

Week 3: "The Gospel"

Memory Verse: *God Disciplines His Sons*

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Hebrews 12:1-2

Day One

Sunday, November 3, 2002

"The Gospel"

Read: Philemon (p. 1416) and Commentary (p. 1417)

Reflect: The term "gospel" literally means good news. Think of the best news you ever remember receiving. How did you feel and how did it change your circumstances?

Dig: Why would the author of the notes of this Bible choose this one-chapter-book to illustrate "the gospel"? (hint: think of the term "Freedom in Christ" and the emphasis upon a change in character and identity).

Carefully read through Philemon. Notice how the gospel has changed Paul from a man who persecuted Christians to one who became a gentle and powerful leader. What can you learn about Paul's relationships by the way he writes this letter?

List the three effects of the fall the commentary (p. 1417) brings to our attention.

Relate these three to the experience of Philemon and Onesimus.

Apply: Take a few moments to write out in a few paragraphs how the gospel has changed your life. Then pray the prayer that Paul prays in Philemon 6: "I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ." ...and then ponder the meaning of that sentence during the day.

Day Two
Monday, November 4, 2002
"Forgiveness of Sins"

Read: Leviticus 9:1-24 (p. 118) and Commentary (p. 119)

Reflect: When we forgive people, it always involves pain and giving up something. What is one of the most difficult hurts you have had to forgive? What did it cost you to forgive?

Dig: Forgiveness of sins is free to us but very costly to God. How is this truth already evident in the reading from Leviticus?

What does the shedding of blood have to do with forgiveness?

Vss. 7-8 speak of atonement. Look that word up in the dictionary and write out the meaning.

Is the hyphenated form at-one-ment a good short-hand way of explaining this term?

Look up Romans 3:21-26 and answer this question: how exactly is Christ's sacrifice related to the Old Testament sacrificial system?

Apply:: Take a little more time than you usually do confessing your sins one by one (maybe take out a sheet of paper and list them) and then thank God for making himself one with you again through the costly sacrifice of his Son.

Conclude your quiet time with a prayer of thanksgiving for freedom that forgiveness brings.

Day Three
Tuesday, November 5, 2002
"New Life in Christ"

Read: Exodus 16:1-31 (p. 81) and Commentary: (p. 81)

Reflect: Remember a time when you skipped a meal or two. What happened to your physical body? How did you feel?

Why are many Christian daily devotionals called "manna"?

Dig: Follow the teachings of the Bible regarding "bread from heaven."

Read: Deut. 8:1-5 and write down what God was trying to teach them by giving them manna.

Read Matthew 4:1-3 and answer the question: Why would Jesus quote the text he quotes in response to this temptation?

Read John 6: 43-51 and answer this question: how do we "eat" the bread of Jesus?

Why would the church see the communion meal as a fulfillment of John 6?

What effect does this teaching have on your attitude toward the meaning of communion?

Apply: Renew your pledge to "eat" Christ daily in his Word. Choose a way to make today's reading real in your life:

- skip a meal to remember what the Israelites experienced and how precious physical bread is to your body and thus spiritual bread is to your soul.
- Make a meal of just plain bread and water, asking God to reveal himself to you through eating bread.

Remember "humans do not live by bread alone but by every word that comes out of the mouth of the Lord". Use this to fight off temptation today just as Jesus did in his temptations.

Conclude with a prayer thanking Jesus for being your "daily manna" for your life.

Day Four
Wednesday, November 6, 2002
"A New Identity in Christ"

Read: Read: John 1:1-14 (p. 1197) and Commentary (p. 1198)

Reflect: Lack of self-esteem is seen as the cause of almost all difficulties in our culture. Do you agree? What do people seem to get their esteem from? What boosts your self-esteem? How might God's way of giving us esteem be different?

Dig: In the commentary, we read "who we are determines what we do..." Is this biblically true? For an answer, read Romans 6:5-14 (p. 1285).

Read the temptation of Jesus in Matt. 4:3 (p. 1079) and notice what the devil suggests to Jesus regarding his identity. What might this add to your knowledge of spiritual warfare?

Finally, notice also in Matt. 3:17 (p. 1285) what message God gives to Jesus. This is the only time in the gospels (aside from what is called "The Transfiguration" cf. Matt. 17 where the "voice" says essentially the same thing) where we hear the voice of the Father. What does this tell you about how basic this identity as a child of God is?

Apply: Read aloud the "In Christ" affirmations on p. 1199. Choose one of them that the Holy Spirit impresses upon you and write a prayer of thanksgiving based on that identity. Then carry that thought with you through the day to focus your thought life.

Day Five
Thursday, November 7, 2002
"The Defeat of Satan"

Read: I John 3:7-8 (p. 1468) Commentary: (p. 1469)

Reflect: C.S. Lewis begins his little book "The Screwtape Letters" with these words: "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to show an excessive and unhealthy interest in them." Into which side of this error do you tend to fall? If you do say you believe in their existence, how aware are you of their influence?

Dig: Study Genesis 3:14-15 and notice how this text fits so well with the text for today. Theologians answer the question "Why did Christ have to come?" with these three answers:

- to overcome the devil and his power (called the "dramatic theory")
- to be an atoning sacrifice for sins (called the "substitutionary atonement")
- to show us how to live (called the "moral influence theory")

Which one tends to be emphasized in our day and age? Does the first one need more emphasis? (to answer that, check out Jesus' life: his encounter with Satan in Matt 4:1-11, his prayer that he taught his disciples in Matt. 6:12, and his treatment of Peter at one point in Matt. 16:21-13)

Apply: Make a list of the frustrations you are now experiencing in your life which would tempt you to see meaninglessness in your existence. Ask God to change your perspective on your frustrations so that they drive you to him instead of driving you to strive harder.

List ways that Satan destroys your freedom by temptation, doubt, discouragement, despair...

Now, in prayer, thank Jesus for coming to destroy these plans of Satan.