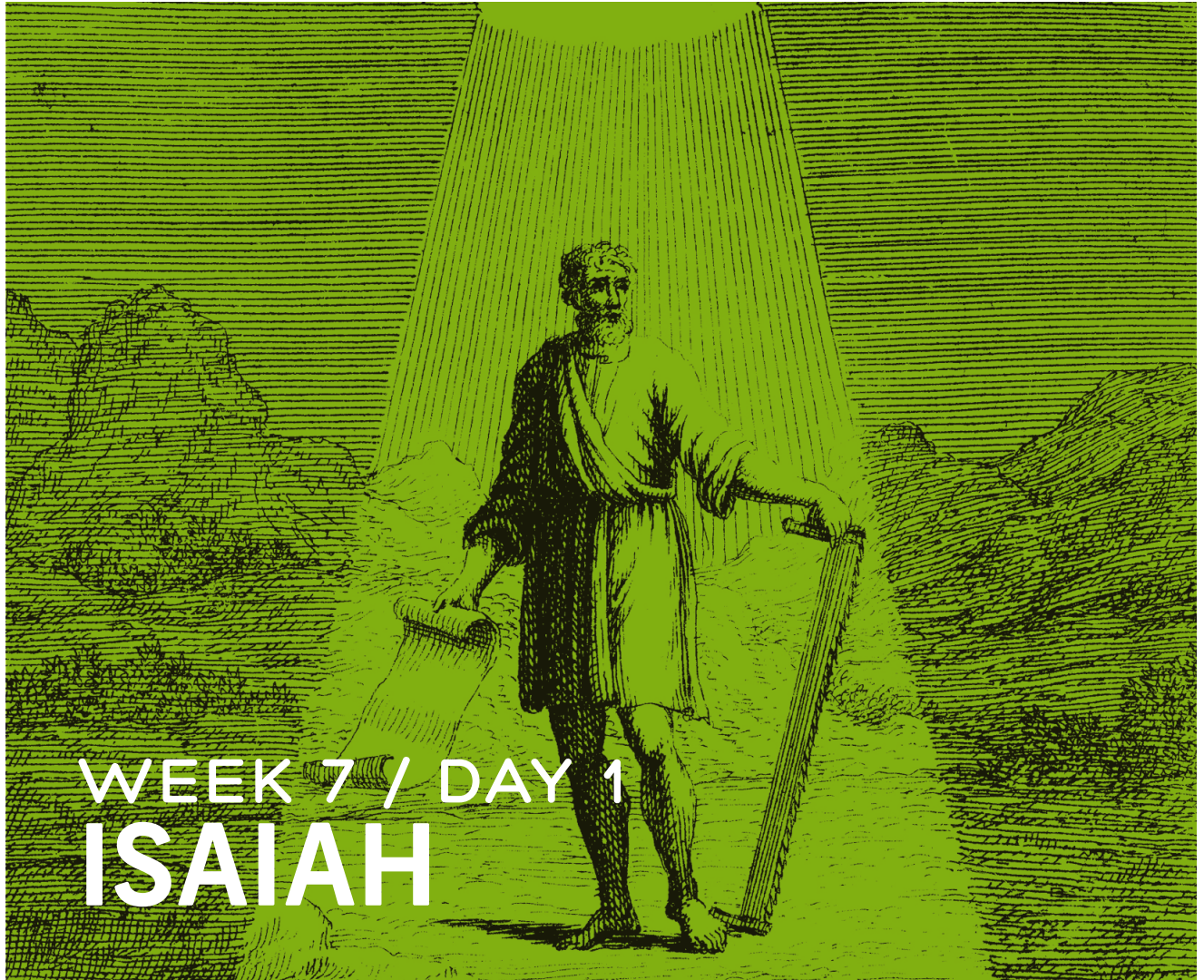
**HE PREDESTINED US
FOR ADOPTION**

While Jonah is claustrophobic in the belly of the great fish he prays a psalm. His psalm is like many others we see in Scripture – emotional, written in desperation, filled with praise.

Read Psalm 30

Many of the psalms sing of deliverance, of being rescued, or “brought up” from a lowly place. Jonah’s does, Psalm 30 does, and undoubtedly your story includes Jesus rescuing you. It is possible that you are currently in a situation from which you need deliverance. Some psalms are written post-deliverance (18, 22, 30, 40, etc.), but many are written in the midst of the pit (6, 7, 70, 71, etc.). Either way God’s promises are true – he will rescue us. As Paul said, so can we also say, “The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen” (2 Timothy 4:18).





WEEK 7 / DAY 1 ISAIAH

Encouragement from a parent, or from a coach can often be impactful. “You can do it!” Not often are people motivated to do something when they are told, “it’s not going to happen.” It is unclear if Jonah knew that the people of Nineveh would repent – he was only told to go and tell them that their sin was going to lead to their destruction. He seems surprised by their repentance, and bothered by God’s mercy.

Isaiah is another prophet – possibly the greatest prophet in the history of Israel. His task is the opposite of Jonah’s. First, Isaiah was sent to God’s people, not to a foreign land. Second, God tells Isaiah what the outcome of his preaching will be – “it’s not going to happen.” God tells Isaiah that Israel is not going to repent. But first God gives Isaiah a beautiful and glorious vision of his own healing.

July 15-21

Read Isaiah 6

Isaiah sees a vision of heaven. His immediate reaction, after seeing the glory of the Lord, is to cry out that he is “lost...a man of unclean lips.” The Lord then takes away his guilt – a beautiful picture of confession and salvation. Then, however, God sends Isaiah on a mission and tells him explicitly that the people to whom he is being sent will not repent as Isaiah did; they will not be healed, they will not understand, they will not see.

In the time of Isaiah the people of Israel struggle in their relationship with God in two different ways. Israel always struggled with worshiping other gods, the gods of their neighbors. They were unfaithful to the Lord, who chose them, saved them, provided for them, and loved them. But even in their relationship with the Lord (and we will look at this more tomorrow), they struggled with being ritualistic. They went through the motions externally because it was what they were supposed to do. They were religious, but only as ceremony, not out of love.

Does this not sound like the context in which God has placed our church?

On the one hand, the Triangle is an area that has deep culturally Christian roots. Many of our neighbors (or even us) claim to be religious and go through the motions because that is what we are supposed to do, that is what our parents did, and that is what Sunday mornings are for. Yet many of our neighbors (or even us) are worshiping everything this world has to offer in front of, or in place of God. Maybe you feel like Jonah and the thought of advancing the gospel to neighbors who are far from God is intimidating. Or maybe you can relate to Isaiah in feeling like they will never see, never hear, never understand the gospel of Jesus Christ. Know this: the truth of Scripture and the truth of God’s love is that Jesus Christ came to save sinners (1 Tim. 1:15).

**WORSHIPING EVERYTHING
THIS WORLD HAS TO OFFER**

Allow this truth, and the beauty of Isaiah 6 to direct your prayers today.

Fasting is a lost art, and understandably so, because eating is not only essential to life but is incredibly enjoyable. So why do we fast, or maybe for those who have never fasted before, why *should* we fast? There is something clarifying about voluntarily abstaining from that which brings you pleasure in order to seek after God. However, this can also be a self-indulging, self-glorifying practice. Jesus had some very clear and very direct words to say about fasting in Matthew 6, “when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites...(b)ut when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father.” Isaiah also has some instructive words about fasting.



Read Isaiah 58.

Isaiah, like Jesus, describes how not to fast. In their fasting they sought their own pleasures, they oppressed those under them, and they quarreled (v. 3-4). The prophet Isaiah then lists for them exactly why and how they should fast:

- to use fasting as an opportunity to bring justice to the hungry, the oppressed, the homeless (v. 6-7)
- for healing (v. 8)
- to cry out the Lord (v. 9)
- for guidance (v. 11)
- to find satisfaction in the Lord instead of food (v. 11)
- for restoration (v. 12)
- to delight in the Lord (v. 14)

WE WANT GOD'S HEART TO BE OUR HEART

In this series we have said that Jesus' church must fight passionately for justice because we want God's heart to be our heart. Our church must also be about recklessly advancing the gospel. Perhaps the Lord wants to use fasting in your life to fight for justice and to advance his gospel. Scripture is clear that God wants to use fasting in our lives to draw us closer to him so that we may find our delight first in him. As with most things in our lives, if we do not plan them they don't happen. Does the Lord have a fasting plan for you? Maybe it's fasting from food one meal a week, or one day a week and that money saved can help "the oppressed go free." Maybe you need to fast from something else in your life that gives you delight so that you can use that time to "take delight in the Lord." Maybe you are seeking direction in your life. Fast and pray. Maybe you are struggling with desiring God? Fast and pray. Maybe the thing that is keeping you from fully experiencing the love of Jesus is relational tension with someone in your life. Make a plan to fast and watch the Lord provide and "healing spring up speedily."

July 15-21



Hopefully you have been encouraged as we have looked every week at the how the Old Testament points toward and is a picture of Jesus. The book of Genesis can only be fully understood in light of Jesus. The law, the Tabernacle, the Temple, the sacrificial system – they only make true sense when seen as a temporary picture which only comes into true focus when we see the big picture of Jesus coming to fulfill that law.

Isaiah is bursting with images and prophecies of Jesus. Written over 600 years before the birth of Jesus, there are times when reading Isaiah feels more like reading one of the gospels. Isaiah 53 sounds like it was written at the foot of the cross. During the season of Advent we read Isaiah right alongside the gospel of Luke. As a church we even used the Servant Songs of Isaiah this past year to frame our Christmas sermons. Isaiah talks to Israel often about their coming deliverance and salvation.

Read Isaiah 52:13–53:12.

There is perhaps nowhere else in Scripture, not even in the New Testament, that speaks so clearly and vividly about the salvation Jesus attained for his people on the cross. “He has borne our griefs, carried our sorrows...he was pierced for our transgressions...crushed for our iniquities...upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed...the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all...stricken for the transgression of my people...his soul makes an offering for guilt... make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities...because he poured out his soul to death...he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.”

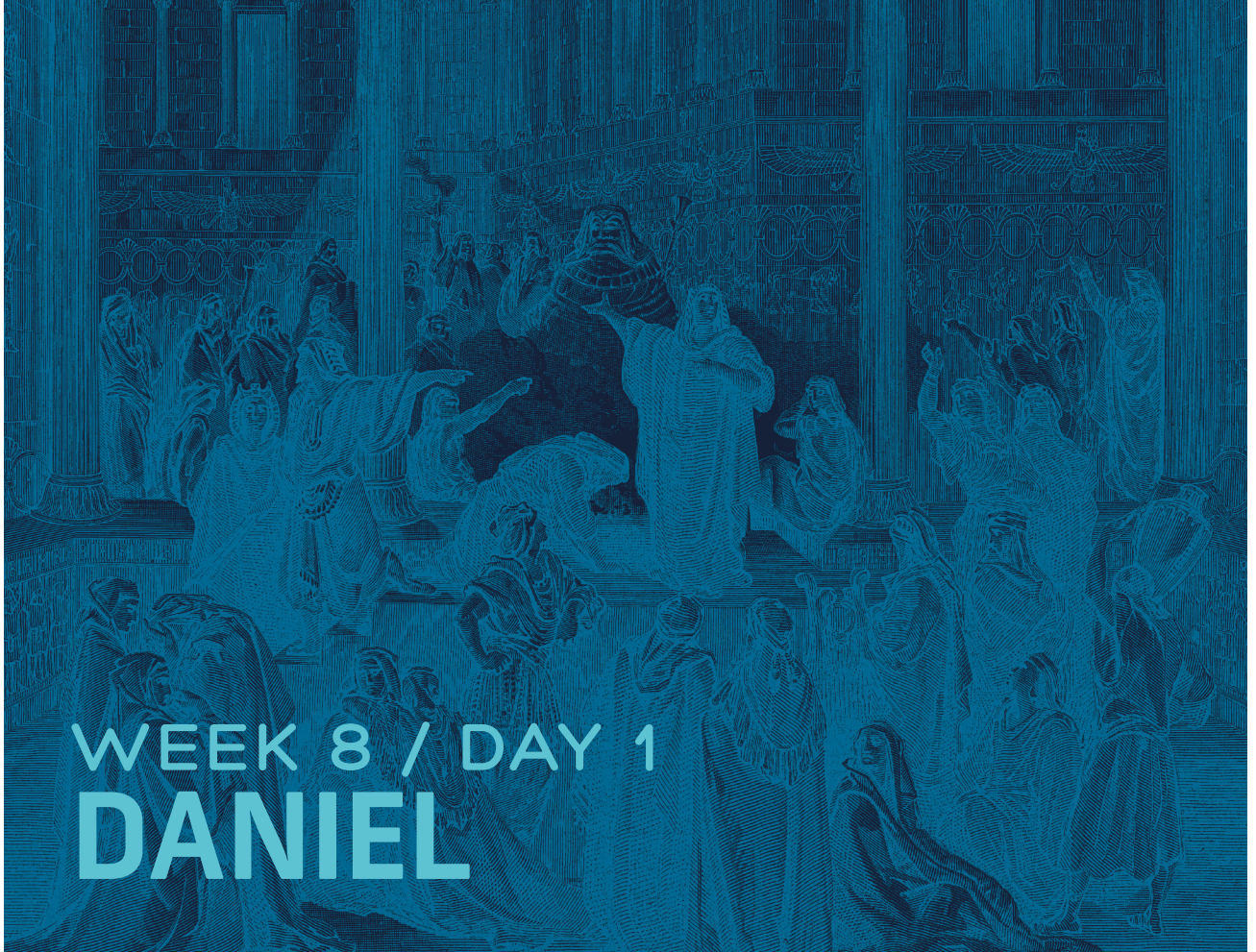
Thanks be to God!



This week we are going to stray from the pattern a bit. Isaiah 40 reads much like a psalm, so instead of reading a psalm from the book of Psalms, we are going to read a psalm from the book of Isaiah. The vision from Isaiah 6 is a perfect outline for most Old Testament prophecy – God is holy, man is sinful, God is redeemer, man must respond. In Isaiah’s prophecy to Israel, much of what he says about their sin leads him to proclaim God’s greatness. Isaiah writes chapter 40 as a series of rhetorical questions and worshipful answers. As you read Isaiah 40 you will undoubtedly hear Isaiah asking these questions of you – Do you not know? Have you not understood? To what will you compare God? Why do you say... my way is hidden from the Lord?

Read Isaiah 40.

As you meditate on these words throughout the day allow them to direct your prayers and your worship of the Lord. For a next level challenge, spend the day memorizing verses 27-31.



Throughout history God's faithful followers have taken different approaches to culture. This is true even of those we have looked at in this series. Culture ("the world") will always present to us a different path than the one God prescribes for his followers. There are those who completely remove themselves from culture – the Israelites in the desert, the monks of the middle ages, the Amish of today. There have been others who have entered into the world and boldly cried against its sin – Jonah, Stephen in Acts 7, Dietrich Bonhoeffer in Nazi Germany. Then there are those who have operated within sinful cultures, living with wisdom and grace, being faithful always to God first, but operating in such a way that those far from God can see a firsthand testimony of someone boldly following the Lord. This is the story of Daniel. He doesn't remove himself from the pagan culture of Babylon, that's not an option as the Israelites have been taken captive. He doesn't boldly cry out against it – he doesn't have that kind of platform. Instead, Daniel and his friends maneuver within culture in such a way that they remain faithful to God first (which clashes with culture to the degree that they are thrown to the fire and to the lions), but ultimately even pagan kings glorify God for Daniel's faithfulness to his God, and for his God's faithfulness to Daniel.

July 22-28

Read Daniel 1.

This can be a definitive statement that we can hold on to as absolute truth: trusting the Lord in obedience will always be better than what the world can offer us.

Daniel and his friends were faced with a dilemma, they could not do what the king commanded and what God commanded at the same time. To obey one would mean disobeying the other. The king's food was defiled, and therefore God's law did not allow Daniel to eat it. But Daniel engaged in the king's program, learned their customs and history and language, and did it better than everyone else. God gave Daniel favor. But this verse cannot be taken as a pattern to apply to our own lives – follow God in obedience and you will be blessed with 10x the results as those who do not trust God. God doesn't work that way. As we have seen in our church's study of the book of Acts, sometimes the Lord delivers his faithful miraculously from prison, and sometimes his faithful are stoned to death. We trust the Lord in obedience because he is always better than what this world can offer us.

God uses Daniel and his friends to advance his Kingdom in a spiritually dark place, but even if the fiery furnace or the lions would have gotten the best of these faithful young men the Lord still would have used them advance his Kingdom. This is where we have to trust that the Lord is good. Allowing culture to come before Jesus will never serve to advance his gospel. What ways are you guilty of following culture before Christ? In what areas do you need to trust God in obedience no matter the worldly consequences? Are there places where you are not standing firm on God's Word because of embarrassment or lack of courage? If this is true of you then spend this next week reading and praying though the first 6 chapters of Daniel. Be challenged by his courage. Be encouraged by God's faithfulness to him.

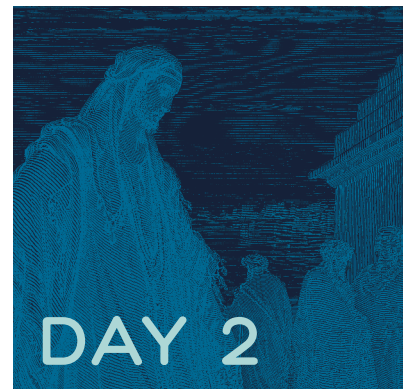
YOU CAN CONFIDENTLY AND COURAGEOUSLY TRUST GOD IN OBEDIENCE, EVEN WHEN IT IS OPPOSITE OF WHAT THIS WORLD DEMANDS.

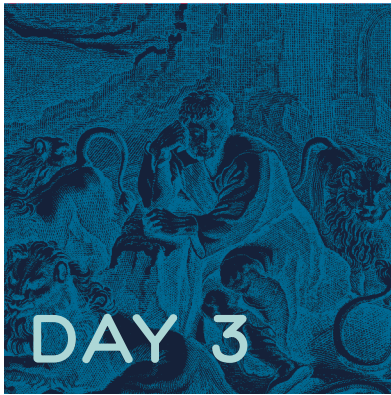
The life of a follower of Jesus must look different than the rest of the world. Jesus' commands are radical; it is impossible to follow Jesus and not be different. When we follow Jesus radically people will take notice. Their reactions will be varied. Some will mock. Being criticized for being blind or even stupid for believing in something so old and obviously not realistic is pretty standard today. Some will be envious or admiring. Most people you know have nothing in their life that they care deeply enough about, outside of their kids and maybe their spouse, for which they would risk anything. Giving your life away to something "larger than yourself" is seen as virtuous in our culture so the reaction to our radically following Jesus can sometimes be admiration. Oftentimes the reaction will be confusion or lack of understanding. Jesus has laid out for his followers a "narrow path", which is completely counter-cultural in the areas of money, relationships, sex, selflessness, time, possessions, marriage, pride, integrity, giving, worship, humility, truth, and love. Many people will observe the life of a follower of Jesus and just not get it.

The reaction to Daniel's radical lifestyle is interesting in these stories. In chapter 1 the chief of the eunuchs was confused by Daniel's decision – why would he abstain from the king's best food? In chapter 3 the king's reaction to the Jews not bowing to the golden image is anger – they were maliciously accused (3:8), and then thrown in the fire. We have also seen kings who have promoted Daniel because of his integrity and because of God's favor on his life. Chapter 4 even records Nebuchadnezzar, the most powerful pagan in the world, praising the Most High God because of what he has seen in Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. In chapter 6 a new king takes over. Daniel was so exceptional that even the new king, as is obvious in this chapter, shows incredible favor to Daniel.

Read Daniel 6.

The reaction of the satraps, or governors, of this chapter to Daniel's bold faithfulness to God is jealousy. The response of King Darius is an obvious deep affection toward Daniel. Every time in the book of Daniel the Lord physically rescues his followers. And every time in the book of Daniel the king ends up, after God's deliverance, praising God and rewarding those who were faithful to God. This is not always the case. History is full of saints who were faithful to God and it cost them their lives. God's deliverance is just as sure in those cases as it was for Daniel in the lion's den. God "has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:13-14). Because of Jesus' redemption we have been delivered. The future is history. Even if your story includes the anger and jealousy of the satraps but never does include the shutting of the lions' mouths or the resulting praise of God by his enemies, know this – you have been delivered! Because you, redeemed of Jesus, have been delivered you can confidently and courageously trust God in obedience, even when it is opposite of what this world demands.





The lions den episode, even down to the details of the seal on the stone, are a picture of Jesus who would come hundreds of years later, to not just deliver himself from death, but to deliver us from death as well! Jesus is the greater Daniel.

Falsely accused...(read Mark 15:1-15)

Condemned to death, buried, placed in a tomb, covered by a stone, sealed...(read Matthew 27:57-66)

Rescued from death...(read Matthew 28:1-10)

Daniel's story points to Jesus, but Jesus died not just because he was falsely accused, he laid down his life for us, and by this we know love (1 John 3:16).

Spend time thanking Jesus for what he suffered and endured on our behalf.



July 22-28

Today's psalm was written by David but sounds like words Daniel could have written. Deliverance is a theme in the story of Daniel and is the theme of this psalm.

Read Psalm 40

Notice that the psalmist has already experienced deliverance, "He drew me up from the pit of destruction...He put a new song in my mouth." Not only has he experienced deliverance but he is now shouting it from the rooftops, "I have told the glad news of deliverance...I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation." The salvation of the Lord is the "new song" in his mouth that he sings to all who will listen. However, the psalmist is obviously still in a situation in which he needs the Lord's deliverance, "Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me! O Lord, make hast to help me!"

This is a very relatable psalm for the follower of Jesus. He has delivered us. We know and have experienced his salvation and rejoice in it. Yet we are continually in need of deliverance – from evil men, from hopeless situations, from ourselves. God is faithful. You know and have experienced his love and faithfulness in your life and that gives you courage for the next time. We say, like Paul, "He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again" (2 Cor. 1:10).

As you meditate on Psalm 40 today allow it to direct your prayers, praising God for lifting you up out of the miry bog, and begging him for his continued deliverance in your life.



The book of Esther has all the elements that make a story great: character development, conflict, greed, jealousy, arc, irony, and as satisfying a resolution as exists in all of literature.

We are only going to look at two chapters in the story but you will surely find joy in reading all ten chapters of this page-turner this week.

The Persian King Ahasuerus (aka Xerxes), dismissed his Queen because she would not show off for him. After a kingdom-wide search a Jewish woman named Esther was chosen to be Queen, though the king did not know she was Jewish because of advice given to her by Mordecai, her elder cousin who raised her. Soon after Esther is chosen, Mordecai discovers a plot to kill the king and makes it known to Esther, and the plot is foiled. Enter the antagonist, Haman. Haman is the king's right hand man, and as is the case with most bad guys in stories where they don't quite have as much power as they would like, he is greedy, narcissistic, and quick to anger. All of the king's servants would bow down to Haman except for one – Mordecai. In Haman's anger, upon discovering that Mordecai was a Jew, he gets the king to agree to a decree that would destroy the Jewish people.

Read Esther 4.

Though it could cost her her life, Esther intercedes for her people.

The faith of both Mordecai and Esther are beautiful in this chapter. Mordecai trusts that even if Esther does not intercede God will provide deliverance. Esther has faith that even if she dies for what she is about to do she still has to do it. Esther is a champion of justice. Esther is a picture of bold intercession. Love for God and his people compels Esther to stand up against oppression and injustice. For us today, Esther is an example to follow. The love of God is for all people, despite social standing, wealth, skill, lineage, culture, skin color, ethnicity, or beliefs. We are all image bearers of God, and as the church we are to live out the Kingdom of God here and now, which means caring for the oppressed, the poor, the marginalized. **What areas of injustice do you see? Where and how will you speak out?**

July 29 - August 4

**MAY WE BE
PEOPLE WHO
HELP OTHERS
SEE GOD'S
GRACE IN THEIR
STORY, AS WE
ALSO SEE HIM
IN OURS.**

Esther went boldly, and found favor with the king. As she was planning her intercession Haman was also planning Mordecai's destruction. He built gallows 75 feet high on which to hang Mordecai. The king, suffering from insomnia, has some history books brought to him and he is reminded of the time Mordecai uncovered a plot against the king. Upon discovering nothing had been done to honor Mordecai, the king orders (who else?) Haman to execute the ceremony honoring Mordecai. Esther has planned a banquet and has Haman invited, along with the king.

Read Esther 7:1-8:8.

Haman is hanged on the very gallows he built to hang Mordecai, what sweet justice. Esther's story is similar to Daniel's and Joseph's in that in her obedience and faithfulness to God she risked everything. Even though the book of Esther does not mention God's name we still see his fingerprints in every chapter if we look for them. The same is true today. God's goodness and grace is everywhere, even for those who don't acknowledge it. He sends the sunshine and rain to the just and also the unjust (Mat. 5:45), but they don't all see it as his grace. May we be people who help others see God's grace in their story, as we also see him in ours.





A priest, in the Old Testament, and even in other religions, is someone who goes to God on behalf of the people. The priests would offer sacrifices on behalf of the people, seeking atonement for their sins. Not just anyone was allowed inside the Tabernacle, or the Temple. The descendants of Aaron, Moses' brother, were given the tasks and responsibilities of the priesthood. Priests interceded for the people.

Esther interceded for her people in a way that prevented an attempt at genocide. Esther's story points to Jesus. Even though not one time in the ten chapters of Esther is the name of God mentioned, Esther is a picture of Jesus.

Read Romans 8:26-39.

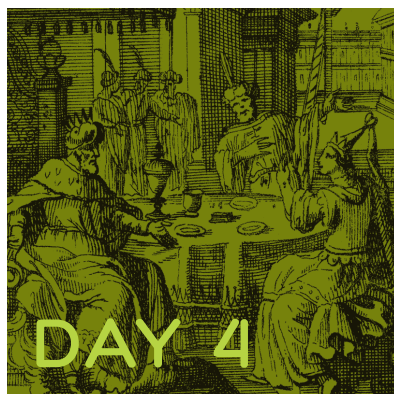
Let this liberating truth wash over you today: there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus because he who was raised from the dead is interceding for you!

He is interceding for you not based on whether or not your case is worth his intercession. Rather, he is interceding for you based on his own payment for your guilt. This is not just theological truth – this theological truth should be life-changing! Live and rejoice in the freedom that this truth brings, and may we advance the gospel knowing that our world is desperate to hear it.

**HE IS INTERCEDING
FOR YOU**

July 29 - August 4

The Psalms were written at a time when Israel had many enemies. We read about those enemies in a majority of the psalms. Our enemies look very different today than they did to David. His enemies were neighboring armies who wanted to destroy him, or his own king who was chasing him because he wanted to kill him. We have a real enemy who “prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8).



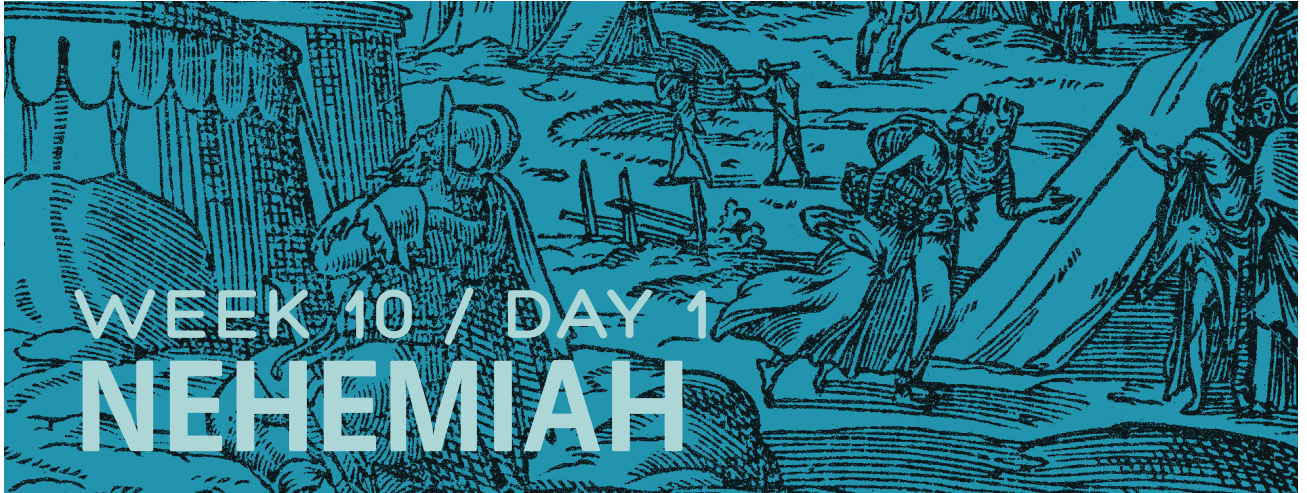
Read Psalm 109.

These are incredibly harsh words for the enemy of the psalmist. They may even be difficult for you to read. But what makes this enemy particularly odious in this psalm is their accusations. Not only do they pursue “the poor and needy and the brokenhearted, to put them to death,” but they have also accused God’s beloved and “speak evil against” his life.

There are multiple words in Scripture used to describe the enemy which reveal both his character and his strategy.

He is called Satan (Job 1:6, Matt. 4:10, and elsewhere) which means adversary. He is called the tempter (Matthew 4:3) which gives insight into his methods. All throughout the New Testament he is called *the devil*, which means slanderer or accuser. His strategy is to slander, to falsely accuse you. He wants you to think incorrectly about yourself. If you are a follower of Jesus you are a child of God (Rom. 8:14), sealed by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13), and loved unconditionally (1 John 4:10). The slanderer wants you to believe less of yourself than this. He also wants to slander you before God. Yesterday we read in Romans 8 that because Jesus has interceded for us and is interceding for us there is no one that can condemn and nothing that can separate us from the love of Christ. Many of us struggle with forgiveness, and for many the most difficult person to forgive is yourself. You have believed the lie of the slanderer. Here is the truth that needs to set you free today: Jesus does not and cannot believe the lie of the accuser. The words of the psalmist need to be your words today:

With my mouth I will give great thanks to the Lord;
I will praise him in the midst of the throng.
For he stands at the right hand of the needy one,
to save him from those who condemn his soul to death.



Paul encourages us in Philippians 2:5 to have the mind of Jesus. A healthy prayer to pray each day is, “Lord, break my heart for what breaks yours.” This was true of Esther. Her heart was crushed for what was going to happen to her people, as was the Lord’s. This is also true of Nehemiah. Nehemiah, like Daniel and Esther, were a part of the exile. Because of Israel’s continually turning from the Lord the Babylonians took them captive for seventy years. Daniel, Esther, and Nehemiah were Jews who served the Lord in a foreign land that was not their own and knew not their God. Nehemiah served one of these foreign kings and heard a report from some of his Jewish brothers about the current situation in Jerusalem.

Read Nehemiah 1:1-2:8.

Having heard that Jerusalem was in ruins and that his people were “in great trouble and shame” Nehemiah could not hide his sadness from the king. God gives Nehemiah incredible favor when he asks the king not only permission to return to his homeland but also for the timber to rebuild the walls, and the king grants his request.

Nehemiah had it good. He was the cupbearer for the king. The king trusted him completely and he had access to all the goodness a palace life had to offer. But the Lord gave Nehemiah a heart that reflected his own. Nehemiah’s heart broke for what also broke the Lord’s heart. The grief that Nehemiah experienced in chapter one was heavy. His heart broke for the trouble and shame of his people. His heart was broken over his own sin. His heart broke for Israel’s collective sin. He mourned their unfaithfulness, but he was hopeful in God’s promises to his people to restore them.

One word that keeps coming up in this series is the word reckless. In this series we have seen multiple examples of people who have been reckless in their pursuit of God – leaving everything and trusting completely in the Lord. We have seen examples in Abraham and Rahab and Esther and now Nehemiah who have sought after God recklessly – knowing that if he didn’t provide they were finished. This is really the heart of Advance 2018 – that our church would pursue Jesus and the advancing of his gospel recklessly – to the point that if God Almighty does not give us mercy and move in power we will be finished. This will only happen if we collectively have a heart that is broken over sin and the spiritual lostness of our city.

Lord Jesus, break our hearts for what breaks your heart. We need your mercy and your power as we recklessly follow you.

August 5-11

HIS DEEDS WERE NOT EMPTY RELIGIOUS SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

One of our DNA points at Vintage Church is that Jesus is worthy of our lives. Jesus cannot be compartmentalized, we need him to pervade every nook and cranny of our lives. Nehemiah exemplifies this.

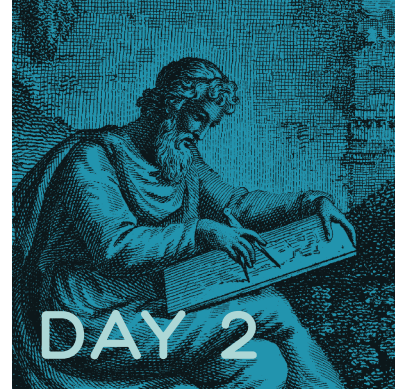
Read Nehemiah 2:9-20.

The task to which the Lord had called Nehemiah was the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem. It was the task to which he was called, and the task for which the Lord provided. In the process he was eventually made governor. Opposition arises. Nehemiah and his people persevere. Injustice is discovered in chapter 5 and Nehemiah the governor fights against the oppression of those who are in debt because they cannot afford food. Nehemiah was singularly focused in serving the Lord and was not to be distracted by opposition or derailed by conflict.

Read Nehemiah 6:15-7:4.

The task of rebuilding the wall was completed. And in the process the opposition was thwarted and even the oppression of the poor was eradicated. Nehemiah was called to a task but even above that task he was called to love and serve the Lord. Jesus wants our obedience, our sacrifice, our service, to be sure, but more than that he wants our hearts. Nehemiah pursued the Lord's heart and it moved him to action. But because his heart was in the right place his deeds were not empty religious self-righteousness. He was working for the Lord, not for self-promotion. The Lord blessed his work because it was the outflow of a heart that was seeking God's glory.

Are there areas where your heart breaks for those suffering injustice, oppression, or poverty? What's keeping that from moving to action? Pray that God stirs your heart not only for passion but to act for change that will reflect his Kingdom.





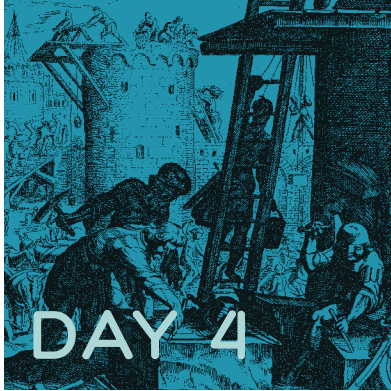
AS WE RECKLESSLY FOLLOW CHRIST WE MUST RECKLESSLY FOLLOW HIS HUMILITY

Jesus is the greater Nehemiah who left everything to pursue God's heart.

Read Philippians 2:1-11.

This is another one of those passages you would do well to commit to memory. Jesus didn't just leave his position as cupbearer to the king, Jesus is the king, who "emptied himself", became a servant, and was "obedient to the point of death." Jesus is the creator (John 1:3) who came to give his life for his created and beloved. Jesus is the king who came to wash the feet of those who would betray and deny him. Jesus is the giver of life who emptied himself and died. We began this week by reading verse 5, "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus." Jesus' "mind" was to become a servant. He told his disciples in John 13:14 after he washed their feet that they ought to wash one another's feet. As we recklessly follow Christ we must recklessly follow his humility. Nehemiah is an excellent picture of this, but Jesus is the perfect picture of humility and servanthood motivated by love. May we spend our lives seeking the mind of Christ in this.

August 5-11



The Psalms often sing about “the righteous.” What a joy it is to read the Psalms knowing that Jesus has given us his own righteousness!

Read Psalm 37.

This is a Psalm about seeking the Lord’s heart. Commit your way to him, trust in him, be still before him, wait patiently for him, fret not, refrain from anger, turn away from evil – these are all prescriptions for seeking God. The best part of this psalm is the circular logic of verse 3. David encourages us to “delight in the Lord”. The result is that he will give us the desires of our heart. If you delight yourself in the Lord he will give you the desires of your heart. If you delight yourself in the Lord then the desire of your heart will be to delight yourself in the Lord. Delight in Jesus and he will give you more of himself. There is no greater object of our delight, there is no greater reward, and there is no greater thing to desire than Jesus himself. If you have gained nothing other than a greater desire for Jesus during this series than you have done well. May our delight be in the Lord, and may he give us more of himself, and may we be a church that advances his gospel out of our delight in him!

