

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies "Essentials"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“Unity in the Church”

Lesson Outlines

January 1

Topic: United in Principle

Texts: 1 Jn. 5:7; Jn. 10:30; 1 Co. 1:13; Jn. 17:11, 20-23; Ga. 3:26-28; 1 Co. 12:12-13; Ep. 4:4-6

Key Verse: 1 Co. 12:13

Main Point: In order to have unity in the church, we must be convinced that our being united is God’s will and that Jesus Christ provides the basis for our unity.

January 8

Topic: United in Spirit

Texts: Ac. 1:4, 8; 2:1-4; 4:31-33; Ep. 4:1-3; 1 Co. 12:25-26; 13:4-8

Key Verse: Ep. 4:3

Main Point: Spiritual unity must be nurtured and cultivated among us in order to experience unity in the church.

January 15

Topic: United in Message

Texts: Ep. 1:10; 4:13-15; Ge. 49:10; Jn. 10:16; 12:32; Am. 3:3; Jude 3-4, 18-19; 1 Ti. 1:3-6; 4:1, 7; 6:3-5; 2 Ti. 1:13; 2:23; 3:14-15; 4:3-4

Key Verse: Ep. 4:13

Main Point: As we preach and proclaim one, united message in Christ, we also establish our unity in the Word and in the church.

January 22

Topic: United under Leadership

Texts: He. 13:7; 1 Pe. 5:1-4; 1 Co. 4:16; 11:1; Ph. 3:17-19; 1 Co. 1:10-13; Ro. 8:14; He. 12:2; Ep. 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Col. 1:18; He. 13:17; Ja. 4:7; 1 Pe. 5:5; 2 Co. 11:28; 1 Ti. 3:1-13; Ph. 3:12

Key Verse: He. 13:7

Main Point: By submitting to our leadership, we keep the church united outwardly, which will help us to move forward in our spiritual conquest.

January 29

Topic: United for Battle

Texts: Re. 12:9, 17; Ep. 6:12; 1 Jn. 4:20; Mt. 10:36; Ro. 12:5; Jn. 17:23; 13:34-35; Judg. 7:21-23; Mt. 12:25; Josh. 10:29, 31, 34, 36, 38, 42-43; Ro. 8:31, 37-39; Is. 54:17

Key Verse: Ep. 6:11

Main Point: In our spiritual conquest, we need to identify our enemy and then unite our efforts against him.

In this month of *Faith-N-Focus*, we consider the importance of unity in the church. When the Lord called Joshua to lead the people in the conquest of Canaan, he said, “Go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people” (Jos. 1:2). They all were required to go and take possession of the land. The conquest required a united effort by the people. Likewise, a successful conquest in the mission of the church requires all of us to do our part in the work of the Lord.

In order to have unity in the church, we must be committed to unity and know that Christ provides the basis for our unity. Therefore, unity is not experienced automatically; it must be nurtured and cultivated among us. Indeed, we will not experience unity without maintaining loving relationships in the church. Also, the unity of the faith is one of our fundamental beliefs in regard to being God’s church. Therefore, as we love one another, and as we embrace and declare one message of Christ to the world, the church advances in unity.

Of course, practically speaking, unity can only work as we are united under leadership. In the church, God has purposefully placed key leaders over us. By submitting to our leadership, we keep the church united outwardly, which will help us to move forward in our spiritual conquest. Finally, the members of the church must be united for battle. We need to identify our enemy and then unite our efforts against him. Through unity in Zion Assembly, we will succeed in our spiritual conquest and fulfill God’s missionary purpose through the church in these last days.



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Adult Bible Studies

"Unity in the Church"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“United in Principle”

An old proverb says, “Two heads are better than one.” However, this only is true if they have unity. As long as people are willing to work together, good success can be attained, for two people committed to one vision can accomplish more than one person. But when they no longer have a sense of agreement, confusion and dysfunction are inevitable. In order to experience ongoing unity in the church, we must be committed to the Biblical principle of unity for God’s people and understand the basis and necessity for our unity.

Key Verse

“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Co. 12:13).

Lesson Summary

The rationale for our unity is found in the unity of the Godhead. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are one (1 Jn. 5:7). Jesus said, “I and my Father are one” (Jn. 10:30). The unity of God himself makes our unity in Christ necessary and attainable. If God and Christ is somehow divided, then our unity with one another is of no consequence (1 Co. 1:13). Nevertheless, Jesus prayed for the unity of all believers on the basis of his oneness with the Father. His oneness with the Father gives impetus and purpose for our oneness in him. With the great commission in mind, Jesus prayed for our oneness, actually making our unity a divine mandate (Jn. 17:20-23). Thus, if we take the mission of the church seriously, then we must also see the necessity for our unity in Christ (Ga. 3:26-28). The apostle Paul emphasized the principle of oneness for all believers, explaining how that by the Spirit we are brought into one body in Christ (1 Co. 12:12-13). In Christ, we all are “made to drink into one Spirit” (v. 13). Thus, every true believer has the capacity to follow Christ into the unity for which he prayed. Of course, the work of the Spirit establishes the principle of unity and serves as the dynamic agent for it. In practice, believers must submit to the work of the Spirit and conform to the will of God in order to experience the unity for which Christ prayed. Again, we see the principle of unity for God’s church in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, where he explained, “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Ep. 4:4-6). This teaching of unity requires that we seek to be one in Christ. If disagreement develops within the church, either individually or corporately, we should be troubled and grieved, realizing we are falling short of God’s will for us. Keeping this focus stresses the necessity for reconciling relationships and resolving differences among brethren.

Scripture Study

The unity of God – 1 Jn. 5:7; Jn. 10:30; 1 Co. 1:13

Jesus’ prayer for unity – Jn. 17:20-23; Ga. 3:26-28

Oneness for the church – 1 Co. 12:12-13; Ep. 4:4-6

Conclusion

In order to have unity in the church, we must be fully convinced and persuaded that our being united is God’s will and that Jesus Christ provides the basis for our unity. His unity with the Father and the Holy Ghost, and his intercession for our unity, form the basis for our unity with one another in Christ. Because Jesus shed the same blood for us all, let us follow after unity in Christ.

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Introduction

“United in Spirit”

What are the basic ingredients of a cake? Of course, a cake has many necessary ingredients, such as, eggs, sugar, and milk; but the one ingredient that sets it apart as an actual cake is “flour.” Some ingredients can be substituted or even omitted in the mixing process and still make a cake of sorts, but a cake without flour simply falls short of being a true cake. Certainly, we would not want to eat it. In regard to unity, what is the single, most essential ingredient?

Key Verse

“Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ep. 4:3).

Lesson Summary

Just because people worship on the same pew and even subscribe to a uniform doctrine does not mean they possess true unity. Merely being members of the church does not equate to true unity within the fellowship of the church. Moreover, professing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior does not guarantee our unity in the church. Believers can maintain an external form of unity yet fail to embrace and experience the unity that the apostles proclaimed (Ep. 4:12-16; 2 Ti. 3:5), and for which Christ prayed (Jn. 17:22). Real unity begins on the basis of spiritual unity, being united **in** the Spirit and **by** the Spirit. In other words, the Holy Ghost unites us together in Christ. He is the spiritual glue that holds us in fellowship with Christ and in fellowship with one another in Christ. As members of the church, not only do we embrace a shared doctrine (Note: see next week’s lesson), but the veracity and dynamic of our fellowship is established by the Spirit indwelling every believer in the church in fullness and power (Note: see last week’s lesson). Before his ascension, Jesus instructed his disciples to “wait for the promise of the Father” (Ac. 1:4). In Acts 2:1-4, the outpouring of the Holy Ghost was the promise that established the spiritual unity of the church at the onset of her mission. In this passage, we note the following phrases: “they were all with one accord in one place” (v. 1); “and it filled all the house where they were sitting” (v. 2); “and it sat upon each of them” (v. 3); and “they were all filled with the Holy Ghost” (v. 4). The initial impact of this outpouring was that they “began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” and they spoke “the wonderful works of God” (vv. 4, 11). The Holy Ghost moved the members of the church in the same direction with the same purpose – toward the goal which Christ gave them (1:8; 4:31-33). When the Holy Ghost manifests his will and power through the members of the church in this way, they flow together in submission to the will of God. The experience of Holy Ghost power in the church sets the tone and pace for our unity. If we fall short of experiencing true unity in the church, this signals a shortage of real Holy Ghost power, for he unites us in the truth, that is, in Jesus Christ, the Word of God (Jn. 15:26; 16:13-14). Therefore, nurturing the unity of the Spirit among us is essential to experiencing spiritual unity in the fellowship of the church (Ep. 4:1-3). Of course, the foundation of this spiritual unity is to love one another (v. 2; 1 Co. 13:4-8). The Holy Ghost is the Spirit of love, for God is love (Ro. 5:5; 1 Jn. 4:8). Where his fervent love is missing, discord and division are inevitable. However, spiritual unity is encouraged and realized when divine love is expressed through mutual care among the members of the church (1 Co. 12:25-26). Such unity brings peace to the house of God.

Scripture Study

Spiritual unity – Ac. 1:4, 8; 2:1-4; 4:31-33

Love and unity – Ep. 4:1-3; 1 Co. 12:25-26; 13:4-8

Conclusion

Unity in the church is not automatic. It must be pursued, preserved, and protected among us. The enemy likes nothing better than sewing discord and division in the house of God. But through the indwelling fervent love of the Spirit, we can work together in peace and harmony.

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Adult Bible Studies

"Unity in the Church"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“United in Message”

What happens when a child asks his mommy for a piece of candy and she says, “No, it will ruin your dinner,” but his father says, “Yes, you can have a treat?” Each parent sends a different message to the child. What problem does their disagreement create for him? Should he have or not have a piece of candy? When a mom and dad disagree, even concerning lesser matters, this eventually causes confusion and breaks down parental authority in the home. In the same way, if members of the church fail to find agreement in the Word of God, it undermines the witness and authority of the church in the world.

Key Verse

“Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ep. 4:13).

Lesson Summary

One of the goals of the church is the unity of the faith – all believers coming together into the fullness of Christ and his Word (Ep. 4:13; 1:10). Certainly, Jesus Christ constitutes our unity (Ge. 49:10; Jn. 10:16; 12:32). But Christ is much more than a name and a motto. He is more than the rallying point and joint interest of believers. Indeed, he is the eternal Word revealed to us more fully in the written Word of God, the Holy Scriptures. Thus, knowing Jesus Christ is inseparably connected to knowing the Bible, the infallible, inerrant Word of God. As such, our unity in the Scriptures is imperative to our unity in the church. In Ephesians 4:13-15, the apostle Paul explained the unity of the faith in terms of: our knowledge of Christ (v. 13), the sound doctrine we embrace (v. 14), and the truth we speak (v. 15). Through our agreement to walk together in the knowledge, doctrine, and truth of God’s Word, our unity is established in the church (Am. 3:3). Zion Assembly believes in one Word of God. We follow only one Jesus and embrace only one Truth for all of God’s people. As we preach and proclaim one, united message in Christ, we also establish our unity in the Word and the unity of the church. As faithful saints, we should guard against division. Divisions will creep into the church anytime members turn away from the faith and begin to propagate their own beliefs, ideas, and agendas within the church (Jude 3-4, 18-19). The church, as with any other government, necessarily has a system of order. Indeed, the church especially has a God-given order. However, instead of working within the system of government which God has established for his people, a divisive spirit, openly and secretly, refuses to cooperate with the government of the church and conform to its established doctrine and practices (Jude 8; 2 Pe. 2:10). Sometimes, rather than leaving the fellowship of the church, people under the influence of this spirit subtly remain within the church as a disruptive voice. Sadly, if members seek to undermine the Biblical teachings and established doctrines and practices of the church, such confusion will lead to open discord and, no doubt, broken fellowship in the body of Christ (1 Ti. 1:3-6; 4:1, 7; 6:3-5; 2 Ti. 1:13; 2:23; 3:14-15; 4:3-4).

Scripture Study

One Message – Ep. 1:10; 4:13-15; Ge. 49:10; Jn. 10:16; 12:32; Am. 3:3

Division – Jude 3-4, 18-19; 1 Ti. 1:3-6; 4:1, 7; 6:3-5; 2 Ti. 1:13; 2:23; 3:14-15; 4:3-4

Conclusion

The members of Zion Assembly have committed themselves “to walk together as one body in the light of the gospel” (*Abstract of Faith*, p. 1). The unity of the faith is one of our fundamental beliefs in regard to being God’s church. As we embrace and declare one message of Christ to the world, the church advances in unity.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Unity in the Church"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“United under Leadership”

Children love to play games. They actually learn through play. Amazingly, some of those “childish” games contain profound truths. For example, “Follow the Leader” requires all of the children to mimic the movements and actions of the first child, the leader. If he runs and jumps, then each child successively runs and jumps behind him. Children have fun playing this game: they love to do what their leader does. However, as adults, people often neglect this pattern and the invaluable lesson of following leadership. In today’s lesson, we will see the importance of being united under leadership in the church.

Key Verse

“Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation” (He. 13:7).

Lesson Summary

God has placed gifted leaders in the church to govern and to have the oversight of his people (He. 13:7). They have the responsibility to lead us by their example (1 Pe. 5:1-4). However, we should remember that we are not following mere flesh and blood, but rather spiritual leadership, that of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (1 Co. 1:10-13; Ro. 8:14). For this reason, we should follow leaders whose lives demonstrate and proclaim Christ’s moral virtues and principles (1 Co. 4:16; 11:1; Ph. 3:17-19). Nevertheless, while we should honor and respect church leaders, we should guard against excessive emphasis on the undershepherds of the church, particularly at the expense of “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith” (He. 12:2; see also Ep. 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Col. 1:18). Often, one’s inability to follow church leaders is not the result of moral failure or false doctrine on their part, but rather a matter of one’s personal expectations and misgivings regarding leadership. Certainly, following church leaders not only requires a spiritual and capable leadership, but also a spiritual and submissive membership (He. 13:17; Ja. 4:7; 1 Pe. 5:5). Church leaders bear a tremendous load because they carry the weight of responsibility for the care of the churches and God’s people (2 Co. 11:28; 1 Ti. 3:5; He. 13:17). Though we have high expectations of church leadership (1 Ti. 3:1-13), for leaders are pacesetters for the entire church, we should not expect of them infallibility – for only Jesus is infallible. As the apostle Paul taught, bishops must be “blameless” (v. 2). But this requirement does not equate to infallibility, nor does it justify undue criticism. Even Jesus, our standard of moral and spiritual perfection, was unjustly criticized. In all honesty, at times, human leadership will actually fail to live up to individual expectations. They will even fall short of attaining to the spiritual perfections of Christ, or at least, from one’s point of view. Thus, as we follow human instruments being yet perfected and completed by the Word and Spirit (Ph. 3:12), let us keep our focus continually on Jesus Christ, the head of the church, and his perfections, as well as the goal of perfect unity for all believers (Jn. 17:23).

Scripture Study

Following godly leadership – He. 13:7; 1 Pe. 5:1-4; 1 Co. 4:16; 11:1; Ph. 3:17-19

Following Christ’s leadership – 1 Co. 1:10-13; Ro. 8:14; He. 12:2; Ep. 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Col. 1:18

Submitting to church leadership – He. 13:17; Ja. 4:7; 1 Pe. 5:5; 2 Co. 11:28; 1 Ti. 3:1-13; Ph. 3:12

Conclusion

By submitting to our leadership, we will keep the church united outwardly, which will help us to move forward in our spiritual conquest. When we work together as one, following the faith of our leaders, we will experience greater success in our mission and greater growth in the church.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Unity in the Church"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“United for Battle”

When soldiers go into battle, they need to recognize their enemy. Each soldier on the battlefield must be able to identify his opponent, if he is to overcome his enemy and emerge victorious. In a war, a certain number of casualties may result from “friendly fire” – soldiers accidentally wounding their fellow soldiers because they mistake friends for foes. In our spiritual conquest, we need to distinguish our enemy and then unite our efforts against him.

Key Verse

“Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Ep. 6:11).

Lesson Summary

Satan is the archenemy of Christ and his church (Re. 12:9, 17; Ge. 3:1; Ep. 6:11). Our enemy is not flesh and blood, but principalities and powers of darkness. As saints of God, our fight is never with one another. “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ep. 6:12). Turning a fellow brother or sister into one’s enemy is a trick of the devil and a mockery of God’s love (1 Jn. 4:20). As Jesus taught, we should expect opposition from sinners, even within our own families, but we should never look at one another as enemies within the fellowship of the church (Mt. 10:36). Indeed, the opposition of the world should move us closer together. Even though our natural brothers and sisters may turn against us, brothers and sisters in the Lord should always support and uphold one another in the faith. As “members one of another,” we are allies in the fight against the devil (Ro. 12:5). If Satan can incite members of the church to internal conflict one with another, then he has succeeded in overturning our mission and purpose (Jn. 17:23; 13:34-35). Internal conflict is the precursor to spiritual death and destruction, individually or corporately. A confused foe is defenseless against attack. When Gideon led his three hundred soldiers into battle against the Midianites, “all the host ran, and cried, and fled” before them (Judg. 7:21). What happened? “And the three hundred blew the trumpets, **and the Lord set every man’s sword against his fellow**, even throughout all the host: and the host fled . . . And the men of Israel gathered themselves together . . . and pursued after the Midianites” (Judg. 7:22-23). When God sent confusion among their enemies and they began fighting among themselves, victory for Israel was certain. A confused army cannot win. Therefore, as saints of God, we must remain united in the battle against evil. God’s church will be triumphant, but only if we prevent Satan from sewing discord and division among us, for our victory in the conquest depends on our unity. We must be united for battle. Jesus explained that a house divided cannot stand (Mt. 12:25). On the other hand, when the church is united for battle against the powers of darkness, she is unstoppable in her advance (Josh. 10:29, 31, 34, 36, 38, 42-43 — “all Israel with him”).

Scripture Study

Knowing the enemy – Re. 12:9, 17; Ep. 6:11-12; 1 Jn. 4:20; Mt. 10:36; Ro. 12:5

Uniting against the enemy – Jn. 17:23; 13:34-35; Judg. 7:21-23; Mt. 12:25; Josh. 10:29, 31, 34, 36, 38, 42-43

Conclusion

“If God be for us, who can be against us” (Ro. 8:31)? Although much opposition comes against us, nothing the enemy devises can defeat us (Is. 54:17). As we recognize the enemy and stand united in God’s love and truth against him, the church has the promise of victory in Jesus (Ro. 8:37-39).

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies "Essentials"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“God’s Increase”

Lesson Outlines

February 5

Topic: *Who Then Are We?*

Texts: 1 Co. 3:5-7; 1 Co. 12:4-12; Ro. 12:4-8; Lu. 24:49; Jn. 14:16; 16:7; Mt. 16:18; Ac. 1:8; Col. 1:29; Ep. 3:20; Jn. 15:5; Lu. 10:17-20; Re. 4:11

Key Verse: 1 Co. 3:6

Main Point: We are laborers in God’s harvest field, reaping his increase, not our own.

February 12

Topic: *Laboring Effectively*

Texts: 1 Co. 3:8-9; Ro. 12:4-5; Ep. 4:25; 1 Co. 12:20; Ro. 6:12-13; 8:5-8; He. 13:20-21; De. 20:1-4; Ga. 6:7-9

Key Verse: 1 Co. 3:9

Main Point: As all of us work together for the Lord in obedience to his Word, we will succeed in the mission of the church.

February 19

Topic: *Building on the Right Foundation*

Texts: 1 Co. 3:9-11; He. 11:10; Ep. 2:20; Ac. 20:17-32; Mt. 7:24-25

Key Verse: 1 Co. 3:11

Main Point: To build the church of God, we must build on the right foundation – Jesus Christ and his Word.

February 26

Topic: *The Fullness of God’s Increase*

Texts: 2 K. 4:1-7; Ps. 34:15-19; 1 Co. 1:26-29; 2 Co. 12:9-10; Mt. 5:6; Ja. 2:22; He. 11:4-8

Key Verse: 2 K. 4:3

Main Point: Through faith and obedience, God fills our multiplied emptiness with his great increase.

In this month of Faith-N-Focus, we will study basic principles of God’s increase, based on the apostle Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 3:5-11. What part do we play in building the church? How do we perceive ourselves in this illustrious task? We are servants in the house of the Lord, faithfully carrying out our responsibilities. We are laborers in God’s harvest field, reaping his increase, not our own.

How do we labor effectively? Of course, it requires teamwork – all of us working together. Also, we must work with God, not against him. As all of us work together for the Lord in obedience to his Word, we will succeed in the mission of the church. Therefore, let us be faithful in our labors.

To build the church, we must build on the right foundation. The foundation of the church was laid by the apostles; that foundation is Jesus Christ, the “chief corner stone” (Ep. 2:20). Today, we must continue to build the church in agreement with the foundation. To build anything which is inconsistent with Jesus Christ on the apostle’s doctrine is to build something other than God’s church.

In the final lesson, we will turn to the account of Elisha and the widow in 2 Kings 4:1-7, a story of miraculous provision. In desperation, the widow cried out for help. Through her faith and obedience, God filled her multiplied emptiness with his great increase. Her experience serves as a pattern for God’s increase in the church today. No matter how severe and challenging our circumstances may be, let us believe and obey the Lord, expecting to see his increase in the church.



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Adult Bible Studies

"God's Increase"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“Who Then Are We?”

Introduction

The church of God does not belong to men. It is God's church, his house, and Christ is the head. Individuals make a grave error when they misappropriate ownership of the church to themselves simply because they have labored and sacrificed to build it. Such thinking is fleshly and unspiritual, for even the increase from our labors and sacrifice belongs to God. Since God gives the increase, then it is indeed his increase, not our own. In today's lesson, we will study this first principle in “Who Then Are We?”

Key Verse

“I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase” (1 Co. 3:6).

Lesson Summary

In 1 Corinthians 3:5, the apostle Paul asked the question: “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?” Of course, Paul's audience knew him well. He was an apostle of Jesus Christ and a missionary sent to the Gentiles (Ac. 9:15-16; 1 Co. 1:1; 2 Co. 1:1; Ac. 18:1-6; Ga. 2:7-9). As a key leader in the church, his ministry was essential to its growth and advancement. Nevertheless, he stressed that the church is greater than Paul, Apollos, or any other minister. As members of the church, we are all ministers, fulfilling our individual call, serving in the house of God, and doing our part in Christ's mission. In fact, we minister as God provides us with the ability, enablement, and opportunity to serve him (1 Co. 3:5; 1 Co. 12:4-12; Ro. 12:4-8). We see this point emphasized when Jesus promised to pour out his Spirit in the church. “And behold, **I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye** in the city of Jerusalem, **until ye be endued with power from on high**” (Lu. 24:49). Christ sent the Holy Ghost not as an option but a necessity for the church (Jn. 16:7). In other words, we require the Spirit's help and empowerment to fulfill Christ's mission (Jn. 14:16). Because building the church is the handiwork of Christ himself, we cannot accomplish this work apart from his divine enablement (Mt. 16:18; Ac. 1:8). Moreover, success in our spiritual conquest depends on God's working in and through our efforts (1 Co. 3:6). He prospers and blesses, as we serve and work by his divine enablement (Col. 1:29; Ep. 3:20). Thus, the increase truly comes from God, not from us (v. 7). Our efforts pale in comparison to the mighty works of God. Jesus said, “I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing” (Jn. 15:5). Therefore, when the Lord uses us to bring forth his increase, we should keep a humble spirit, and credit it to the glory, honor, and power of God (Lu. 10:17-20; Re. 4:11).

Scripture Study

We minister as God provides – 1 Co. 3:5-6; 1 Co. 12:4-12; Ro. 12:4-8; Lu. 24:49; Jn. 14:16; 16:7; Mt. 16:18; Ac. 1:8
 God blesses as we minister – 1 Co. 3:6-7; Col. 1:29; Ep. 3:20; Jn. 15:5; Lu. 10:17-20; Re. 4:11

Conclusion

“Who then are we?” We are servants in the house of the Lord, faithfully carrying out our responsibilities. We are laborers in God's harvest, simply doing our job. Some of us plant the seeds, others add water, and still others contribute in various ways, but all of us labor in the fields according to the call of God and his enablement. Although we may appropriately express special recognition and appreciation for outstanding service to the church, valuing any one laborer above the others is too close to the sin of showing “respect to persons” (Ja. 2:9). We want to make sure always the Lord is glorified in all things. In the church, we value every member and every contribution that is made toward the overall success of our mission – to God be the glory (1 Co. 12:18-26; 1 Co. 1:31)!

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Adult Bible Studies

"God's Increase"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“Laboring Effectively”

Introduction

Have you ever worked hard and given your all, yet seemingly accomplished little? Nobody enjoys wasting his time and efforts. Indeed, laboring without results leads to frustration and discouragement. However, when we labor and then reap good results, we experience the satisfaction and pleasure of a job well-done. In today's lesson, we will examine how to labor more effectively for good results.

Key Verse

“For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building” (1 Co. 3:9).

Lesson Summary

To be more effective in our mission, we must be “labourers together” (1 Co. 3:9). Teamwork is productive and efficient. When everyone works together, great strides can be achieved in the church's mission. Indeed, in the church, we are a team – “members one of another” (Ro. 12:5; Ep. 4:25). Although we are many, we nevertheless are one (1 Co. 12:20; Ro. 12:4). On a team, individual members have assigned jobs with specific responsibilities. Take baseball, for example. Baseball requires nine players: a pitcher, a catcher, players at first, second, third base, shortstop, and three outfielders. Each one has a unique function. Imagine a team where the outfielders try to act like the catcher, or the third baseman performs like the pitcher. This kind of team is dysfunctional. Instead, each player must fulfill his personal responsibilities and not attempt to function as another player on the team. Of course, on any team, players will help and assist one another. After all, this is what it means to be a team. Nevertheless, laboring together never suggests doing each other's job or attempting to take over one another's responsibilities, because “every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour” (1 Co. 3:8). On any successful team, each player must know what is expected of him or her, and each one should strive to fulfill his own responsibilities, without interrupting and interfering with another's work. Because none of us can accomplish the mission of the church single-handedly, we should support and strengthen one another, working together for the glory of God. Certainly, we need each other's help, and most of all, we need God's help: “For we are labourers . . . with God” (1 Co. 3:9). However, laboring with God means we labor for God, rather than God laboring for us. In other words, we do not set the pace for God, and then he works with us. Instead, God sets the pace for us, and we labor with him. In this way, God also labors with us, even as we labor with him and for him in obedience to his Word. The only way to be effective in our mission is to work with God, not against him. To have God's favor as we labor, we must cooperate with his will, doing those things that please him according to his Word (Ro. 6:12-13; 8:5-8). Only then can we be sure that God is working with us and through us (He. 13:20-21).

Scripture Study

Laboring together – 1 Co. 3:8-9; Ro. 12:4-5; Ep. 4:25; 1 Co. 12:20

Laboring with God – 1 Co. 3:9; Ro. 6:12-13; 8:5-8; He. 13:20-21

Conclusion

As members of God's church, we are teammates. As all of us work together with the Lord in obedience to his Word, we will succeed in the mission of the church. Victory in the spiritual conquest is ours, if we do not become “weary in well-doing” and faint in heart (Ga. 6:9; De. 20:1-4). We will reap if we faithfully continue to labor together with God (Ga. 6:7-9).

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"God's Increase"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“Building on the Right Foundation”

Introduction

If a building is constructed on a faulty or insufficient foundation, it will be unstable and eventually collapse. For example, the building may develop severe cracks, the floors may bow, or the walls may lean. On the exact day that a homebuyer was preparing to go to the bank and complete the purchase of a new house, he was counseled not to buy it. Why? Before the closing, the buyer decided to have a general contractor inspect the house. The building looked good on the outside and on the inside. But what was beneath the floor was unstable. For a house to stand firm, it must be built on the right foundation.

Key Verse

“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Co. 3:11).

Lesson Summary

In Corinthians 3:5-11, the apostle Paul uses the imagery of “God’s husbandry” – his garden or vineyard. Paul explained that God is growing his church through the efforts and labors of his ministers, as they plant and water God’s field (vv. 5-9). Paul was telling the church, “You are what God is growing.” Then he said, “Ye are God’s building” (v. 9). Again, he was saying to them, “You are what God is building – his special building project” (He. 11:10). Paul declared that the church must be built on the right foundation (vv. 9-11). When writing to the saints at Ephesus, he explained how they were “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone” (Ep. 2:20). When Paul met with the elders at Ephesus, he warned them about “grievous wolves” entering the church, and reminded them that the church was purchased with Christ’s own blood (Ac. 20:28-29). The very foundation of the church is Jesus Christ himself (1 Co. 3:11). This foundation will never be changed. Therefore, Jesus Christ will forever be the “chief corner stone” of God’s house. Paul referred to himself as “a wise masterbuilder,” indicating that what he laid was indeed the right foundation for the church (1 Co. 3:10; Mt. 7:24-25). In other words, he did not make a mistake in his labors, but faithfully carried out his commission to establish God’s church (Ac. 20:17-27). As an apostle, he had the great responsibility and privilege of laying the foundation of the New Testament church. Paul laid the foundation in agreement with Jesus Christ, the chief corner stone. The apostles laid the foundation of the church in Christ, and, since then, many saints and ministers have built on the foundation that they laid. Today, we must continue to build the church in agreement with the Biblical foundation, for some will depart from the faith and try to lead us astray (Ac. 20:30-31). That foundation is preserved for us in the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures, particularly in the light of the New Testament. Through the Holy Ghost revealing the same foundation of Christ to us today, we too can build on the right foundation (v. 32).

Scripture Study

Jesus Christ, the chief corner stone – 1 Co. 3:9, 11; He. 11:10; Ep. 2:20; Ac. 20:28-29

Building on Christ – 1 Co. 3:10; Mt. 7:24-25; Ac. 20:17-27, 30-32

Conclusion

To build anything which is inconsistent with Jesus Christ on the apostle’s doctrine is to build something other than God’s church. Paul’s admonition to the church at Corinth still holds true today: “But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon” (1 Co. 3:10). To build the church of God, we must build on the right foundation – Jesus Christ and his Word. As we do, we will reap God’s increase.

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"God's Increase"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction “The Fullness of God’s Increase”

Today’s lesson is the story of Elisha and the widow – a story of miraculous provision. Finding herself overwhelmed by impoverished circumstances, this poor woman was blessed when God gave her an increase through the ministry of Elisha. Let us consider some of the particular points through which God gave his increase, as a pattern for his increase in the church today.

Key Verse

“Then he said, Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbors, even empty vessels; borrow not a few” (2 K. 4:3).

Lesson Summary

“Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the Lord: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen” (2 K. 4:1). The cry of this woman was crucially important to the unfolding of the story. Crying out was the turning point in her situation. Until she cried, nothing changed. The Lord always sees our circumstances – he hears the cry of the righteous (Ps. 34:15-19). Indeed, crying for God’s help is never in vain. Because of the debt she incurred through the death of her husband, the creditor intended to take her two sons as payment for her debt. The widow felt desperate. She had lost her husband, but now losing her two sons also was more than she could bear. When she cried to Elisha to intervene, he asked, “What shall I do for thee? tell me, what hast thou in the house” (1 K. 4:2)? Perhaps, she owned something that could pay her debt. However, her desperation was even more evident when she replied, “Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house, save a pot of oil” (v. 2). Fortunately, God is not limited by our limitations. Our pitiful circumstances and weaknesses do not prevent God from working in us, through us, and for us (1 Co. 1:26-29). In fact, our desperate needs create opportunities for God to manifest his presence and power in our lives (2 Co. 12:9-10). Elisha said, “Go, borrow thee . . . empty vessels.” Imagine a poor widow with one pot of oil surrounded by numerous empty vessels. What was God doing? How could empty vessels benefit the widow? Nevertheless, she clearly had faith in the Word of God. She did exactly what the prophet instructed her to do. He told her to borrow many empty vessels. Thereby, the Lord initially multiplied the widow’s emptiness through adding many empty vessels to her. Now she had not only a meager pot of oil, but a collection of emptiness surrounding her. Through increasing her emptiness, God demonstrated his fullness. After all, what is an empty vessel to the Lord, but a vessel needing to be filled? The depth of our emptiness opens the door for the fullness of God’s increase in our lives. He satisfies our hunger and thirst (Mt. 5:6). This is the blessedness of emptiness. Finally, the widow “went from him, and shut the door upon her and upon her sons, who brought the vessels to her; and she poured out” (v. 5). The Lord blesses our faith and obedience to his Word. The example of this story supports this important principle: as we exercise faith in the Word of God and take right action based on our faith in his Word, we experience God’s increase and blessings in our lives (Ja. 2:22). The Lord will do just what he says he will do. By faith, she borrowed vessels. By faith, she shut the door and began to pour the oil into the empty vessels. In her obedience to the Word of the Lord, she received God’s great increase. Every empty vessel was filled (v. 6).

Scripture Study

Crying out – 2 K. 4:1; Ps. 34:15-19

Desperate opportunities – 2 K. 4:2; 1 Co. 1:26-29; 2 Co. 12:9-10

The blessedness of emptiness – 2 K. 4:3; Mt. 5:6

Believing and Obeying – 2 K. 4:4-7; Ja. 2:22; He. 11:4-8

Conclusion

“Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay the debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest” (v. 7). When we cry out and turn to the Lord for help, he will fill our multiplied emptiness with his great increase, even as we obey his Word in faith, knowing that he will not fail us, for he is our sufficiency. No matter how severe and challenging our circumstances may be, let us believe and obey the Lord, expecting to see his increase in the church.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

“Essentials”

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“A Successful Conquest”

Lesson Outlines

March 5

Topic: Strength and Courage

Texts: Jos. 1:5-7; 10:8-16, 22-25; Mt. 7:13-14; Pr. 4:1-27; 1 Sa. 13:13-14; 16:7; 17:45-47; Ac. 13:22

Key Verse: Jos. 1:7

Main Point: We must be strong and courageous in the Lord and his Word in order to succeed in our spiritual conquest.

March 12

Topic: Arise, Shine

Texts: Is. 60:1-5; 1 Pe. 2:9; Ep. 5:27; Mt. 28:18-20; Jn. 10:14, 16, 27; Ep. 1:10; Jn. 17:6-8; Ac. 2:42; 2 Ti. 3:14; Ac. 4:17-20; 1 Jn. 1:1-3; Ep. 5:14

Key Verse: Is. 60:1

Main Point: As God’s church, we must wake up and take upon ourselves the awesome responsibilities of being his peculiar people.

March 19

Topic: The Priority of God’s Word

Texts: Jos. 1:8-9; Mt. 28:20; 2 Ti. 1:7; Is. 41:10; De. 6:1-12; Pr. 2:1-5; 1:7; 2:6; 9:10; Ps. 1:2; 119:9-16, 97; Jn. 16:13; 1 Co. 2:13; Ja. 1:21-22, 25; Col. 1:21-23

Key Verse: Jos. 1:8

Main Point: Success in our spiritual conquest depends on the priority of God’s Word in the church.

March 26

Topic: Choosing Our Destination

Texts: Jos. 23:11-16; 24:1-2, 14-25

Key Verse: Jos. 24:15

Main Point: Our continued success as Christians, and as God’s church, depends on our continually choosing Christ and obeying God’s Word above the world and its pleasures.

In this month of *Faith-N-Focus*, we conclude our study of church growth principles. Although we often place emphasis on the numerical aspects of the church, such as attendance and finances, success in the church should never be based solely upon numbers. Nowhere in the Scriptures is quantity alone equated with success. Instead, success means accomplishing God’s will for us and reaching his goal for the church, whether we see great numerical growth or not. Of course, this does not mean that we are disinterested in numbers, for increases in attendance, members, and finances, are some of the practical ways we gauge our effectiveness. Nevertheless, in the church, we should keep the priority where it belongs – on the Word of God. As we faithfully proclaim and obey the truth, we will bear precious fruit, both spiritually and numerically.

In these final lessons, we want to focus on the Word of God. Joshua was instructed to be strong in the Lord and courageous for the Word of God. By keeping God’s Word his priority, he was assured success in the conquest of Canaan. Today, we must continue to keep the priority of the Word in our lives. Every generation must choose to build on the foundation of God’s Word. Our continued success as Christians, and as God’s church, depends on our continually choosing Christ and obeying God’s Word above the world and its pleasures. Indeed, we must choose to accept the responsibilities of being God’s church. In these last days, we must wake up and take upon ourselves the awesome responsibilities of being his peculiar people in this world.



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Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"A Successful Conquest"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Strength and Courage”

Strength and courage are impressive. In the Olympics, athletes accomplish almost unbelievable feats. To achieve this, they prepare themselves through grueling physical exercises and disciplines that stretch their abilities. When they perform for a few, brief moments, the world is actually watching months and even years of preparation unfold. Certainly, champions excel in physical exploits through strength and courage. What kind of strength and courage is required in order for us to succeed in the spiritual conquest of the church?

Key Verse

“Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper withersoever thou goest” (Jos. 1:7).

Lesson Summary

In Joshua 1:5-7, the Lord essentially told Joshua, “I will be with you and fight for you. If you are going to be successful in this conquest, in taking possession of the Promised Land that I am giving to you, then you must be “strong and very courageous.” At first glance, in verses five and six, one might think God was telling Joshua to have physical fortitude in the conquest; after all, they were going into battle to fight. It might seem as if God was saying, “Joshua, you must be strong and courageous in battle. You can take this land if you are willing to fight hard.” However, verse seven makes clear that the Lord had in mind another kind of strength – not an outer physical power, but an inward virtue. To take possession and succeed in the conquest, Joshua needed inner, spiritual strength. His victories were not the result of his army’s might and fighting capabilities, but rather of his faith in God’s mighty power (10:8-16, 22-25). The children of Israel took possession because Joshua was a leader who remained strong in the Lord (v. 5) and courageous for the Word of God (v. 7), leading the people into the promises of God’s Word. God measured Joshua’s strength and courage, not on the basis of his performance in battle, but by his performance of the law of God. If he failed to obey the law (God’s Word), then he surely would not be courageous in following the Lord’s leadership in the conquest of Canaan. His success depended on his obedience. Therefore, the Lord admonished Joshua, saying, “Turn not from it to the right hand or to the left” (v. 7). Indeed, the Word of God is the narrow way that leads to eternal life (Mt. 7:13-14). However, turning to the right or left hand expresses disregard for the Word, indifference to God’s commandments, thinking that we know best, and substituting our own will for God’s (Pr. 4:1-27). Right and left represent not only departure, but extremism and instability, and divergent positions without Biblical foundation and support. Anytime God’s people turn aside from the Word of God, they lose the standard and direction for their success in the conquest.

Scripture Study

Inner, spiritual strength – Jos. 1:5-7; 10:8-16, 22-25

The right and left hand – Jos. 1:7; Mt. 7:13-14; Pr. 4:1-27

Conclusion

Today, in the face of religious pluralism (multiple ways to God and different views of truth) and moral relativism, obedience to God’s Word demonstrates great strength in one’s convictions, while compromising the truth evidences spiritual weakness. As the spirit of antichrist withstands the church in these last days, obedience will require greater and greater courage. To have success, we must remain strong and courageous to the finish.

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"A Successful Conquest"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“Arise, Shine”

Introduction

Each day, we all need a reason to wake up, climb out of bed, get dressed, go to work, and be productive. Unfortunately, some people lack initiative. They may rise and go to work, but they are anything but productive. Why? They lack a sense of direction and meaning in their lives. They do not see their own significance in the broad scheme of life. The same can be said of the church. To advance the church, we must see our significance in God's eternal plan. In the midst of a great falling away (2 Th. 2:3), Zion Assembly has set out to restore the church and fulfill its mission in these last days. But in order to do this, we must restore the vision of God's church among the people of God. Where do we begin?

Key Verse

“Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee” (Is. 60:1).

Lesson Summary

Certainly, to restore the vision of the church, we must revive the purpose of the church among us. What is the prophetic purpose of the church in the Scriptures? In Isaiah 60:1-5, the prophet foretold of a restoration of the church when the “the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee” (v. 1). In this passage, we see the church arising out of moral and spiritual darkness, shining with the light and glory of Christ (v. 2; 1 Pe. 2:9). Isaiah's prophecy anticipates a glorious church, fulfilling her mission among the nations (vv. 3-5; Ep. 5:27). Therefore, this prophecy compels us to action. In the face of moral corruption and spiritual deception, the predestined purpose of the church is to arise and shine. From this passage, we see the mission and purpose of the church. It essentially functions to bring revival and restoration among the nations. First, the church serves to illuminate the nations *with* the Truth of Christ and his Word in the power of the Spirit (vv. 1-2; Mt. 28:18-20). Second, God's church serves to rally and unify the children of God *in* the Truth of Christ and his Word, in the power of the Spirit (vv. 3-5; Jn. 10:14, 16, 27; Ep. 1:10). We must align ourselves therefore with the responsibilities of the church as set forth in the Scriptures (Jn. 17:6-8; Ac. 2:42; 2 Ti. 3:14): for when the prophet declared “Arise, shine,” he not only prophesied the spiritual awakening of the church out of darkness, but also established her prophetic responsibilities. We must “arise” in the truth of God's Word and “shine” with the light of Christ, because this is the destiny of the church. In other words, after the Holy Ghost reveals to us the prophetic purpose of the church in the Scriptures, we then have a choice to make – to accept or reject the responsibilities of being his church (Ac. 4:17-20; 1 Jn. 1:1-3). We either qualify or disqualify ourselves as God's church, his Zion (Is. 60:14). We cannot spiritually slumber and be his peculiar people. Therefore, we must wake up and take upon ourselves the awesome responsibilities of being his church (Ep. 5:14).

Scripture Study

Reviving the purpose of the church – Is. 60:1-5; 1 Pe. 2:9; Ep. 5:27; Mt. 28:18-20; Jn. 10:14, 16, 27; Ep. 1:10
 Aligning ourselves to the responsibilities of the church – Jn. 17:6-8; Ac. 2:42; 2 Ti. 3:14; Ac. 4:17-20;
 1 Jn. 1:1-3; Ep. 5:14

Conclusion

What does building and growing the church actually require of us? The apostle Paul declared, “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called” (1 Co. 1:26). Fulfilling our spiritual conquest does not depend on exceptional people, but common people with exceptional faith. Success requires people who see the vision of the church in the Scriptures and run with it by faith (Hab. 2:2).

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"A Successful Conquest"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“The Priority of God’s Word”

Introduction

Distractions, distractions – the world is full of distractions! Work, school, routine responsibilities, extracurricular activities, and, yes, even family can sidetrack us from what is eternally important. The last days are described as the days of Noah, when “they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage,” and becoming oblivious to God (Mt. 24:37-39). We have been warned therefore not to fall into this trap of the enemy and become distracted from our spiritual conquest. In order to succeed in our conquest, we must keep God’s Word our priority.

Key Verse

“This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success” (Jos. 1:8).

Lesson Summary

In Joshua 1:9, we have the promise of the Lord’s abiding presence as we fulfill the church’s spiritual conquest (Mt. 28:20). Joshua was instructed to “be strong and of a good courage.” Actually these instructions were God’s commandment: “Have not I commanded thee” (v. 9)? To this, the Lord added, “be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed.” Do not fear (2 Ti. 1:7). How could God possibly expect Joshua to go up against the inhabitants of Canaan and not be afraid? The Lord promised to go with him into the battle. Who else would we want fighting alongside us? In fact, the Lord promised to go with Joshua wherever he went. Clearly, on the basis of this promise, God has commanded his people to fear not (Is. 41:10). However, the promise of God’s blessing, favor, and success in the conquest depended on Joshua’s obedience to the Word of God (v. 8). In other words, “Joshua, I promise to go with you and to fight for you, but you must listen to me and follow me.” To help Joshua maintain the priority of God’s Word, the Lord gave him two directives. First, he should keep the law of God in his mouth. He should speak the Word of God to himself and to others, lest they forget God in all they do (De. 6:1-12). The Word of God teaches us “the fear of the Lord” (Pr. 2:1-5). The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, for wisdom and knowledge come from God (Pr. 1:7; 2:6; 9:10). Indeed, the Scriptures give wisdom and understanding to those who follow its teachings. Keeping the Word on our tongues continually reinforces our allegiance to and dependency on God. Second, the Lord instructed Joshua to meditate in his Word continually, “day and night” (Ps. 1:2; 119:97). Reading the Bible is essential to spiritual growth. Meditation however goes beyond a casual reading of the Scriptures; it surpasses surface thoughts about the Word of God. Meditating in the Scriptures involves an in-depth study and reflection in the Word, whereby we take the Word to heart (Ps. 119:9-16).

Scripture Study

God’s abiding presence – Jos. 1:9; Mt. 28:20; 2 Ti. 1:7; Is. 41:10

Speak the Word – Jos 1:8; De. 6:1-12; Pr. 2:1-5; 1:7; 2:6; 9:10

Meditate in the Word – Jos. 1:8; Ps. 1:2; 119:9-16, 97

Conclusion

In the last days, “some shall depart from the faith” (1 Ti. 4:1), some “will not endure sound doctrine” (2 Ti. 4:3), but “they shall turn away their ears from the truth” (v. 4). Therefore, in Zion Assembly, we must not be moved, but rather “continue in the faith” to the finish. Our success in our spiritual conquest depends on the priority of God’s Word in the church (Col. 1:21-23; Ja. 1:25).

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"A Successful Conquest"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Choosing Our Destination”

When making a trip, reaching the destination requires several factors. First, we must choose where we are going – we must know our ultimate destination. We cannot be confused over our choice. Second, knowing how to reach our destination is essential. Following directions and signs is strategic to getting there. We must therefore choose the path that will reach our destination. Finally, we must be committed to making the trip, start to finish. Once we have determined the way, we must choose to continue on the right path until we reach our final destination.

Key Verse

“And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Jos. 24:15).

Lesson Summary

In review, the book of Joshua communicates a powerful message, regarding the church’s spiritual conquest. First, at the beginning, God gives Joshua specific directives for their conquest. Contained in these directives are principles for success: 1) Answering the call of God, 2) Working for Christ, 3) Overcoming obstacles, 4) Uniting our efforts, 5) Receiving God’s increase, and 6) Obeying the Word of God. Second, the book of Joshua tells the story of their successful conquest and the dividing of the land among the tribes of Israel. Finally, the book concludes with the secret of continued success. Having taken possession of the land and received their inheritance, Joshua gave a final challenge to the people. After reminding them that their ancestors served false gods, Joshua admonished them to serve the Lord, who had given them the Promised Land (Jos. 24:1-2, 14). Because he was dying and could no longer lead the people (23:14), the next generation had to make its own choice. Choosing was unavoidably required of the people. Joshua offered only three choices: 1) the gods of their ancestors, 2) the gods of the natives, or 3) the Lord God (24:15). Although the people quickly professed the Lord as their God, Joshua caused them to contemplate their decision to follow the Lord (24:16-20). Profession and commitment are not the same thing. The Israelites were already called the people of God, but they needed to be committed to their choice (v. 23). Continued success in the land of Canaan required the children of Israel to make God their only choice (23:11-16). Therefore, before he died, “Joshua made a covenant with the people,” and they publicly witnessed their choice to follow the Lord and obey his voice (24:21-25).

Scripture Study

The necessity of choosing – Jos. 24:1-2, 14-15

Commitment to one’s choice – 23:11-16; 24:16-25

Conclusion

Joshua gave them their options, but the people had to choose their destination. Their success or failure depended on their own choice. Indeed, life is full of important decisions and difficult choices. No doubt, the greatest one we will ever make is whether or not to serve the Lord. Of course, serving him is not a one-time choice, that is, we must choose the Lord again and again. Serving him is a daily decision. In fact, our continued success as Christians, and as God’s church, depends on our continually choosing Christ and obeying God’s Word above the world and its pleasures. “Choose you this day whom you will serve” (Jos. 24:15).

Faith -N- Focus

Adult Bible Studies

April 2017

“Epistles of Peter: The First Epistle”

Writer/Editor: Todd D. McDonald

**Zion Assembly Church of God
- Sunday School Services -
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Epistles of Peter: The First Epistle

Monthly Summary

In this month of *Faith-N-Focus*, we begin a new quarter of study in the Epistles of Peter. By his resurrection and ascension, Jesus paved the way and established our future hope. This life is only temporary; it's fading away. As Christians, we have a heavenly hope – the better hope of an eternal home in heaven. While upon this earth, we will necessarily go through many trials of our faith. Trials and suffering are a normal part of our journey through this temporal life. Though difficult, these trials are not for our destruction, but rather for our perfection in Christ. God is spiritually forming us in the image (likeness) of his own Son (Ro 8:29). Christ is holy; and we are called into his holiness – “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation” (1 Pe. 1:15).

Although holiness may be expressed through our lives in many different ways, the most profound expression of holiness is our love one to another. “Be ye holy; for I am holy” (1 Pe. 1:16). God is holy; and “God is love” (1 Jn. 4:8, 16). God's love is a pure and holy kind of love. When we love one another the way Jesus loves, then we are demonstrating the character and nature of holy God.

Truly, our holiness is made possible by Christ's redemptive work when he gave his life on the cross and shed his precious blood. Through Jesus and his redemptive work, we have access to God. He is the only way to the Father – God's eternal plan for our salvation. The teachings of the Holy Scriptures reveal who Jesus is: the eternal Word of God made flesh. Our access to God thus depends on the revelation of the Holy Scriptures, the word of God.

April 2, 2017

“Heavenly Hope”

Main Point

We have the hope and expectation of something better beyond this world – heaven.

Introduction

The apostle Paul declared, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept” (1 Co. 15:19-20). All around us, people are living and dying without hope. They are truly miserable. On the other hand, we have hope in Christ. But if our hope ends when this temporal life ends, we are also miserable people. Nevertheless, our hope in Christ transcends this life. Through Jesus Christ, we have spiritual life, peace with God, and comfort in the Holy Ghost in this present world. Moreover, we have a blessed heavenly hope in the world to come.

Key Verse

“To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Pe. 1:4).

Lesson Summary

The apostle Peter wrote to the saints scattered across Asia Minor (i.e. modern-day Turkey). He first encouraged them in the Lord assuring them of their election and eternal life in Christ (1 Pe. 1:1-3). As Peter explained, we have a “lively” or living hope. We have the hope of eternal life by the very life of Christ, even by his resurrection from the dead (v. 3). Just as Christ suffered and died, and then rose again in victory, we too have been raised from death to life with Christ (Ep. 2:5). Through him, we are victorious over sin, death, and the suffering of this present world. Our lively hope, the life of God’s Spirit indwelling us, gives us the hope and expectation of something better beyond this world – heaven (1 Pe. 1:4; 2 Co. 1:22; Ep. 1:13-14). Peter began his first epistle by emphasizing our heavenly hope (1 Pe. 1:4). As children of God, this sinful world is not our home, but we are “strangers” here – we don’t belong – for we are God’s “elect,” chosen and set apart in Christ (vv. 1-2). We have a heavenly home awaiting us (Jn. 14:1-3). Peter referred to heaven as our “inheritance” (1 Pe. 1:4). Many people inherit

something of worth upon the death of a loved one or close friend. But such inheritances are only temporary; the things of this world will not last. However, through Jesus Christ, we have become the recipients of a great inheritance in the eternal kingdom of God. Our heavenly inheritance is permanent and everlasting; it's "incorruptible" and immortal (1 Co. 15:50-54). Peter further referred to our inheritance as being "undefiled." The world is a place where sin, death, sickness, and suffering abound. But none of these will enter into heaven for heaven will be pure and perfect (Re. 21:1-4, 27). Peter declared that our inheritance "fadeth not away." Some things in this life seem certain today, but are gone tomorrow (e.g. a lifetime investment, a career, and personal health). Nevertheless, regardless of the uncertainty of this world, we can count on God's promise of heaven – he has reserved a place for us (1 Pe. 1:4). Clearly, heaven is the goal of the faithful. But until we reach our heavenly goal, we will all go through seasonal (temporary) sufferings, trials, and temptations. This was Peter's point. We rejoice greatly in the hope of heaven though we endure sorrow and suffering along the way – "heaviness through manifold temptations" (v. 6; see also 2 Co. 4:16-18). In fact, our suffering serves to increase our anticipation of and longing for heaven. Fortunately, all suffering in this life is only temporary because this life is not permanent. This perspective should encourage us to persevere through the trials of our faith to reach our heavenly goal. The Lord never promised to rid our lives of suffering, but instead he promised to be with us and give us the power to endure faithfully to the finish (1 Pe. 1:5; 1 Co. 10:13; Mt. 28:18-20). The power of God will protect and keep us through faith in Jesus Christ until we hear the Lord say, "Well done" (Mt. 25:21, 23).

Scripture Study

Our heavenly hope – 1 Co. 15:19-20; 1 Pe. 1:1-4; 2 Co. 1:22; Ep. 1:13-14; Jn. 14:1-3; 1 Co. 15:50-54; Re. 21:1-4, 27

Seasonal sufferings – 1 Pe. 1:6; 2 Co. 4:16-18

God's keeping power – 1 Pe. 1:5; 1 Co. 10:13; Mt. 28:18-20

Conclusion

Our salvation will ultimately be revealed at the end of the way when Christ comes and raptures the church. At that point, we will reap our inheritance. Heaven is sure; suffering is sure; but God's keeping power is also sure. Through faith in Jesus Christ, we will attain our heavenly hope at the end of the way (Col. 1:5).

April 9, 2017

“Trials of Faith”

Main Point

Our faith is being proven and perfected as we persevere through trials and sufferings.

Introduction

Essentially, all of life is one big trial or test of faith. As we pass through this temporal life, we are establishing where we will spend our eternity. Of course, the goal of the child of God is heaven. We live in anticipation of the Lord's coming, and we spiritually prepare ourselves to make heaven our home (Mt. 25:10-13).

Key Verse

“That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (1 Pe. 1:7).

Lesson Summary

As Christians, why must we suffer? Suffering is one of the major issues that world religions have tried to address and resolve. In 1 Peter 1:7, the apostle gave sense and significance to our suffering and trials of faith. First of all, we need to understand that our faith is precious. Our faith in Jesus Christ is more precious than anything else we possess. It's not only precious to us but also to God. In fact, nothing in this life is comparable to our faith in him. Our faith is more precious than the purest and finest gold which perishes. Without Christ, all of the money and possessions of this world means nothing. All of these things will surely pass away. Jesus taught, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Mt. 24:35; 2 Pe. 3:10-13). Our faith in Jesus Christ is therefore precious because it transcends this present world, carrying us from the temporal into the eternal where our faith becomes sight (Ro. 8:22-25; 2 Co. 5:6-7). Moreover, our faith is being proven through our trials and sufferings in Christ. In the same way that gold and precious metals are tried (refined) with fire, our faith is also tried. The word “tried” means “approved,” as in “tried and true.” It means tested and found to be the real thing. Precious metals are purified and refined by fire: impurities are burned up, and the dross is removed through the process of the refiner's fire (Pr. 25:4; see also 1 Co. 3:11-

15). Our faith is thus being purified and proven as we go through “manifold temptations” for the cause of Christ (1 Pe. 1:6; Ja. 1:12). Furthermore, by persevering in faith to the finish, we will give praise to God when Christ comes for his church at the rapture (1 Th. 4:13-18; 1 Co. 15:51-58; 2 Ti. 4:7-8). So suffering should be considered an integral part of faith in Christ. Until he comes again, we should expect our faith to be tried. The essential test of our faith is thus: Will we continue to believe and hope for the unseen when everything we see in this world opposes faith in Christ? In 1 Peter 1:8, he explained that we love Jesus though we have not seen him. We know him and rejoice in him by faith but have never seen him face to face (Jn. 20:27-29). We experience joy and glory beyond words, yet we have never seen Christ in the flesh. This is the nature of real faith that stands when put to the test – faith with real substance behind it – “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things **not seen**” (He. 11:1). Our faith is being “tried with fire” (1 Pe. 1:7). It’s a faith that lives in the expectation of Christ’s appearing. We are waiting on Jesus to come for us just as he promised. We believe in him; we love him; we rejoice in him; and we are looking for his appearing (Tit. 2:13).

Scripture Study

Precious faith – 1 Pe. 1:7; Mt. 24:35; 2 Pe. 3:10-13; Ro. 8:22-25; 2 Co. 5:6-7

Proven and perfected faith – 1 Pe. 1:6-7; Pr. 25:4; Ja. 1:12; 1 Co. 3:11-15

Persevering faith – 1 Th. 4:13-18; 1 Co. 15:51-58; 2 Ti. 4:7-8; 1 Pe. 1:8-9; He. 11:1

Conclusion

Clearly, God has saved us and given us his Spirit; he keeps us by his power and grace; and he proves and perfects our faith by bringing us through many trials and sufferings. We already experience a foretaste of heaven through the Spirit, but we look forward to so much more at the coming of Christ (2 Co. 12:1-4; 1 Co. 2:9-10). Our faith in Jesus is presently being tried and proven until we obtain our final salvation. Hence, Jesus taught us perseverance, saying, “But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved” (Mt. 24:13). At the end of the way, we will receive our full salvation bringing praise, honor, and glory to God at Christ’s appearing.

April 16, 2017

“Holiness”

Main Point

Our holiness in Christ is most profoundly expressed in our love one to another.

Introduction

The apostle Peter explained the expectation of the redeemed at the coming of Christ: that we should reap the grace and salvation of God (1 Pe. 1:13). He also explained God’s expectation of us as we prepare ourselves for Christ’s coming: that we should live holy lives. In today’s lesson, we will explore holiness in the life of the believer.

Key Verse

“But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation” (1 Pe. 1:15).

Lesson Summary

Peter asserted that the saints will reap the grace of God when Christ comes for the church. Of course, the world will not reap grace, but rather judgment. In order to prepare ourselves to receive the grace of God, Peter admonished: 1) “gird up the loins of your mind,” 2) “be sober,” and 3) “hope to the end” (1 Pe. 1:13). In other words, if we plan on receiving grace and not judgment at his coming, then we should follow Peter’s solemn admonition. The mind is the spiritual battlefield. Peter urged the saints to “gird up.” We must pull our thoughts together in Christ taking control of our thinking. The apostle Paul expressed the same idea when writing to the church in Corinth – “Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Co. 10:5). This requires both soberness of mind (i.e. being spiritually alert and watchful for Christ’s coming, 1 Th. 5:4-6) and hope-filled thinking (i.e. a mindset that never loses the “hope of salvation” and the expectation of Christ’s coming, vv. 7-9). Hope keeps us moving forward and persevering in Christ. When a person begins to think within himself, “I can’t follow Christ; it’s too hard; I can’t make it,” and when he becomes discouraged in his faith, he is spiritually defeated if he loses hope. Therefore, we must “gird up” our thoughts in Christ, and we do so primarily through Bible study, prayer, and worship.

Furthermore, to prepare ourselves for Christ's coming, we should pattern ourselves after him. Peter declared, "As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance" (1 Pe. 1:14). As children of God, we must obey the Lord unto his coming. Of course, obedience is first an attitude and desire of the heart (Ro. 6:17). Obedience is yielding ourselves to God; it is our humble submission to his authority (Ja. 4:7, 10; Ro. 6:13, 16). Peter explained what he meant by obedience – "not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance." Notice that he did not give us a list of do's and don'ts to define our obedience in Christ. Rather, Peter understood obedience as a pattern of works ("fashioning yourselves") completely opposite to our former lifestyle in sin. In other words, the Christian lifestyle is radically different than a sinner's. Jesus Christ – God revealed in human flesh – is now our pattern for living; and we are striving to be like him. What is Christ like? Jesus is holy (1 Pe. 1:15-17). The rationale and basis for our being holy transcends the doctrine and standards of the church, the body of Christ. We should pursue a holy lifestyle because God is holy; the head of the church is holy. Holiness is God's nature; and we are to pursue holiness in pursuit of him (1 Jn. 3:2-3).

Scripture Study

Take control of our thoughts – 1 Pe. 1:13; 2 Co. 10:5; 1 Th. 5:4-9

Pattern ourselves after Christ – 1 Pe. 1:14; Ja. 4:7, 10; Ro. 6:13, 16-17

Pursue Christ's holiness – 1 Pe. 1:15-17; 1 Jn. 3:2-3

Holiness in love – 1 Pe. 1:22; Jn. 13:35; Ro. 5:5; 1 Jn. 4:12-13

Conclusion

Many times, people may think of holiness only in terms of certain external behaviors (e.g. one's choice of attire, adornment, and entertainment). But outward holiness alone falls short of true holiness in Christ; for sinners may conform to the same external practices, however, perhaps for different reasons. Certainly, inward righteousness will be reflected in outward practices. Nevertheless, our true holiness in Christ is most profoundly expressed in our genuine and fervent love one to another (1 Pe. 1:22; Jn. 13:35; Ro. 5:5; 1 Jn. 4:12-13).

April 23, 2017

“Redeemed”

Main Point

We are redeemed from the bondage and corruption of sin in order to live holy lives pleasing to God.

Introduction

Emphasizing readiness for Christ’s coming, the apostle Peter clarified God’s call and requirement for every child of God, saying, “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation” (1 Pe. 1:15). In today’s lesson, Peter will further explain the basis of our acceptance and holiness in Christ (vv. 18-19).

Key Verse

“But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pe. 1:19).

Lesson Summary

How do sinners become acceptable and holy to God? Peter wrote to explain how holiness is made possible for sinners. The basis and foundation of holiness is rooted in Christ’s redemptive work (1 Pe. 1:18). We must be redeemed (set free) from the bondage and corruption of sin. What does it mean to be redeemed? Briefly, under the Old Testament law, if one was so impoverished that he could not pay his debts, he could be sold as a hired servant. However, his freedom could be purchased by a near kinsman: a redeemer (Le. 25:39-55). Therefore, in redemption, someone else pays the price for you. He pays your debt – a debt you cannot pay. As sinners, we could never save ourselves. So God had to provide the way of salvation for us. He had to redeem us. The price for our freedom from sin (i.e. our ransom, Mk. 10:45; 1 Ti. 2:5-6) was paid by Jesus Christ when he went to the cross. He did not pay a monetary sum. It was not corruptible silver and gold that bought our salvation, but rather Christ’s very own precious blood was the price of our freedom (1 Pe. 1:19; Col. 1:14; Ep. 1:7). When writing about redemption, Peter spoke of “vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers” (v. 18). Many world religions, like that of the Jews, have resorted to traditions and vain ways of life which attempt to secure salvation. They are eagerly trying to make themselves acceptable to God. But manmade religion can never make us holy and acceptable because we are utterly

incapable of paying the sin debt (Mt. 18:23-25). Only the blood of Jesus could satisfy God's justice and righteous demands (2 Co. 5:21; He. 10:7, 12; 1 Jn. 2:2). "What can wash away our sins? – Nothing but the blood of Jesus!" Literally, billions are trapped in the religious vanities of a works-based salvation. Consider the Jews. They corrupted and distorted the meaning and purpose of the law by their elaborate tradition (Mk. 7:5-9, 13). By the time Christ came in fulfillment of the law, the Jews, particularly the Jewish leaders, stumbled at him and rejected him (1 Co. 1:23; 1 Pe. 2:8). Their corrupt tradition (actually their corruption of God's Word, 2 Pe. 3:16) could never have redeemed them. Thereby, they resorted to their own works in keeping the law as the means of salvation, rather than faith in Christ and his redemptive work on the cross. However, Jesus' death on the cross and his shed blood provided the only source for our redemption. He alone came into the world to be the sacrificial Lamb of God – "without blemish and without spot" – to be the holy sacrifice to purchase a holy people (1 Pe. 1:19). His work at Calvary was all-sufficient. Peter's point is very clear: Christ redeemed us to be holy and pleasing to God. The way of holiness includes both sanctification and consecration only made possible through the blood of Jesus. Peter taught that believers live holy lives separated to God through "sanctification of the Spirit" and "obeying the truth through the Spirit" (1 Pe. 1:2; 2 Th. 2:13; 1 Pe. 1:14-15, 22). So then, based on Christ's redemptive work, Peter lifts up God's will for his people: "Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Pe. 1:16).

Scripture Study

Redemption – 1 Pe. 1:18-19; Lev. 25:39-55; Mk. 10:45; 1 Ti. 2:5-6; Col. 1:14; Ep. 1:7

Jesus paid the sin debt – 1 Pe. 1:18; Mt. 18:23-25; 2 Co. 5:21; He. 10:7, 12; 1 Jn. 2:2

The sufficiency of Christ – Mk. 7:5-9, 13; 1 Co. 1:23; 1 Pe. 2:8; 1 Pe. 1:19

Redeemed for holiness – 1 Pe. 1:2, 14-16, 19, 22; 2 Th. 2:13

Conclusion

Jesus provided the way for sinners to be made acceptable to God. He purchased our freedom from sin. Through his death and by his blood we are redeemed from the bondage and corruption of sin in order to live holy lives pleasing to God.

April 30

“The Word”

Main Point

Our access to God depends on the revelation of the Holy Scriptures, the word of God.

Introduction

As children of God, our sins have been forgiven. We have been washed and cleansed by the blood of Jesus. Peter taught that we are redeemed to be holy: to walk in the Spirit according to the Word of God. In today’s lesson, we will explain and emphasize the priority of the Word of God in our salvation.

Key Verse

“But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you” (1 Pe. 1:25).

Lesson Summary

When Jesus came, the majority of the Jewish leaders did not believe and accept him as the Christ sent from God. They did not confess, as did Peter, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Mt. 16:16; Jn. 6:68-69). Consequently, they did not grasp God’s eternal purpose in Jesus Christ (Ep. 3:11). Jesus was actually “foreordained **before** the foundation of the world” (1 Pe. 1:20). Sadly, the Jews turned God’s law (corrupted by their own tradition) into the epitome and apex of God’s desire for his people. They could not see that Christ was the fulfillment of the law, and thus, the end of the law for God’s people (Ro. 10:4; 2 Co. 3:13; He. 8:13). Nevertheless, God’s plan of salvation has always been Jesus Christ from the very beginning: before the law, during the law, and after the law. In fact, the apostle Paul declared the very purpose of the law was to point to faith in Christ (Ga. 3:24). God’s eternal plan was/is Christ, yet he was not manifest and revealed, as Peter stated, until “these last times” for us all (1 Pe. 1:20). Being God’s eternal plan of salvation, Jesus is our only access to God (Ro. 5:2); he is the only way to the Father (1 Pe. 1:21; Jn. 14:6). By his death and resurrection, we come to God (Ro. 5:10; 10:9). We do not come to God on the basis of a dead prophet, but rather a risen Savior. Of course, world religions depend on vain beliefs and practices, such as looking to a dead prophet (guru) for the way of salvation. In contrast, we serve a risen Lord. He has

ascended and returned to the Father in glory that our faith and hope might be in God; and he is now at the right hand of God interceding for us (Col. 3:1-2; He. 7:25). Moreover, we presently await the coming of the Lord to catch away his bride (1 Th. 4:16-17). Our hope is above; our faith is directed toward heaven; and Christ is our access. We thus live with a heavenly hope. Our eager expectation is Christ's soon coming. So we are not living for this world, but for the world to come. In chapter one, Peter wrote about the prophetic revelation of Jesus Christ and our salvation through him (vv. 10-12). Then in the closing verses of chapter one, he emphasized "the word (*logos*) of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (v. 23). Here he equated the eternal Word with the historic Jesus of the New Testament (Jn. 1:1-3, 14). The Word or *logos* of God, God's eternal mind and will, was revealed in Jesus the Christ, the only begotten Son of God (3:16). Peter further equated Jesus Christ, who is the eternal Word of God made flesh, with the revelation of the Holy Scriptures, saying, "But the word (*rhema*) of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word (*rhema*) which by the gospel is preached unto you" (1 Pe. 1:25). Jesus Christ was revealed by the word ("rhema") of the Lord, that is, by the truth which God has spoken and given to his people down through the ages (1 Pe. 1:10-12; He. 1:1; 2 Pe. 1:21).

Scripture Study

God's eternal plan – Mt. 16:16; Jn. 6:68-69; Ep. 3:11; 1 Pe. 1:20-21; Ro. 10:4; 2 Co. 3:13; He. 8:13; Ga. 3:24

Our access to God – Ro. 5:2, 10; 10:9; 1 Pe. 1:21; Jn. 14:6; Col. 3:1-2; He. 7:25; 1 Th. 4:16-17

The word of God – 1 Pe. 1:10-12, 23, 25; Jn. 1:1-3, 14; 3:16; He. 1:1; 2 Pe. 1:21

Conclusion

Peter explained three ideas in one reality: 1) the eternal, personal Word of God (*logos*), 2) Jesus Christ (the Word made flesh), and 3) the word(s) of the Lord, the Scriptures, the gospel (*rhema*). All three are one and the same revelation of God. Clearly, the Holy Scriptures are the written revelation of God to mankind. Therefore, our access to God depends on the revelation of the Holy Scriptures, the word of God.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies "Essentials"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“The First Epistle”

Lesson Outlines

May 7

Topic: Spiritual Growth and Formation

Texts: 1 Pe. 2:1-3; He. 5:12-14; Ps. 34:8; Job 23:12; Mt. 4:4; De. 8:3; Jn. 17:17; Ep. 4:15; 5:26-27; 1 Pe. 2:4-6; 1:15-16, 23; Ac. 4:11-12; Jn. 6:66-69; 1 Co. 12:18

Key Verse: 1 Pe. 2:5

Main Point: We must spiritually grow and be spiritually formed by the Word and Spirit in order to fulfill God’s purpose in the church.

May 14

Topic: Christ and the Church

Texts: 1 Pe. 2:5-9; He. 7:25, 27; 10:1-2, 11-12, 14, 21; Ro. 10:11; 12:1; Ep. 1:6; Is. 28:16; 1 Co. 3:11; Ep. 2:20; Jn. 3:16-17; Lu. 19:10; Mk. 1:15; Mt. 24:14; Mk. 16:15; Ac. 1:8; Ep. 1:9-10; 4:13; 5:26-27; Is. 60:7; Jn. 14:16; Jn. 15:4-5; Ep. 5:25, 29; Ac. 20:28; Song 7:10; Mt. 16:18; 7:24-27

Key Verse: 1 Pe. 2:6

Main Point: Both Christ and the church together will finish God’s mission in the world.

May 21

Topic: Set Apart in Christ

Texts: 1 Pe. 1:2-4, 9, 15, 17; 2:8-14; Is. 8:14; Pr. 4:18-19; Ep. 5:8; Mt. 5:14-16; Jn. 3:18-19; 17:14-16; He. 11:13; Tit. 3:1; He. 13:14; Jn. 14:2; 2 Ti. 3:14-17; Ro. 13:1-5

Key Verse: 1 Pe. 2:9

Main Point: Although we live in this world, we are nevertheless citizens of heaven, and our lifestyle should reflect our true citizenship and uniqueness in Christ.

May 28

Topic: Suffering with Christ

Texts: 1 Pe. 2:19-25; Jn. 15:18-19; Ph. 3:10; He. 11:35-39; 2 Ti. 2:12; Mt. 5:10-12, 43-45; 1 Pe. 3:13-18; 4:1-2, 12-14, 19; 5:10-11; Ja. 1:2-4

Key Verse: 1 Pe. 2:21

Main Point: Through suffering with Christ, God is accomplishing his will in our lives and spiritually preparing us for our eternal reward.

In this month of *Faith-N-Focus*, we will continue our study of Peter’s first epistle. When we first come to Christ, we are spiritual babies. But God does not intend for us to remain infantile in our faith. He desires for us to grow spiritually. Spiritual formation and maturity are necessary for the church to move forward in God’s plan. Christ is the foundation of the church. Jesus gave us his example, teaching us by his words and manner of life; he purchased the church with his own blood; and he commissioned his disciples to declare the gospel of the kingdom throughout the world. He then ascended back to the Father and poured out his Holy Spirit upon the church. Certainly, Christ is essential to the church for we have nothing apart from him. But the church is also essential to Christ for his eternal purpose can only be fulfilled through the church. Both Christ and the church together will finish God’s mission in the world.

The church is in the world, but we are not a part of the worldly system. Taking on the ways of the world would surely undermine our mission and purpose. Although we live in this world, we are nevertheless citizens of heaven, and our lifestyle should reflect our true citizenship and uniqueness in Christ. Of course, because we refuse to take part in the world’s sinful attitudes and behaviors, we often find ourselves in conflict with the world. Like Christ, we suffer through trials of opposition and persecution, not for doing anything wrong, but for doing everything right. Satan is out to destroy us to be sure! Nevertheless, through such sufferings, God is accomplishing his will in our lives and spiritually preparing us for our eternal reward.



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Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"The First Epistle"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Spiritual Growth and Formation”

In 1 Peter 1:24-25, the apostle contrasted the flesh that perishes with the Word that endures forever. Then in chapter two, he began by noting specific works of the flesh, admonishing the saints to “lay aside” or cast off such sinful works. He further encouraged them to desire the Word of God (i.e. Christ and his teachings). Peter understood that Christ is building his church (Mt. 16:13-20), but only with those who will grow and be formed by the incorruptible, eternal Word of God. Let’s consider this teaching further.

Key Verse

“Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, do offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Pe. 2:5).

Lesson Summary

Peter challenged the spiritual growth of the saints from the perspective of two extreme positions. In 1 Peter 2:1, he first noted several works of the flesh: malice (ill will; a bad attitude; hateful), guile (deceit; trickery; manipulation), hypocrisies (being phony or two-faced; devious ways), envies (jealousies; resentful actions), and evil speakings (backbiting; gossiping; maligning others). Over and against these attitude/practices, Peter then lifted up the sincerity and goodness of the Word in our lives – “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious” (1 Pe. 2:2-3). In this way, Peter forced the saints to identify themselves with one of the two positions, either following the flesh or following the Word and Spirit (Ga. 5:24-25). “Newborn babes” and “milk” suggest Christians who are practicing fleshly works rather than maturing in the Lord. They are still babies in the faith – unlearned and unskilled in the Word (He. 5:12-14; 2 Pe. 3:16) – they are not growing up. But hungering for and receiving spiritual nourishment from the Word of God will enable the children of God to grow up in the Lord. 1 Peter 2:3 is undoubtedly a reference to Psalm 34:8, “O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.” Naturally, babies will drink milk when you give it to them. God made mothers to produce it, and he made babies to crave it. Likewise, it is unnatural (or something is wrong) if a Christian rejects the Word of God in order to satisfy the desires of the flesh. If he tastes the good Word but then pushes it away, something is definitely wrong because it is perfectly natural for one who is born by the Word to desire and hunger the words of God (1 Pe. 1:23; 2:2-3). Job declared, “I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food” (Job 23:12). When Jesus was tempted, he quoted the Holy Scriptures, saying, “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Mt. 4:4; De. 8:3). Clearly, without the Word of God, we cannot grow up in the Lord. There is no spiritual growth without the cleansing power and sanctifying work of God’s Word in our lives (Jn. 17:17; Ep. 4:15; 5:26-27). Peter further explained why Christians must cease from sinful works and grow up spiritually. We should be a sanctified and consecrated people – “an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Pe. 2:5) – for we have answered the call of God, who is holy, and have come to Jesus Christ, the incorruptible Word of God (1 Pe. 2:4; 1:15-16, 23). Peter said, “**To whom** coming” (2:4). We come to the personal, eternal Word of God to be saved. We do not trust a doctrine, an idea, or a practice for our salvation, but we believe in the Son of God and obey his words, which is the proof of genuine faith and discipleship. Peter believed in the exclusivity of Jesus Christ, saying, “This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Ac. 4:11-12). When many of Jesus’ disciples were offended by his words (teachings) and turned from following him, “Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, **to whom** shall we go? thou hast **the words of eternal life**. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God” (Jn. 6:66-69). God is fulfilling his purpose in and through the church, but only with those who will submit themselves to Christ and his teachings. The church is being built even as God is forming us in Christ’s likeness by his Word and Spirit. Peter called Jesus a “living stone” in God’s house, the “chief cornerstone.” Likewise, we are called “lively stones,” being spiritually formed and fitted (i.e. prepared and placed) into the building as it pleases God (1 Pe. 2:4-6; 1 Co. 12:18).

Scripture Study

Spiritual growth – 1 Pe. 2:1-3; He. 5:12-14; Ps. 34:8; Job 23:12; Mt. 4:4; De. 8:3; Jn. 17:17; Ep. 4:15; 5:26-27

Spiritual formation – 1 Pe. 2:4-6; 1:15-16, 23; Ac. 4:11-12; Jn. 6:66-69; 1 Co. 12:18

Conclusion

The cornerstone suggests not only the stability and foundation of a house, but also the measure and standard by which all else is built. God is building his church, and to be a part of his church, we must fit into his building program. Christ is the living cornerstone in the house of God; he is both the foundation and the standard by whom all other stones are set in place. Though many refuse his teachings, and thus reject him, Jesus Christ is nevertheless “chosen of God, and precious” (1 Pe. 2:4). He is the head of God’s church. He is the only way, the truth, and the life; none come to the Father without coming through his Son Jesus (Jn. 14:6).

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"The First Epistle"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

"Christ and the Church"

Some Christians may exaggerate the significance of the church to the point of deemphasizing Christ, and others may emphasize Christ to the point of minimizing the importance of the church. In today's lesson, we will examine the relationship of Christ and the church, and see how both of them together accomplish God's mission in the world.

Key Verse

"Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded" (1 Pe. 2:6).

Lesson Summary

Christ alone is the "chief corner stone" and "high priest over the house of God" (1 Pe. 2:6; He. 10:21). After his unique pattern and likeness, we also "as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood" (1 Pe. 2:5). While the priests under the law were imperfect and offered up imperfect sacrifices, our perfect high priest offered up himself once for our sins (He. 10:1-2, 11-12; He. 7:27). Only by Jesus Christ and his perfect sacrifice, may we, as "a royal priesthood," now offer up ourselves to God with spiritual sacrifices acceptable to him (He. 10:14; He. 7:25; 1 Pe. 2:9; Ro. 12:1). Our acceptance and fellowship in the beloved depends on Christ (Ep. 1:6). The apostle Peter declared, "He that believeth on him shall not be confounded" (1 Pe. 2:6; Ro. 10:11; Is. 28:16). Clearly, the identity of the church (both of the individual members and of the corporate body) depends on Jesus Christ. The profound importance of Christ to the church is undeniable. He is "elect" and "precious" to us (1 Pe. 2:6-7). What then is the importance of the church to Christ? Quoting from the prophet Isaiah, Peter declared, "Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone" (v. 6; Is. 28:16). Of course, Zion refers to the church; and the cornerstone refers to Christ. Christ, the cornerstone, is laid in the church at its very foundation (1 Co. 3:11; Ep. 2:20). "Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone" expresses God's purpose in Christ through the church and God's purpose in the church by Jesus Christ. First, let us consider God's purpose in Christ through the church. His primary purpose in coming was to save the lost (Jn. 3:16-17; Lu. 19:10). Being laid in Zion, Christ is not separated from the church, but he is a part of the church – the very foundation of God's house. The church is an extension of Christ, being built upon him. In terms of ministry, we are his functioning body, his hands and feet extended to the world. So Christ's purpose is our purpose. We, therefore, are sent by Christ into the world with his message of salvation through faith and repentance (Mk. 1:15). Now, let us consider God's purpose in the church by Jesus Christ. The church will take the gospel into the whole world and fulfill Christ's great mission (Mt. 24:14; Mk. 16:15; Ac. 1:8). In addition to fulfilling his mission, God has foreordained a perfect church at his coming. He will have a united, glorious house, "holy and without blemish" (Ep. 1:9-10; 4:13; 5:26-27; Is. 60:7; 1 Pe. 2:9). However, God's purpose in the church is only possible by divine intervention. Humanly, we will never reach the world with the gospel without Christ's supernatural help (i.e. his Spirit; consider Jn. 14:16; Jn. 15:4-5). Likewise, we will reach perfection, but only by his Word and Spirit working in and through the members of the church. How do we know these lofty goals will be accomplished? – Because Christ gave himself for the church and "purchased [the church] with his own blood" (Ep. 5:25; Ac. 20:28). He "nourishes and cherishes" the church (Ep. 5:29); his desire is toward the church (Song 7:10). Christ is fulfilled by the church; that is, the church fulfills his purpose in the world. Hypothetically speaking, if the church fails, then Christ's purpose fails. Of course, in reality, Jesus will never fail! For this very reason, he emphatically declared, ". . . **I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it**" (Mt. 16:18). The church then will not fail but is destined for success. Nevertheless, in order to succeed and fulfill its purpose, it must remain wholly dependent on Christ. God's house will stand with the Word at its foundation (Mt. 7:24-27). Undeniably, we, the church, need Christ; and Christ needs the church.

Scripture Study

Christ, elect and precious – 1 Pe. 2:5-9; He. 7:25, 27; 10:1-2, 11-12, 14, 21; Ro. 10:11; 12:1; Ep. 1:6; Is. 28:16

God's purpose in Christ – 1 Pe. 2:6; Is. 28:16; 1 Co. 3:11; Ep. 2:20; Jn. 3:16-17; Lu. 19:10; Mk. 1:15

God's purpose in the church -- Mt. 24:14; Mk. 16:15; Ac. 1:8; Ep. 1:9-10; 4:13; 5:26-27; Is. 60:7; 1 Pe. 2:9

Christ working in and through us – Jn. 14:16; Jn. 15:4-5; Ep. 5:25, 29; Ac. 20:28; Song 7:10; Mt. 16:18; 7:24-27

Conclusion

Both Christ and the church together will finish God's mission in the world. We see the significance of Jesus Christ to the church. Likewise, we see how important the church is to Christ. To us who believe, he is indeed precious (1 Pe. 2:7). We count it a great privilege to "show forth the [marvelous] praises of him" in a sinful, dark world (v. 9). But to the disobedient who reject Christ, the cornerstone of God's house is "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense" (v. 8).

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"The First Epistle"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Set Apart in Christ”

What sets the church apart from all other people? We are distinguished by our faithful obedience to Christ and God’s Word (1 Pe. 1:2, 14, 22; compare 2:7-8). Even though one may identify himself with a specific generation, religion, nation, or people, he is **not** chosen (or royal, or holy, or peculiar) apart from faith in and obedience to Christ (2:9). In today’s lesson, we will discuss being set apart and distinct from the world and its sinful system. Although we live in this world, we are nevertheless citizens of heaven, and our lifestyle should reflect our true citizenship and uniqueness in Christ.

Key Verse

“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Pe. 2:9).

Lesson Summary

As the apostle Peter explained, our obedience or disobedience to Christ determines our ultimate significance and eternal outcome. The disobedient “stumble at the word” – they are offended by the Word of God (1 Pe. 2:8; Is. 8:14; Pr. 4:19). Without faith in Christ, they have no hope of salvation (1 Pe. 1:3, 9). However, our significance and outcome are entirely different. Through our faith and obedience to Christ and God’s Word, we manifest God’s light in a dark, sinful world. As we walk in his light, we display his glory and praises before the world (2:9; Ep. 5:8; Mt. 5:14-16; Pr. 4:18). Through Christ, we then shine uniquely and distinctly. But before we came to Christ, we were nothing special; we were mere sinners in a fallen, sinful world already under the judgment of God (Jn. 3:18-19). Thus, it does not matter with whom we associate ourselves in this present world, only Christ can give us acceptance and special standing with God. Only through him do we obtain the mercy and favor of God that we so desperately need (1 Pe. 2:10). Having become God’s people, being chosen, royal, holy, and peculiar, we are then called to abstain from fleshly lusts and worldly desires. Peter described us as “strangers and pilgrims” – outsiders – who don’t belong to the world (v. 11; Jn. 17:14-16; He. 11:13). As spiritual foreigners with differing priorities and goals, we no longer believe or behave like the world. Instead, we have a heavenly citizenship – a citizenship not of this world. Peter described our citizenship as follows: we have a reservation in heaven (1 Pe. 1:4); we are sojourners and pilgrims on the earth (1:17; 2:11); and we are God’s elect, called and chosen out of the world (1:2, 15; 2:9). Peter therefore admonished the saints to pursue a good life with good works that glorify God (2:12). Moreover, as citizens of heaven, we should be role-model citizens upon the earth (Tit. 3:1). “Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles” can be understood in the admonition, “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake” (1 Pe. 2:12-13). The saints are urged to exemplify noble, Christian character and behavior through good citizenship. Although we are not of this world, we should still be good citizens in the world because our Christian lifestyle is our witness. We should be good citizens in this life, not because we belong to the world or are of the world, but because we have a heavenly home (He. 13:14; Jn. 14:2). Thus, we are to conduct ourselves right now as citizens of a heavenly and nobler kingdom, demonstrating to the world a superior way of life in Christ. In other words, we are not living by the mere laws and regulations of man, but we are living by the truths and principles of God’s Word (2 Ti. 3:14-17). As such, we keep the ordinances of man’s law, so long as it does not conflict with God’s Word, recognizing that God sets powers, authorities, and governments in place for the good of humanity (1 Pe. 2:14; Ro. 13:1-4). We thus submit to the ordinances of human government because it’s the right thing to do (v. 5).

Scripture Study

Our distinction – 1 Pe. 1:3, 9; 2:8-10; Is. 8:14; Pr. 4:18-19; Ep. 5:8; Mt. 5:14-16; Jn. 3:18-19

Our citizenship – 1 Pe. 1:2, 4, 15, 17; 2:9, 11-13; Jn. 17:14-16; He. 11:13; Tit. 3:1

Our witness – He. 13:14; Jn. 14:2; 2 Ti. 3:14-17; 1 Pe. 2:14; Ro. 13:1-5

Conclusion

Clearly, the church is set apart in Christ. We are not of this world; we are distinct from it. Our citizenship is in heaven, and we are living in this world as heavenly citizens. Because of this, we believe and live differently from the world around us. Our Christ-like lifestyle and behavior sets us apart and serves as a powerful witness of the transforming power of the gospel.

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"The First Epistle"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Suffering with Christ”

Suffering was one of the apostle’s major themes in writing to the saints. God wanted them to understand why they were suffering, the need to suffer faithfully, and his ultimate goal in their suffering. So Peter wrote to console and to encourage the saints to press onward in the faith. In today’s lesson, we will consider what it means to suffer with Christ.

Key Verse

“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps” (1 Peter 2:21).

Lesson Summary

In John 15:18-19, Jesus said, “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.” These words of Jesus provide a backdrop for today’s lesson. Christ is our pattern. Jesus patiently suffered the shame of the cross giving his life for us, and he did so without sinning, complaining, reviling, or threatening others. When done wrong, he did not take matters into his own hands. Instead of retaliating against his enemies, he completely placed himself in the hands of God and trusted in his righteous judgment. He knew his Father was in control. Jesus therefore fully surrendered himself to do the will of God, and he allowed God to direct the outcome. As Christians, we are called to be like Christ – to follow his example and to walk in his footsteps. When we suffer according to the will of God, we are being like Jesus. This is what it means to be a true disciple and follower of Christ (Ph. 3:10). Accordingly, Peter explained that our Christian calling requires us to face suffering and trials with grace and endurance. Common sense teaches us that we will suffer for doing wrong. Even if we try to hold our head high and take it with dignity, it’s nevertheless shameful to suffer for doing wrong. But if we suffer patiently for doing right, then we are in good company and have the assurance of God’s approval, whether others accept us or not (1 Pe. 2:19-25; He. 11:35-39; 2 Ti. 2:12). Peter asked, “And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good” (1 Pe. 3:13)? The answer should be “no one.” Why would anyone oppose us for doing right? Yet the world actually despises and criticizes us for our righteousness. Nevertheless, doing what is good and right in God’s sight, especially in the face of opposition and persecution, will securely preserve his love and peace in our hearts (Mt. 5:43-45). “But and if ye suffer for righteousness sake, happy are ye” (1 Pe. 3:14). Peter was alluding to the beatitudes in Christ’s Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:10-12). Clearly, the saints of God will suffer, even as we do right, and in fact, because we do right. Righteousness goes against the world and its sinful ways which often provokes opposition against us. So Peter’s question in 3:13 actually asserts that nobody has a just cause to harm us or come against us when we do right. We should therefore live righteously before all men, so that none may justifiably accuse us. A righteous lifestyle is then an essential part of our Christian witness. By always doing what is right, and by suffering opposition with godly patience, we demonstrate our faith and confidence in God, and expose the error of our accusers (1 Pe. 3:13-18). However, we have no benefit in suffering if we turn and do wickedly. If we suffer for the sake of Christ, but then become bitter and resentful, complaining and rebelling, we have nothing but emptiness and spiritual loss in the end. But for the one who humbles himself to God in his trials and suffering, and keeps the faith with patience, he overcomes and ceases from sin (1 Pe. 4:1-2; Ro. 8:13; 1 Jn. 5:4-5; Ja. 1:3). As we go through “the fiery trial,” we are “partakers of Christ’s sufferings” (1 Pe. 4:12-14). Through it all, God is getting us ready for heaven – spiritually perfecting us – by accomplishing his will in our lives (4:1-2, 19; 5:10-11; Ja. 1:2-4).

Scripture Study

Following Christ’s example – 1 Pe. 2:19-25; Jn. 15:18-19; Ph. 3:10; He. 11:35-39; 2 Ti. 2:12

Maintaining a faithful witness – Mt. 5:10-12, 43-45; 1 Pe. 3:13-18

Reaching spiritual perfection – 1 Pe. 4:1-2, 12-14, 19; 5:10-11; Ja. 1:2-4

Conclusion

Sometimes, it’s difficult to imagine how suffering can possibly fit into God’s will and plan for our lives. But God is looking at things from an eternal perspective. His ultimate goal for us is taking us to heaven. Whatever we go through in this life in order to fulfill God’s will, we can be sure that our eternal reward will far outweigh our temporary trials.

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies "Essentials"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“The First Epistle”

Lesson Outlines

June 4

Topic: Respect and Honor

Texts: 1 Pe. 3:1-7; Ep. 5:21-33; Col. 3:18-19

Key Verse: 1 Pe. 3:2

Main Point: Respect and honor form the foundation of a strong marriage relationship that pleases the Lord.

June 11

Topic: Love One Another

Texts: 1 Pe. 1:8, 22; 3:8-9; 4:8-10; 1 Co. 13:1-5; Pr. 15:1; Ga. 5:13-15; Jn. 3:16

Key Verse: 1 Pe. 4:8

Main Point: We should value every member of the church, loving and serving one another.

June 18

Topic: Subjection and Humility

Texts: 1 Pe. 5:1-7; Ac. 20:28; Jn. 21:15-19; 2 Co. 11:28; Mk. 10:42-44; Ja. 3:1; Lu. 12:48; 1 Co. 4:1-4; Tit. 1:4-9; 2:7-8; 1 Ti. 3:1-7; He. 13:7, 17-18

Key Verse: 1 Pe. 5:5

Main Point: To have God’s favor among us, we should be submissive and humble toward each other.

June 25

Topic: Be Sober and Vigilant

Texts: 1 Pe. 5:5-10; 1:13; 4:7; 1 Th. 5:6-9; Mk. 13:32-37; Lu. 21:34-36; Ph. 4:6; Ep. 6:10-12; 2 Co. 10:3-4; Ja. 4:6-7, 10-11

Key Verse: 1 Pe. 5:8

Main Point: We will overcome the tactics of the devil if we remain sober and vigilant unto the coming of the Lord.

In this month of Faith-N-Focus, we will continue our study of Peter’s first epistle. We will look at various attributes of the committed Christian and see the benefits of these attributes at work in us. In teaching about authority and order in our relationships, Peter wrote about the marriage relationship. Respect and honor form the foundation of a strong marriage relationship that pleases the Lord. This, of course, is essential because strong families build a strong church.

Peter admonished the saints to love each other. But love is more than a sentiment; we show love toward others by our actions. How we treat others speaks volumes! Why is love so important in the church? Loving one another creates an atmosphere in the church where every member feels valued and finds significance. This is an atmosphere where people flourish and succeed.

God has provided leadership as a gift to the church. We are blessed to have leaders who follow the heart of God. The Lord is pleased when the members of the church cooperate with and submit to God’s leaders over them. Likewise, the Lord is pleased when church leaders submit to the members by fulfilling the responsibilities of ready service and the obligation of being a faithful example. The success of the church requires both good leaders and good followers. Submission and humility are key to this success: “Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility” (1 Pe. 5:5).

Finally, Peter concluded the first epistle by reminding the saints that Satan is a real, formidable foe. But we will overcome him if we remain sober and vigilant unto the coming of the Lord. Although we suffer as Christians and undergo Satan’s attacks, we are assured of “eternal glory” at the coming of Christ (1 Pe. 5:10). Let’s remain sober and vigilant.



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Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"The First Epistle"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“Respect and Honor”

Introduction

When the apostle Peter wrote about submission to authority, he pointed to Christ as our supreme example who perfectly submitted himself to the will of the Father (1 Pe. 2:13-14, 18, 23; He. 10:7). Then he wrote, “Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives” (1 Pe. 3:1). In today’s lesson, we will consider submission in the marriage relationship.

Key Verse

“While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear” (1 Pe. 3:2).

Lesson Summary

Peter taught subjection (or submission) by choice, not by force: the wife should choose to submit to her husband. The whole idea of submission suggests that husbands should have superior authority in the marriage relationship. This point is evident in 1 Peter 3:1, 5-6. Ultimately, the husband’s authority is based on God’s created order (1 Co. 11:7-9; 1 Ti. 2:12-14). Does the Biblical view of male authority harmonize with today’s world? Regardless of prevailing cultural norms and social trends, Peter asserted that men should have authority in the family unit. Why is the wife’s submission to her husband and his authority so vital and necessary? If her husband is not a believer, then she has both the opportunity and responsibility to bring him to Christ by putting their relationship into the Biblical order. Peter understood that many marriages are out of order. No doubt, even some cultures have put the marriage relationship out of order. Sin, of course, is the real issue that distorts the marriage relationship. So when the believing wife puts the husband-wife relationship in the Biblical order, showing proper respect to her husband and his authority in the home, her lifestyle (i.e. behavior or conversation) – “without the word” (v. 1) – can actually turn him to the Lord. If the husband is a sinner and does not regard the Scriptures, then her lifestyle of obedience to God’s Word will be a greater influence on him than her preaching at him. According to the old saying, “Her life may be the only Bible he ever reads.” Her “chaste conversation” in verse 2 is connected to Peter’s admonition regarding outward adornment in verse 3. Her “fear” (i.e. respect and reverence) in verse 2 is connected to Peter’s admonition to have “a meek and quiet spirit” in verse 4. Bottom line: When the husband experiences her respect and connects her submission to her faith in Christ, her humble attitude and godly actions will make a lasting impression on him. Again, why is the wife’s submission to her husband so vital and necessary? In verses 2-4, Peter emphasized an important contrast – outward versus inward. The Lord does not value outward adornment, but he places a high premium on inner virtues, and so should the church and its members. When women cultivate inward graces like respect and meekness, this reflects the mind of Christ, and God is well-pleased. Interestingly, Peter reflected back on the Old Testament, even prior to the Mosaic Law, lifting up the example of Sarah, Abraham’s wife, emphasizing her respect and reverence for her husband. Indeed, respect for others is built on the fear of the Lord. Sarah respected her husband and submitted to him because she feared the Lord and desired to please him. Being a woman of great faith, her voluntary submission to her husband adorned her with beauty and grace in God’s sight (vv. 4-6; He. 11:11). Today, Christian women who respect their husbands follow the pattern of holy women in the Scriptures. After calling the wives to submission, Peter then wrote to the husbands, saying, “Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered” (v. 7). Peter’s use of the word “likewise” when speaking to husbands suggests that he was still writing in terms of submission. How then are husbands to submit to their wives? How does authority submit? Having authority in the home does not relinquish the husband of his responsibility, but rather increases his obligation toward his wife. For husbands, submission means “giving honour unto the wife” (v. 7). His submission means valuing her as Christ values her, remembering that she is not only his wife but also his sister in Christ and fellow-heir of eternal life. The apostle Paul explained the husband’s submission to his wife in terms of his love and self-sacrifice for her: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it” (Ep. 5:25). He thus submits to her by honoring, loving, nourishing, and cherishing her (v. 29).

Scripture Study

Respect your husband – 1 Pe. 3:1-6; Ep. 5:22-24; Col. 3:18

Honor your wife – 1 Pe. 3:7, Ep. 5:25, 28-29; Col. 3:19

Conclusion

The Bible teaches submission in the husband-wife relationship (Ep. 5:21). Submission is not one-sided but is based on mutual love, honor, and respect (5:33). When husbands and wives understand and fulfill their God-given responsibilities in the marriage, their relationship will be stronger and pleasing to the Lord.

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"The First Epistle"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Love One Another”

Saying “I love you” is good, but demonstrating “I love you” is even better. We all need to know that we are loved; and we need to hear it often. But even more, we need to experience love in the way we are treated by others. Likewise, we need to show others that we love them by the way we treat them. In this way, we will be like Jesus who showed his love for us (Ro. 5:8). Let’s love one another.

Key Verse

“And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins” (1 Pe. 4:8).

Lesson Summary

In writing about relationships in the church, the apostle Peter taught the priority of love. Love undergirds our relationships in the church. First, we love the Lord (1 Pe. 1:8); and then we love one another. “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye **love one another** with a pure heart fervently” (v. 22). The apostle Paul explained that God’s kind of love is not self-promoting or self-seeking, but it gives itself to others (1 Co. 13:4-5). We need an abundance of this kind of love in the church in order to edify one another and please the Lord. On the basis of love, Peter called us to unity – to have one mind. When we have one mind, we will work together rather than pull apart. As members of the same body, we should be compassionate and show understanding and consideration to each other. The fellowship of the church should thus provide a context for strong and lasting friendships. We should be a people of mercy and kindness – “Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing” (1 Pe. 3:8-9). Proverb 15:1 says, “A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.” When someone says or does anything wrong toward us, giving the same treatment right back only creates more conflict. The apostle Peter was clear: rather than retorting with evil and railing, seek to bless. God wants Zion Assembly to be a fellowship of blessing, but it’s up to us to recognize and fulfill God’s blessing among us. We create the spirit of the church by our own attitude, words, and actions (see Ga. 5:13-15). We have already received the Word of God and the Holy Spirit; the church then is what we, the members, make of it. If we want the church to be a real fellowship of blessing, then we must develop an attitude and atmosphere of blessing one another within the church. Peter further gave emphasis to the priority of love in the church, saying, “And **above all things** have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins” (1 Pe. 4:8). Many aspects of the faith are vitally important to the church (e.g. doctrine, worship, giving, missions, and prayer); but if we lose sight of love, then we have lost the most essential asset of the church (1 Co. 13:1-3). Why is love so important? When God’s love prevails among us, we work out the problems and issues in our relationships (1 Pe. 4:8). Love helps us to show mercy, and to forbear and forgive, rather than keeping score and holding a grudge against another (v. 9). Again, Peter admonished us to love one another, saying, “As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (v. 10). We have received the gift of God’s great love and grace in Jesus Christ – “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (Jn. 3:16). Having received the abundance of God’s love in Christ, we then have an obligation to share his “manifold grace” with others.

Scripture Study

Love one another – 1 Pe. 1:8, 22; 1 Co. 13:4-5; 1 Pe. 3:8-9; Pr. 15:1; Ga. 5:13-15

Above all things – 1 Pe. 4:8-10; 1 Co. 13:1-3; Jn. 3:16

Conclusion

God’s love creates an atmosphere of blessing and success within the church – a fellowship where every member can flourish and find his/her significance in Christ. We should always remember: God’s church is not a church of programs, buildings, and agendas. Rather, his church is a church of love and truth comprised of flesh and blood members. This is not to say that programs, buildings, and agendas are irrelevant. On the contrary, all of these serve a vital purpose in the church. However, without love prevailing among God’s people, these things mean little and produce only superficial results (Ga. 5:13-15). We need each other to succeed. So let’s value every member, loving and serving one another in the church.

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"The First Epistle"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Subjection and Humility”

Peter knew the importance of church leaders and members cooperating and working together. Accordingly, in 1 Peter 5:5, the apostle wrote, “Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility.” In today’s lesson, we will understand why subjection and humility are so important in the church, both for leaders and laity.

Key Verse

“Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble” (1 Pe. 5:5).

Lesson Summary

In 1 Peter 5:1-4, the apostle admonished elders (e.g. pastors, bishops, and church leaders) to fulfill their leadership responsibilities in three ways. First, elders are responsible to feed the members of the church (v. 2). The apostle Paul gave similar instructions to the elders of Ephesus: “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Ac. 20:28). Elders (church leaders) are responsible to care for the church and its members as a shepherd tends his flock of sheep (Jn. 21:15-19; 2 Co. 11:28). Second, eldership involves oversight. Some people view church leadership as prestigious, but the Scriptures say something quite different. Although elders clearly oversee the church, Jesus explained that their leadership requires greater service (Mk. 10:43-44). With greater leadership comes greater responsibility and greater accountability to God for those we serve (Ja. 3:1; Lu. 12:48; 1 Co. 4:1-4). This responsibility never goes away. Spiritual leaders continually carry the burdens of the church and its members in their minds and hearts. In other words, committed church leaders carry a spiritual load of responsibility for the church. Peter reminded the elders to fulfill their ministry of leadership and their obligation of oversight **willingly** (1 Pe. 5:2). Third, eldership includes example. Peter explained that elders should not function as lords in the church, but they should provide an example (1 Pe. 5:3). “Lords over God’s heritage” implies ruling with force, whereas “examples” suggests leading by pattern (Mk. 10:42-43; Tit. 1:4-5; 2:7-8). Paul expounded the specific requirements of being a leader by example (Tit. 1:6-9; 1 Ti. 3:1-7). Based on these requirements, eldership involves a grave obligation because people follow leadership (good or bad). After speaking to the elders, Peter then gave instruction to the younger (1 Pe. 5:5). The responsibility of the elders is to feed and tend the sheep, to provide oversight, and to be examples for the members of the church; whereas the responsibility of the younger in the faith is to submit to the elders (i.e. to follow their leadership) and pray for them (v. 5; He. 13:17). Therefore, the success of the church requires faithful leaders and faithful followers. Yet Peter did not make the call to submission completely one-sided. Elders also submit: “Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility.” From this perspective, submission has more to do with attitude than position. Everyone is to be submissive whether in a leadership role or a follow-ship role because we must all submit to God’s Word and his will. This suggests that there are times when everyone, even the chief leader among us, must willingly submit to others in the church in order to please the Lord. Bottom line: To have God’s favor among us, we should be submissive and humble toward each other. What are the rewards of subjection and humility in the church? In Peter’s epistle, God promised to reward us in three ways. Elders will receive “a crown of glory” for their untiring labor of love in the church (v. 4). Moreover, the Lord will exalt us when we humble ourselves under his leadership (e.g. when we follow church leaders), remembering that God leads the church through human instruments (1 Pe. 5:6; He. 13:7). Finally, from the position of humility before almighty God, we should surrender everything to him, even all of our needs, having the assurance that God will care for us (1 Pe. 5:7).

Scripture Study

The responsibility of leadership – 1 Pe. 5:1-4; Ac. 20:28; Jn. 21:15-19; 2 Co. 11:28; Tit. 1:4-9; 2:7-8; 1 Ti. 3:1-7

The responsibility of laity – 1 Pe. 5:5; He. 13:17-18

God’s reward – 1 Pe. 5:4, 6-7; He. 13:7

Conclusion

Subjection and humility are for the good of the whole church. God wants his church to succeed in its mission, and success requires both leaders and followers working together. Truly, the church cannot rise above its leadership; but also faithful members can elevate the church through supporting the effort and influence of their leaders.

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"The First Epistle"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Be Sober and Vigilant”

Some people see the devil around every corner and blame demonic spirits for every oddity they encounter. Others downplay the reality of a spiritual archenemy and instead speak in terms of systemic evil and oppressive regimes rather than demonic spirits. Although the devil is not the direct cause of every problem in our lives, and while systemic evil and oppression are realities in the world, we must nevertheless avoid the pitfall of ignoring the powerful influences of Satan and his demonic spirits. In today’s lesson, let us consider Peter’s teaching in regard to our spiritual enemy.

Key Verse

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pe. 5:8).

Lesson Summary

In 1 Peter 5:8-9, the apostle gave a clear warning to the saints. When he wrote about keeping the faith through times of suffering, he taught the reality of Satan (“the devil”) reminding the church to be on guard against him. From this warning, we learn the following course of action: be sober and vigilant; and resist the devil. First of all, Peter used the imagery of a lion on the prowl to illustrate his point – “the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (v. 8). Lions are skilled hunters, and they roar to be sure; but they do not roar to alarm their victims. Instead, they are stalkers. They often attack weak animals (e.g. old, young, injured, sickly) and try to take their unsuspecting victims by catching them off guard. They approach their prey crouching down and moving in slowly; and when the victim is not expecting it, they suddenly attack. If the lioness is discovered before she makes her move, her attempts will likely prove unsuccessful. With this image in mind, Peter admonished the saints to be sober and vigilant. Soberness is the opposite of drunkenness. When someone is intoxicated, he is not in his right mind. His faculties are impaired, and his bodily functions are impeded. He thus becomes careless and irresponsible in his judgments and actions. Over and against the intoxicating influences of this world, we are called to spiritual soberness. Peter further connected soberness to being watchful unto the Lord’s coming, as did the apostle Paul in his teaching (1 Pe. 1:13; 4:7; 1 Th. 5:6-9). Of course, the apostles’ call to soberness and watchfulness is based on Jesus’ teaching in regard to his coming (Mk. 13:32-37). In brief, soberness indicates being alert as opposed to being apathetic and unaware. Likewise, vigilance refers to watchfulness. When keeping a vigil, one does not go to sleep but remains awake throughout the night. Falling asleep when you’re responsible to keep watch is nothing short of carelessness (Lu. 21:34-36). Peter’s point is clear: If we become careless spiritually, then we make ourselves vulnerable (i.e. an easy target) to the devil. Satan is real, and he always “walks about” looking for someone to devour (1 Pe. 5:8; Job 1:7; 2:2). As such, we should live in a state of alert and spiritual readiness for the coming of the Lord. This means we should “watch unto prayer” (1 Pe. 4:7; Mk. 13:33). Perhaps, prayer is our greatest spiritual tool for overcoming the tactics of our adversary. Peter said, “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Pe. 5:7). How else do we cast our care upon the Lord if not through prayer (Ph. 4:6)? Peter further admonished the saints to resist the devil – “Whom resist stedfast in the faith” (1 Pe. 5:9). Resisting speaks of our defense. When the enemy attacks, what should we do? We should defend ourselves with spiritual weapons – resisting in the faith – not fighting after the flesh (Ep. 6:10-12; 2 Co. 10:3-4). On this note, humility is essential in our fight against the enemy. Why? God gives grace to the humble; but he resists the proud (Ja. 4:6; 1 Pe. 5:5). There is no way for us to resist the enemy if God is resisting us! But we can resist and overcome Satan’s attack as we humble ourselves to God and submit one to another (5:5-6; Ja. 4:7, 10-11).

Scripture Study

Be sober and vigilant – 1 Pe. 5:8; 1:13; 4:7; 1 Th. 5:6-9; Mk. 13:32-37; Lu. 21:34-36

Pray – 1 Pe. 4:7; Mk. 13:33; 1 Pe. 5:7; Ph. 4:6

Resist the devil – 1 Pe. 5:9; Ep. 6:10-12; 2 Co. 10:3-4; Ja. 4:6-7, 10-11

Conclusion

We serve a God who loves us and cares for us. As saints of God, we are “called unto his eternal glory.” This is his plan for us, and our suffering cannot prevent God from fulfilling his will in our lives. In fact, our suffering only fits into his plan. His grace actually unfolds in our lives as we humble ourselves to God, especially in times of suffering. Even though the enemy attacks us, God is still fulfilling his ultimate will in our lives: “after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, [and] settle you” (v. 10). Therefore, we should remain sober and vigilant, always resisting the devil.

Faith -N- Focus

Adult Bible Studies

July 2017

“Epistles of Peter: The Second Epistle”

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

**Zion Assembly Church of God
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Epistles of Peter: The Second Epistle

Monthly Summary

In his second epistle, the apostle Peter wrote to settle and confirm the saints in their faith in Christ. This epistle is more pointed in its message and focus. It seems that Peter has one central thought in mind: a falling away. He wrote to encourage the saints in their victory over the world and challenged them to continue growing in the knowledge of the Lord. Peter urged them to remain diligent in their relationship with Jesus. He did not want them to become negligent after his death. So he carefully reminded them of their great salvation and their responsibility to remain faithful to Christ to the finish. In other words, we can be sure the Lord will do his part to save us if we will only do our part to remain faithful to him.

In calling the saints to diligence and remembrance (1:5, 10, 12), Peter reflected on his personal experience with Jesus in the holy mount when the Lord was transfigured. Peter was an eyewitness of Christ's honor and glory received from the Father. This was an awesome experience that Peter did not want to forget, and he wrote to remind the saints of what he heard that day: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (v. 17).

Nevertheless, Peter wrote to remind the saints of something greater than his personal experience on the holy mount with Jesus. He wanted to emphasize the importance of the Holy Scriptures in the revelation of Jesus Christ. Indeed, we all need to understand who Christ is from the Scriptures. In regard to the Bible, we need to see Jesus from cover to cover – only then will we truly be established in the faith. We need the Holy Ghost to reveal Christ to us from the Holy Scriptures so that we may be fully established in the truth.

July 2, 2017

“Precious Faith”

Main Point

We are partakers of God’s nature by the Holy Ghost who has established us in the precious faith and promises of Christ.

Introduction

The Bible refers to faith in various ways. For example, Jesus spoke of “great faith” (Mt. 8:10; 15:28) and of “little faith” (Mt. 8:26; 14:31; 16:8). But he also taught a tiny, mustard seed kind of faith producing huge results (Mt. 17:20). In today’s lesson, we will consider “precious faith.”

Key Verse

“Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pe. 1:1).

Lesson Summary

When we talk about the meaning of “faith,” we also have “faithfulness” and “*the* faith” in view (see 1 Pe. 1:9, 21; 5:9, 12). Faith is often defined as belief, whereas *the* faith includes the teachings of the Scriptures which we believe. Furthermore, faithful refers to someone who is full of faith – committed and dedicated to what (or whom) he believes. Being faithful is the proof of genuine faith; faithfulness means faith in action. The apostle Peter wrote his first epistle to saints whose faith was being proven through enduring trials, suffering, and attacks of Satan (see 1 Pe. 1:7; 2:20-21; 3:14, 17; 4:1, 12-14; 5:8-10). In the opening of his second epistle, he wrote “to them that have obtained like precious faith with us” (2 Pe. 1:1). Peter recognized that the saints had the same kind of faith as the apostles who had suffered many things for the name of Christ (Ac. 5:40-41; 12:1-5; 9:15-16; 2 Co. 11:23-27; 2 Ti. 3:12). Indeed, our faith in Christ becomes more and more precious to us as we persevere through trials and suffering for the sake of Christ (1 Pe. 1:7). Faith is then dynamic rather than static. It is developing and becoming over time. Our faith in God and all we believe concerning him become clearer, deeper, and more established as we continue in his righteousness and as we grow in his knowledge (2 Pe. 1:1-2). In this way, our faith in Christ is being perfected even as we grow in the faith and are proven faithful to God (Ja. 1:3-4; 1 Pe. 1:7). In writing about precious faith, Peter emphasized the knowledge of God and of Christ (2 Pe. 1:2-3). Faith in

Christ opens up to us a whole new world of understanding. Our faith in Christ unlocks the knowledge of God (i.e. unlocks the faith). Peter did not write about knowledge, like head-knowledge or human wisdom and understanding, but rather of knowledge from the perspective of divine revelation (consider Mt. 16:17). Hence, Peter said, “According as his divine power hath given unto us” (2 Pe. 1:3). His divine power is Holy Ghost power. “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you” (Ac. 1:8). Through faith in Christ we receive his Spirit (“his divine power”); and by his Spirit we obtain the depths of the knowledge of God, experiencing conviction, justification and regeneration, sanctification, the Holy Ghost baptism, and the untold dimensions of God’s love (Ep. 3:17-20; 1 Co. 2:10-14; 2 Pe. 1:3-4). As Peter explained, the Spirit has enabled us to experience life and godliness through personally knowing Jesus Christ by whom we know the glory and virtue of God (v. 3). As Jesus taught, “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you” (Jn. 16:13-14). Jesus said, “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me” (15:26). Simply put, the Spirit is the one who reveals Jesus to us and takes us into the depths of God’s knowledge. How does he do this? The Holy Spirit reveals unto us the “exceeding great and precious promises” of God’s Word (2 Pe. 1:4). These precious promises revealed by his Spirit are the very foundation of our precious faith. By these precious promises, we presently experience the nature of God (e.g. his love, mercy, life, holiness, joy, and peace), and we live in the expectation of his glory and power to come.

Scripture Study

Like Precious Faith – 2 Pe. 1:1-2; 1 Pe. 1:7; Ac. 5:40-41; 12:1-5; 9:15-16; 2 Co. 11:23-27; 2 Ti. 3:12; Ja. 1:3-4

Divine power – 2 Pe. 1:3-4; Ac. 1:8; Ep. 3:17-20; 1 Co. 2:10-14; Jn. 16:13-14; 15:26

Conclusion

We are partakers of God’s nature by the Holy Ghost who has established us in the precious faith and promises of Christ. Our faith today – the same faith as that of the apostles and saints in the New Testament – becomes more precious to us as we persevere through trials and remain faithful to Christ.

July 9, 2017

“Diligence”

Main Point

By growing in our relationship with God through diligently adding to our faith in Christ, we will secure our salvation and will never be lost.

Introduction

In the opening verses of Peter’s second epistle, the apostle established faith in Christ as the foundation of our relationship with God. Faith in Christ is our spiritual baseline, and on this foundation our relationship with God is built. Peter admonished the saints, saying, “Add to your faith.” As we will see, adding requires diligence on our part.

Key Verse

“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall” (2 Pe. 1:10).

Lesson Summary

Peter said, “Add to your faith” (2 Pe. 1:5). What is the implication of “adding” to anything? There is something more to be attained in Christ (consider also Ph. 3:12). Of course, faith in Christ and his atoning work on the cross is the beginning and foundation of our relationship with God. Although faith permeates this relationship at every level, there is so much more to our relationship with God than faith alone. Admittedly, we attain nothing in Christ without faith; and the fact that we do attain many spiritual blessings by faith is the confirmation that there is so much more to knowing God than faith alone. Many people see faith as the apex and height of their spirituality, rather than the basis. They profess bold faith in Christ, yet their relationship with God has gone no further than a public profession of faith. James exposed this error. He explained that works of righteousness will surely accompany genuine faith in Christ, confirming that real faith cannot stand alone (Ja. 2:20-24). Real faith in Christ will take us on a faith-journey of deepening relationship with God (e.g. Abraham, He. 11:8-19). But this journey requires diligence on our part – it’s not an accident. If we want a deeper relationship with God, then we must pursue it. We have the responsibility to nurture and cultivate our relationship with God by adding to our faith. Peter said, “Giving all diligence” (2 Pe. 1:5; see also v. 10). So diligence is something we must do. Why is our diligence

needed? Hebrews 11:6 says, “But without faith it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” Coming to God requires our faith, but his reward requires our diligence. Diligence is then essential to a growing relationship with God. Through faith and diligence, Peter suggested untold depths of relationship with God, admonishing us to add the following Christ-like attributes to our faith: virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brother kindness, and charity (2 Pe. 1:5-7). Peter began with faith and ended with love. Faith in Christ calls us to move forward in our relationship with God into the depths and heights of his great love. Faith then is the beginning of our relationship with God, but perfect love is the ultimate goal (Ep. 3:19; Mt. 22:37-40). By faith, we explore and experience the vast dimensions of God’s love (Ep. 3:17-18). The result of such diligence in our relationship with God is self-evident. When all of these attributes are working abundantly in us, we lack nothing spiritually. We have a faith that produces the fruit of Christ (i.e. the fruit of the Spirit, Ga. 5:22-23). All of these attributes are the evidence of God’s abiding presence in our lives. These attributes demonstrate his divine power working in us and his divine nature dwelling in us (2 Pe. 1:3-4). On the other hand, when these attributes are missing in a Christian, this indicates backsliding. The believer has lost his spiritual vision and direction. He has forgotten all that God did for him (v. 9). It has been said, “Those who do not learn from their past are bound to repeat it.” If a man loses sight of where he came from – “forgetting that he was purged from his old sins” – he will surely resort to his old, sinful ways. Peter’s point is clear. We avoid backsliding by adding to our faith – growing in grace (3:18) – and by attaining all we can in our walk with God. Adding to our faith requires diligence. By diligence, we secure our relationship with the Lord (1:10).

Scripture Study

Add to your faith – 2 Pe. 1:5-7; Ph. 3:12; Ja. 2:20-24; He. 11:8-19

Give diligence – 2 Pe. 1:5, 8-10; He. 11:6; Ep. 3:17-19; Mt. 22:37-40

Conclusion

Our relationship with God is two-sided: He relates to us, but we also relate to him. He has graciously saved us and called us to follow him. In our relationship, we can be sure of God’s faithfulness. Nevertheless, we bear the responsibility of establishing our calling and election in Christ through diligently adding to our faith. Through such diligence on our part, we will secure our salvation and will never fall.

July 16, 2017

“Don’t Forget”

Main Point

By focusing on our relationship with Christ through studying the Scriptures, we keep our spiritual mind alert and thereby defend ourselves against spiritual lethargy and backsliding.

Introduction

In his second epistle, the apostle Peter had spiritual growth and formation in mind. He wrote about “adding” to our faith, and he upheld a faith that cannot be shaken because it is so established (2 Pe. 1:5-10). As Peter explained, the key to spiritual victory is our diligence. In today’s lesson, we will see that “remembrance” is an important part of being diligent unto the coming of the Lord.

Key Verse

“Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance” (2 Pe. 1:13).

Lesson Summary

Relationship with Christ calls us to advance and develop in it (Ph. 3:12). Until the Lord takes us home, we should never stop growing spiritually. Jesus told Peter, “Follow me” (Mt. 4:19; Jn. 21:19, 22). To follow means moving forward after the pattern. As a servant and an apostle of Christ, Peter likewise taught us to follow the Lord’s example and footsteps (1 Pe. 2:21). Following Christ is not fixed and stationary, but it’s a dynamic, growing, life-changing, and formative relationship. As long as our spiritual motion is moving forward and upward in the love of Christ, we will do well spiritually. We can be assured of a place in his everlasting kingdom (2 Pe. 1:10-11). By following Jesus and pursuing him, we will arrive where he is seated – at the right hand of the Father (Col. 3:1-2; Jn. 14:3; 1 Th. 4:17). Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I now them, and they follow me” (Jn. 10:27). Nevertheless, Peter warned against backsliding or turning back (2 Pe. 2:20). It is possible for someone to “forget that he was purged from his old sins” (1:9). For this reason, Peter emphasized the need to remember the truth (vv. 12-15). Naturally speaking, many people suffer from various causes of memory loss: dementia, brain injury, stroke, emotional trauma, and so on. They can no longer recall people, events, and experiences that have shaped their lives. In many ways, the loss of memory inhibits their ability to

function normally and to relate to others. Fortunately, not all memory loss is permanent – it can be regained through therapy and medical treatment. Moreover, the Lord is our healer (1 Pe. 2:24; Is. 53:5). Similarly, Peter’s teaching suggests that we can have “spiritual memory loss” through neglecting our discipleship (2 Pe. 1:5, 10). Satan desires nothing more than to destroy the faith of a child of God (1 Pe. 5:8). Sin is destructive and deceptive, but Satan promotes sin as a positive, self-fulfilling experience (Ga. 6:7-8; Ge. 3:4-5). The spirit of this world gives us no support and encouragement in the faith; it actually works to undermine and destroy our faith in Christ (1 Jn. 2:15-17; Ep. 2:2). We must remain alert! Remembering the truth is one of the primary ways we remain on guard against the enemy and the wicked influences of this world. God wants us to remember our deliverance from sin and its bondage; but Satan wants us to forget it. After God miraculously delivered the Hebrews from Egypt, they actually desired to return. As soon as they escaped from Egyptian bondage – when the first trouble came along – the people immediately forgot the horror and misery of slavery, and longed to return to Egypt (Nu. 14:1-4). Clearly, remembrance is essential to keeping the faith. If we fail to discipline and consecrate ourselves in our relationship with Christ, we will eventually lose sight of the past from which God has delivered us, and also the future heavenly hope that awaits us (2 Pe. 1:9, 11). Remembering where we came from and where we are going gives us our spiritual perspective. By keeping the truths of God’s Word in the forefront of our mind and heart, we maintain the righteous perspective needed for resisting the enemy (Ps. 119:11; 1 Pe. 5:9; 1 Ti. 4:13-16).

Scripture Study

Following Christ – Ph. 3:12; Mt. 4:19; Jn. 21:19, 22; 1 Pe. 2:21; 2 Pe. 1:10-11; Col. 3:1-2; Jn. 14:3; 1 Th. 4:17; Jn. 10:27

Remembering the truth – 2 Pe. 1:9, 12-15; 2:20; 1 Ti. 4:13-16

Resisting the enemy – 1 Pe. 5:8-9; Ge. 3:4-5; Ep. 2:2; 1 Jn. 2:15-17; Ps. 119:11

Conclusion

Peter understood his responsibility for stirring up the remembrance of the saints (2 Pe. 1:12-15). This is an important part of leadership in the church. As the leaders and ministers of the church keep the members focused on the truths of God’s Word, we can be confident of the church’s readiness for the Lord’s coming (Ep. 5:26-27).

July 23, 2017

“Eyewitnesses”

Main Point

Our faith in Jesus Christ is affirmed by the eyewitness accounts of the apostles whose testimony is recorded in the pages of the New Testament.

Introduction

The Lord had already shown Peter that soon he would die (2 Pe. 1:14). Formally, this epistle was Peter’s final address to the saints. But even more, it was God’s final words to the church through Peter. Peter’s desire (and the Lord’s) was to leave them with truth they would never forget. The apostle wanted to establish the church in the faith long after he was gone. In today’s lesson, Peter gave the church his eyewitness.

Key Verse

“For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (2 Pe. 1:16).

Lesson Summary

In every society, children grow up hearing tales about real people. Some of the stories are true, but some are merely legends – fictional stories that embellish the characteristics of the person making him bigger than life. For example, Davy Crockett was a real person from East Tennessee who was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives. He was dubbed “king of the wild frontier,” but the story of his life was stretched into mythical tales and was then popularized by books, plays, and movies. However, when Peter wrote his epistle, he was explaining that this is not the case concerning the life of Jesus Christ (2 Pe. 1:16): the apostolic leadership of the church did not follow after fables (i.e. myths, legends, made-up stories). They did not preach the message of Christ based on fictitious stories being circulated in and around the church. Peter was asserting that they did not suffer persecution and even martyrdom for a fable (Ac. 12:1-4; Jn. 21:18-19). However, the apostle Paul said the last days would be a time of great deception, and he warned that people would actually turn from the truth to follow fables (2 Ti. 3:1, 13; 4:3-4). Like Paul, Peter also wrote to confirm the saints in the Truth, knowing that deception and deceivers were imminent after his death (2 Pe. 1:12, 14; 2:1-2). How did Peter know the validity of his claims concerning

Jesus? He was an eyewitness! The apostles declared and wrote the things that they witnessed with their own eyes and heard with their own ears (2 Pe. 1:16-18; Mt. 17:1-9; Mk. 9:1-9; Lu. 9:27-36). In 2 Peter 1:16, the word “eyewitnesses” has the idea of being up-close observers (i.e. people who can definitely confirm their claims firsthand). The twelve apostles saw, heard, and touched Jesus physically (1 Jn. 1:1-4). After Jesus’ resurrection, Thomas declared, “Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe” (Jn. 20:25). Being an eyewitness of Jesus’ ministry and resurrection was essential to the apostleship of the twelve disciples (Ac. 1:15-26). As an actual eyewitness, Peter wrote to declare that Jesus was indeed the Christ, the Son of God (2 Pe. 1:17). When Peter saw the glory of Jesus’ transfiguration, he was stunned with fear and spoke out of turn because he did not know what to say (Mk. 9:5-6). In response to Peter’s mistake, the Father gave honor and glory to Jesus by a voice from heaven confirming that Jesus was indeed the Son of God (Mk. 9:7-8; 2 Pe. 1:17-18). An audible voice – the voice of God – was heard by Peter, which said, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mt. 17:5). In 2 Peter 1:18, the apostle said, “And this voice . . . we heard.” Not only did Peter hear the voice, but also James and John were equally authoritative witnesses of this supernatural wonder (Mt. 17:1, 6). Their collective eyewitness corroborated each other’s individual experience and testimony. Each one saw; each one heard; and together they declared that Jesus is the Son of God.

Scripture Study

Jesus is not a fable – 2 Pe. 1:12, 14, 16; 2:1-2; Ac. 12:1-4; Jn. 21:18-19

Peter’s eyewitness – 2 Pe. 1:16-18; Mt. 17:1-9; Mk. 9:1-9; Lu. 9:27-36;

Ac. 1:15-26

Jesus is the Son of God – 2 Pe. 1:17-18; Mk. 9:5-8; Mt. 17:1, 5-6

Conclusion

The transfiguration of Christ must have been an almost unbelievable experience, much like Peter’s miraculous escape from prison (Acts 12:5-11). We should note, however, that Peter’s revelation of the Christ was not based on the transfiguration, but rather was confirmed by it, for he had already declared that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God prior to this experience (Mt. 16:15-16; Mk. 8:29; Lu. 9:20). In next week’s lesson, we will consider the ultimate foundation and source of Peter’s divine revelation.

July 30, 2017

“A More Sure Word”

Main Point

Our understanding of Jesus Christ is based on the Holy Scriptures as revealed by the Holy Spirit who abides in us.

Introduction

Jesus promised that signs will follow believers (Mk. 16:17-18). The Spirit works through believers, and he works, at times, in miraculous and powerful ways (Lu. 24:49; Ac. 1:8). Nevertheless, we do not follow after signs – spiritual manifestations and supernatural wonders – but we follow the Word of God which these signs and wonders confirm (Mk. 16:20). In today’s lesson, we will consider the Holy Scriptures and their primary importance to our faith in Jesus Christ.

Key Verse

“We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts” (2 Pe. 1:19).

Lesson Summary

The apostles knew Jesus firsthand: they walked with him, talked with him, heard his teachings, and saw his miracles. Their personal experiences, like the transfiguration, confirmed that Jesus was indeed the Christ, the Son of God (2 Pe. 1:17-18; Mk. 9:2-7; 1 Jn. 1:1-4). However, the multitudes to which they preached did not have this same firsthand experience of Jesus. Likewise, we today are not eyewitnesses of his earthly life and ministry. Therefore, our revelation of Jesus Christ must rest in something greater than our own personal experiences. In fact, Peter was emphasizing this very point in his second epistle. While personal experience is essential to our relationship with God, ultimately our faith must be rooted in something deeper than our own experiences. In 2 Peter 1:19-21, the apostle explained two interconnected sources of divine revelation: the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Spirit. In Matthew 16:13-20, when Jesus asked, “Whom do men say that I the Son of man am,” Peter declared, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” He did not receive this understanding through man’s wisdom, but God revealed this truth to him by his Spirit (v. 17; 1 Co. 2:10-14). Peter understood that Jesus was the Christ by nothing less than a divine revelation. This revelation of Jesus Christ is the very foundation of God’s church (3:11; Mt. 16:18; Ep. 2:19-22). But what was the basis for Peter’s revelation? He wrote: “We have also a more sure word of prophecy” (2 Pe. 1:19). Likewise, how do we know today that Jesus is the Christ? He is the one who fulfills the prophecies of the Scriptures (v. 20; e.g. Mt. 1:22-23; 2:4-6, 14-15, 17-18, 22-23; 4:12-16; 8:16-17; 12:14-21). He fulfilled and

will continue to fulfill the things which are written about him in the Old and New Testament Scriptures (Jn. 5:39; Mt. 24:35). No doubt, Peter's eyewitness of the transfiguration was itself an overwhelmingly powerful witness that Jesus was the Son of God. Nevertheless, we are not building our faith on Peter's wonderful experiences alone, but rather on the eternal Word of God and the authority of the Holy Scriptures. Like the other apostles, Peter's eyewitness experience of Jesus Christ only served to confirm the prophecy (i.e. the claims) of the Holy Scriptures. His experience was like adding another layer of understanding to the revelation of Christ. Peter therefore took his eyewitness to a deeper, more meaningful level – beyond the limits of his own spiritual experience – and interpreted his experience by the context of the written Word: “We have also a more sure word of prophecy” (2 Pe. 1:19). Thus, everything he saw and heard concerning Jesus Christ fulfilled and confirmed the things God had already spoken by the holy prophets (v. 21; Ac. 3:21; He. 1:1-2). Today, every true believer experiences Jesus Christ in a personal way, but his individual experience must reconcile and agree with the Holy Scriptures. Believers may have different kinds of spiritual experiences (e.g. spiritual gifts, dreams, visions, callings, and ministries) – and these should be encouraged – but regardless of personal experiences, the revelation of Jesus in God's written Word is the ultimate confirmation that settles who he is. We cannot make Jesus out to be who we desire or will him to be, but a divine understanding of Jesus Christ is based on the Holy Scriptures as revealed by the Holy Spirit abiding in us (Jn. 16:13-15; 17:17). On this note, we then can see how the Spirit and Word must agree. Peter explained that the Scriptures were inspired by the Holy Ghost, and not by man – “holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Pe. 1:20-21; see also 2 Ti. 3:15-16). The Holy Spirit inspired the Scriptures; he is the one who spoke the Word to and through the prophets. He then will not contradict the Word of God when he works in and through believers today (1 Jn. 5:7).

Scripture Study

The Word is revealed by the Spirit – Mt. 16:13-20; 1 Co. 2:10-14; Jn. 16:13-15; 2 Pe. 1:21; 2 Ti. 3:16

The Word is the foundation of our faith – 2 Pe. 1:19-20; 1 Co. 3:11; Ep. 2:19-22; Jn. 5:39; Mt. 24:35; Ac. 3:21; He. 1:1-2; Jn. 17:17; 2 Ti. 3:15

Conclusion

Peter desired for the saints to have confidence in Jesus: that he is indeed the Christ, the Son of God. He wanted the church to see Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of God's historic plan of salvation. Although we may not have a mountain top experience like Peter's, our revelation of Christ is nevertheless founded upon the same Holy Scriptures and inspired by the same Holy Ghost.

Faith -N- Focus

Adult Bible Studies

August 2017

“Epistles of Peter: The Second Epistle”

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

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Epistles of Peter: The Second Epistle

Monthly Summary

The content of Peter's second epistle speaks to the church today in many ways. He was not exaggerating when he warned the saints of coming deception in the last days. Peter's writing helps us to understand the unprecedented increase in false doctrine and religious charlatans permeating the world today.

He also exposes the fallacy of false teachers (self-proclaimed prophets) who seem to prosper in their efforts. The masses often follow their "damnable heresies," oblivious to the consequences of believing a lie. Amazingly, multitudes pour in financial support for people and projects, though they know little about them. The faithful who see the error in all of this are somewhat bewildered. Even some sinners know better. Nevertheless, for the moment, these imposters prosper. "Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith. But they shall proceed no further: for their folly shall be manifest unto all men, as theirs also was" (2 Ti. 3:8-9). Ultimately, God will surely judge them.

But until Christ comes, the church must contend for the faith. From time to time, the faithful must confront "false brethren" who infiltrate the fellowship of the church. These are men and women who initially comply with the authority of the church but eventually resist its doctrine and leadership.

Indeed, we are living in "perilous times" (2 Ti. 3:1). Many will be swept away by the swift currents of deception, but the faithful can remain steadfast by holding to the truth of God's Word and Spirit. Although deception and deceivers will continue to persist, God's church will persevere in the truth to the finish, and his faithful will experience final salvation at Christ's coming (Mt. 24:11-13; 1 Th. 5:8-9).

August 6, 2017

“Deception”

Main Point

The church must diligently contend for the faith, guarding against false teachers and false doctrine in the last days.

Introduction

In his second epistle, Peter closed the first chapter emphasizing the certainty of God’s Word – “We have also a more sure word of prophecy” (v. 19). He then warned against false teachers and deception in the last days – “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you” (2:1). In today’s lesson, we will consider Peter’s warning and look at the nature of deception.

Key Verse

“And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of” (2 Pe. 2:2).

Lesson Summary

False prophets have always been a threat to the unity and vision of the church. When the Holy Ghost was inspiring “holy men of God” to declare the Word of the Lord, false prophets were also speaking and bringing confusion to the people of God and leading souls astray (e.g. Jer. 28:1-17). Likewise, as we seek to declare the truth and fulfill the mission of the church, we will be faced with false teachers and false doctrines in these last days (Mt. 24:4-5, 11-14). False teachers are deceptive, working secretly (“privily”) – whether knowingly or unknowingly – to undermine the truth. They do not hold up banners declaring themselves to be false, but present themselves as “angels of light” and “ministers of righteousness (2 Co. 11:13-15). They cunningly “bring in damnable heresies” without reproof. Such deceivers disguise their agenda and steadily gain momentum over time until they have enough influence within the church to change the doctrine of Christ. However, Jesus Christ, the person, cannot be separated from his doctrine. Corrupting his doctrine distorts him. To reject his teachings is ultimately to reject and deny him. As Peter explained, the end result to all of this is destruction (2 Pe. 2:1). By teaching false doctrine, the deceivers bring God’s judgment on their own heads. Moreover, they lead others into the same judgment, for “many shall follow their pernicious ways” (v. 2). We should note in verse one that “damnable” and “destruction” come from the same Greek word, “*apoleia*.” This stresses the point that right doctrine (i.e. the truth) is crucial to the salvation of souls; whereas

“damnable heresies” ultimately produce the destruction of souls. Therefore, the church with its dedicated ministers must contend for the faith, teaching the truth consistently and diligently (1 Ti. 4:16; 2 Ti. 4:2; Jude 3). Likewise, we must all be discerning hearers. An important aspect of discerning the truth is “considering the end of their conversation” (He. 13:7; Pr. 14:12; 16:25). Clearly, we need to know the lifestyle of those who preach and teach among us (Mt. 7:15-20). The right message will produce righteousness and holiness in the messenger, whereas false teachers and deceivers leave a trail of destruction behind them. They are a reproach to the truth. Because of them, people speak against the truth (2 Pe. 2:2). Think about it. When a well-known preacher is involved in a scandal, it gives preachers, in general, a bad reputation; and when a church leader fails the Lord, it clouds trust in leadership. Peter further specified the evil motivation behind many false teachers – “Any through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you” (v. 3). In other words, the false teachers craft their message in order to get money; they manipulate people and market the gospel for personal gain. The apostle Paul taught that such greed (i.e. covetousness, “the love of money”) leads to destruction (1 Ti. 6:5-11; 2 Pe. 2:15-16; Jude 11). Sometimes, people do wrong and seem to get by with it. But Peter asserted that their judgment is certain and imminent. He declared God’s judgment against false teachers and deceivers by citing examples of God’s judgment against sin and rebellion: 1) the fallen angels, 2) Noah and the great flood, and 3) Sodom and Gomorrah. Just as God judged sin and rebellion in the past, he will continue to judge those who rebel against Christ and his doctrine.

Scripture Study

False teachers and false doctrine – 2 Pe. 2:1; Jer. 28:1-17; Mt. 24:4-5, 11-14; 2 Co. 11:13-15

Dealing with deception – 2 Pe. 2:2; 1 Ti. 4:16; 2 Ti. 4:2; Jude 3; He. 13:7; Pr. 14:12; 16:25; Mt. 7:15-20

Motivated by greed – 2 Pe. 2:3, 15-16; 1 Ti. 6:5-11; Jude 11

Conclusion

What do we learn from Peter’s warning? Readily accepting any message without first critiquing its content is unwise (Mk. 13:5). We should remain on guard against deceivers and be a discerning hearer. To avoid deception and its destruction, we must know the truth for ourselves by the Word and Spirit (2 Ti. 2:15; Jn. 16:13).

August 13, 2017

“God’s Judgment”

Main Point

False teachers may seem to succeed in their deceptive ways, but they are already reserved for God’s judgment and punishment, except they repent.

Introduction

An alluring side to deception is the way false teachers often seem to prosper as they propagate their doctrines. Rather than sacrificing for the gospel, they often become wealthy and affluent by it. So there is an aura of apparent blessing that hangs over them, suggesting that those who follow their ways will also prosper (2 Pe. 2:2). But the apostle Peter declared God’s coming judgment against false teachers and against those who follow them (v. 3).

Key Verse

“The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished” (2 Pe. 2:9).

Lesson Summary

Peter gave three examples of God’s judgment against sin and rebellion in order to establish God’s certain judgment against false teachers and those who follow them, namely: 1) the fallen angels, 2) Noah and the great flood, and 3) Sodom and Gomorrah. First, God did not spare the angels who rebelled against him, but rather reserved them for his coming judgment (Re. 12:7-9; 2 Pe. 2:4; Mt. 25:41; Re. 20:10). Clearly, angels were created with the freedom of choice. But some of them came under the influence of Satan’s rebellion; and thus sinning against God, they were “cast down to hell” and “delivered into chains of darkness” (2 Pe. 2:4). They are thus bound for God’s judgment which cannot be reversed. Second, God did not spare the “old world” for it was “the world of the ungodly” (v. 5). What was the extent of their ungodliness? Genesis 6:5 says, “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” Humanity’s wickedness was so extreme that people were completely and continually caught up in evil thinking and practices. So God could no longer spare the human race. Genesis 6:7 reads, “And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the

air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.” When man’s wickedness escalated to the point that God could no longer tolerate it, he destroyed man. “But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord” (Ge. 6:8). God determined to start over with a remnant of eight people: Noah, his wife, and his three sons with their wives. When God judged the wickedness of Noah’s day with the great flood, everyone perished except the righteous. It’s hard to imagine a world where only eight people were judged as righteous by God. Nevertheless, Jesus used the example of Noah and the great flood when speaking of his coming again (Mt. 24:37-39; Lu. 17:26-27). Finally, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah serve as an example of God’s judgment against sin and rebellion. In Noah’s day, judgment was by water, but God promised to never again destroy the world by flood, placing the token of the rainbow in the sky (Ge. 9:8-17). However, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire warns of the coming judgment against the ungodliness of this world (2 Pe. 2:6; 3:6-7). Not even ten people were found righteous in Sodom; only Lot and his two daughters escaped God’s judgment in the end (Ge. 18:16-33; 19:12-17, 26). Like Noah, Lot was a “just” and “righteous” man living among a wicked, lawless people. Their “filthy” ways made living in Sodom unbearable (2 Pe. 2:7-8). When Peter wrote of God’s judgment against the “ungodly” and their “unlawful deeds,” he was citing examples before the law under Moses and referring to an inherent law in mankind (see Romans 2:11-15). In other words, all people know that certain things are wrong (e.g. stealing and murder) because man is born with a moral conscience, although he may override it. Clearly, God judged the people because they seared their consciences and hardened their hearts, and thus were no longer able to discern the difference between right and wrong (1 Ti. 4:1-2; He. 3:12-13; Ro. 1:28).

Scripture Study

Fallen angels – 2 Pe. 2:4; Re. 12:7-9; Mt. 25:41; Re. 20:10

The flood – 2 Pe. 2:5; Ge. 6:5-8; 9:8-17; Mt. 24:37-39; Lu. 17:26-27

Sodom and Gomorrah – 2 Pe. 2:6-8; 3:6-7; Ge. 18:16-33; 19:12-17, 26

Conclusion

In the face of God’s coming judgment, we have a strong consolation in Christ. The Lord knows how to keep the righteous from coming under his judgment. He gives us the grace to overcome the world’s temptations and deceptions. We need not fear. The Lord wants us to understand that he will deliver us and bring us through to victory, even as he reserves the unjust for judgment and punishment (2 Pe. 2:9).

August 20, 2017

“Spots and Blemishes”

Main Point

God’s church is required to discipline members who rebel against its doctrine and government.

Introduction

Presently, the church is imperfect having “spots” and “blemishes” (2 Pe. 2:13; Ep. 5:27; 3 Jn. 9-10; Jude 12). Sometimes, “false teachers” and “false brethren” enter the fellowship of the church undetected (2 Pe. 2:1; Ga. 2:4; Jude 4). In his second epistle, the apostle Peter identified them describing their character (2:10-16). In today’s lesson, we will explain the essential characteristics of these spots and blemishes.

Key Verse

“And shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you” (2 Pe. 2:13).

Lesson Summary

When writing about the judgment of the unjust, particularly the false teachers, Peter generalized them in two ways: those who “walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness,” and “despise government” (2 Pe. 2:10). These unjust ones “walk” (live) in the pollution of fleshly, carnal desires, yet they claim to walk in the light of Christ and presume to be teachers of the just. In other words, their outward persona does not match their inward motives. Jesus taught, “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves” (Mt. 7:15). These false prophets teach damnable heresies and promote practices contrary to sound doctrine, corrupting themselves and those who follow them (2 Pe. 2:1-2). In verse 12, Peter likened these deceivers to “natural brute beasts” (see also Jude 10). They are not led by the Spirit and wisdom of God; rather they live out of a base, carnal nature that drives them. They are spiritually corrupt and have become brutish in their thinking. Yet they continue to exert their influence in the fellowship of the church (2 Pe. 2:13). More specifically, Peter charged them with adultery and greed (vv. 14-16). We should remember the art of deception is subtlety; it is hidden from plain view, so that things really are not as they appear on the surface. Peter emphasized the hidden

motives and secret desires that drive their teachings and practices, using phrases like: “having **eyes** full of adultery,” “an **heart** they have exercised with covetous practices,” and “who **loved** the wages of unrighteousness” (vv. 14-15). So whether or not they are caught in the act of adultery or in an immoral scandal, they are nevertheless caught up in the carnal desires of such wickedness. Therefore, their doctrine and corresponding practices will not lead to a lifestyle of righteousness and holiness, but rather of uncleanness and iniquity, resulting in spiritual and eternal death (Ro. 6:18-23; 8:5-8). Moreover, these unjust ones “despise government” and “speak evil of dignities.” Peter described them as “presumptuous” and “self-willed” (2 Pe. 2:10; Jude 8). They are rebellious and disrespectful of spiritual authority, particularly against the leadership of the church, and ultimately against the lordship of Jesus Christ. When people are unwilling to submit to authority in the church, this indicates a major spiritual problem (He. 13:7, 17). Government and order are God’s way. But when people become presumptuous and self-willed in their thinking, they tend to disrespect and disregard the moral and spiritual authority of the church (Ro. 16:17-18). Of course, this is a dangerous departure from the faith of Christ. Often a critical attitude toward leadership is what makes people cynical and bitter concerning spiritual matters. Therefore, opening the door to a presumptuous, self-willed attitude leads to spiritual defilement and pollution (Hebrews 12:15). Even angels know better than to rail against spiritual authorities; yet these despisers ignorantly speak out against authority to their own spiritual demise (2 Pe. 2:11-12).

Scripture Study

Walking after the flesh – 2 Pe. 2:10, 13-16; Mt. 7:15; Ro. 6:18-23; 8:5-8
Despising government – 2 Pe. 2:10-12; Jude 8; He. 13:7, 17; Ro. 16:17-18; He. 12:15

Conclusion

A major deception is that Christians “cannot cease from sin” (consider 2 Pe. 2:14). This error promotes tolerance among Christians in regard to sinning. Accordingly, many preach and teach a misleading view of God’s grace (Jude 3). Sinners, of course, walk after the flesh, but God’s grace enables believers to cease from sin and to live holy (1 Pe. 1:15; 1 Th. 5:23). Jesus Christ has the authority to free us from the power and corruption of sin (Jn. 8:34-36). Therefore, if church members rebel against the doctrine and government of the church, the faithful (spiritual) members have an obligation to discipline them (Ga. 6:1; 1 Co. 5:11-13).

August 27, 2017

“Follow the Truth”

Main Point

We, as members of God’s church, must continue to follow the truth to the finish in order to be saved.

Introduction

We are living in a day of great deception. In fact, deception in the last days will be so alluring that many professing Christians will be turned away from the truth to follow error and corruption. Like the apostle Paul, Peter wrote to the saints warning them of this falling away (2 Pe. 2:21; 2 Ti. 4:3-4). In today’s lesson, we will expose those who “have forsaken the right way” (2 Pe. 2:15).

Key Verse

“For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them” (2 Pe. 2:21).

Lesson Summary

In John 4:7-14, Jesus spoke of his living water – the life of his Spirit – indwelling those who come to him and drink. But Peter described the last days’ deceivers as “wells without water” (2 Pe. 2:17). They are dry wells offering false hope to thirsty souls. They are clouds which produce no rain (Jude 12). They blow boisterously across the sky but cannot refresh us. Likewise, deceivers have an impressive appearance. Their words sound weighty and powerful, but they lack real, spiritual substance (2 Pe. 2:18). Paul also wrote about the “enticing words of man’s wisdom” which appeal to the natural man but lack the power of God (1 Co. 2:4-5, 13-14). In verse 18, Peter used the language of temptation to describe their deceptive approach. Their words “allure” their listeners by appealing to the lusts and sensual desires (wantonness) of the flesh (cf. “enticed,” Ja. 1:14). Like any predator, deceivers devour those who are naïve and weak, spiritually speaking. Their message sounds good to those who are unstable, unsettled, and immature in the faith (2 Pe. 2:18; 1 Co. 3:1-3). For this reason, the church must emphasize the doctrine of sanctification – the crucifixion of the old sin nature – along with consecration and being set apart to God (Ga. 2:20; 5:24). New converts must quickly be rooted and grounded in the faith

(Col. 1:23; 2:7). Although deceivers promise spiritual liberty, even salvation from sin, they admittedly continue in sin (Jude 4). What corruption and confusion! Regardless of a man's profession of faith, if he walks in sin fulfilling the works of the flesh, then he is yet a sinner – he is in bondage to sin (2 Pe. 2:19; Ga. 2:18; Ro. 6:15-16). Thus, deceivers may declare a promising message and even gain a significant following, but they cannot lead converts into the truths and depths of God's Word and Spirit. What then is the danger in following corrupt teachers? Peter's warning is unmistakable: a falling away. In verses 20-22, he clearly defined backsliding or turning back. In verse 20, note the following phrases: "For if after they have escaped the pollutions;" and "they are again entangled therein, and overcome." Peter indicated someone returning to the same spiritual bondage from which he was once liberated. How is this possible? In our faith, we either move forward in Christ or we turn back, whether we realize it or not (see Ex. 14:10-15; Nu. 13:30-14:4; He. 3:12-19). In verse 21, he made the distinction between those who have known and turned from the truth as opposed to those who have never known the right way. Those who have never followed Jesus are lost, but Peter placed a heavier burden of guilt and condemnation on those who have known but turned from the truth (cf. He. 10:29). Indeed, how do we bring to repentance someone who has rejected the truth in order to follow a damnable heresy, even though he may claim salvation? In verse 22, Peter described two filthy images in order to strengthen his warning against those who turn back to sin: the dog licking up his vomit, and the washed pig returning to the mud hole.

Scripture Study

An alluring message – 2 Pe. 2:17-19; 1 Co. 2:4-5, 13-14; 3:1-3; Ja. 1:14
A falling away – 2 Pe. 2:20-22; Ex. 14:10-15; Nu. 13:30-14:4; He. 3:12-19; 10:29

Conclusion

In the last days, deceivers will preach and teach doctrine contrary to the Word of God, drawing away converts from the truth and the source of their freedom and salvation in Jesus Christ (2 Th. 2:13; Jn. 8:31-32). We must therefore take heed, for Satan will present himself as an angel of light and his false teachers as prophets of light (2 Co. 11:13-15). Although deception and deceivers will continue to persist, God's church will persevere in the truth to the finish, and his faithful will experience final salvation at Christ's coming (Mt. 24:11-13; 1 Th. 5:8-9).

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Epistles of Peter: The Second Epistle

Monthly Summary

Peter closed his second epistle by addressing the doctrine of “last things” (i.e. eschatology, the study of end time events). Specifically, he wrote to the saints about the coming of Christ and the events that will follow his coming. Peter knew the last days would present a great challenge to the church because deception will abound in the world. Deceivers will scoff at the teachings of the church. The worldly system will reject the true message of Christ’s coming. Jesus will come like “a thief in the night,” and the majority will be spiritually unprepared and eternally lost, because Jesus is coming for a holy, virtuous bride.

Clearly, spiritual readiness is a primary reason for Peter writing this epistle. We must be established in the teachings of God’s Word in order to endure the world’s opposition. As the world’s pressure intensifies, we must be able to defend the faith from the Scriptures. As we await Christ’s coming, we should remain diligent in our relationship with the Lord, walking in righteousness and holiness. The majority of the world will reject the truth of Christ’s coming and will go after the spirit of antichrist. Peter thus warned the saints to remain steadfast to avoid “being led away with the error of the wicked” (2 Pe. 3:17).

Peter emphasized the certainty of Christ’s coming. We do not know when he will come, but we must know (i.e. will be fully persuaded) that he is definitely coming in God’s own time. Until then, we have a great opportunity and a grave responsibility to proclaim the gospel of salvation to the ends of the earth. This means reaching our neighbor and reaching the nations. We should remain steadfast in the faith in order to complete our mission in the world.

September 3, 2017

“Believe God’s Word”

Main Point

We must resist the opposition of the enemy through faith in God’s Word.

Introduction

The apostle Peter wanted the saints to keep a right attitude in the face of suffering and opposition. He encouraged them to think about their circumstances from the perspective of God’s Word (2 Pe. 3:1-2). In difficult times, the enemy will surely challenge our thinking and tempt us to question God’s faithfulness. But we must keep our heart and mind firmly established in Christ by focusing on the teachings and promises of the Holy Scriptures (v. 2). In today’s lesson, Peter admonished the saints to believe the Word of God.

Key Verse

“That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour” (2 Pe. 3:2).

Lesson Summary

The world is filled with diverse messages: there are many religions and philosophies, and all of them have something to say. If we allow the “words” and “commandments” of this world to dictate our thinking, we will adopt a spiritually-confused and corrupt mindset. In 2 Peter 3:1-7, the apostle delineated two major lines of thought: the world is speaking; but God is also speaking. Of course, the spirit of antichrist is speaking through the world, but Christ and his Spirit are speaking through the church (1 Jn. 4:1-6). The message of God’s church focuses on being ready for the coming of the Lord. Jesus said, “I come quickly” (Re. 22:7, 12, 20; see also 1 Th. 5:1-9). He warned, “Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come . . . Therefore be ye also ready for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh” (Mt. 24:42-44). Moreover, Jesus taught the parable of the wise and foolish virgins: the wise were ready for the bridegroom at his coming, but the foolish were not prepared when he came (25:1-12). Jesus concluded the parable by saying, “Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh” (v. 13). The church is “getting ready to leave this world.” But scoffers in the last days will say, “Where is the promise of his coming?” (2 Pe. 3:4). This worldly mindset rejects Christ

and refuses the authority of the Holy Scriptures in order to follow after its own sinful desires (v. 3; 2 Pe. 1:4; 2:10, 14, 18). Accordingly, worldly-minded people deny God's historical acts and judgments recorded in the Bible, for example, God's judgment in the days of Noah (2 Pe. 3:5-6; Ge. 6:17-22; 7:11-12, 17-24; Mt. 24:35-39; Lu. 17:26-27). Peter labeled this worldly mindset as "willingly ignorant" in a time when the gospel will permeate the nations (2 Pe. 3:5; Mk. 16:15; Mt. 24:14). Hence, people will choose to remain in spiritual darkness to their own destruction. Jesus said, "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (Jn. 3:19). Peter thus admonished the saints to believe the Word of God over against the rising deception in the last days. Christ's coming will bring salvation to the faithful; but his coming will also bring certain judgment against false teachers, spots and blemishes, those who cannot stop sinning, and scoffers, to name a few (2 Pe. 2:1, 13-14; 3:3). Moreover, God's coming judgment against this world will not feature another great flood upon the earth, but rather he will judge this present world by fire (3:7; Ge. 9:8-17; Lu. 17:28-30). The same Word of God that created the world has the power and authority to bring judgment against it (Jn. 1:1-3; Ep. 3:9; Mt. 28:18; Jn. 5:27). Fortunately, God's judgment is reserved (postponed) until the end; it is held back for the present time (Mt. 24:36; Ac. 1:7). Until then, the church has a great responsibility and opportunity to declare the truth of Christ's coming and judgment. We need to be ready, and we need to awaken and make ready as many souls as possible.

Scripture Study

The Lord is coming – 2 Pe. 3:1-4; Re. 22:7, 12, 20; 1 Th. 5:1-9; Mt. 24:42-44; 25:1-13

Judgment is coming – 2 Pe. 3:5-7; Ge. 6:17-22; 7:11-12, 17-24; Mt. 24:35-39; Lu. 17:26-30; Jn. 3:19; 5:27

Conclusion

Jesus Christ (the Word of God; our Creator) plainly declared that he will come again to receive us to himself (Jn. 14:3). "And so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Th. 4:17). But as Peter indicated, Christ's coming will also bring God's judgment upon this ungodly world (2 Pe. 2:9; 3:7). The only one who stands between the world and its judgment is Jesus. He is the Word who is holding everything together until the Father's appointed time (He. 1:1-3; Col. 1:16-17). Scoffers and deceivers will surely arise in the last days, but we must resist their opposition by placing our faith in God's Word.

September 10, 2017

“The Day of Salvation”

Main Point

The Lord’s coming and judgment is delayed because God is longsuffering and merciful to sinners.

Introduction

We live in a sinful, wicked world, much like the conditions of Noah’s day. “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Ge. 6:5). No doubt, if not for the mercies of God, he would bring immediate judgment upon this world. But the Lord’s coming judgment is delayed because God is longsuffering and merciful to sinners. “The day of the Lord” is surely coming; but for now, we are living in “the day of salvation” (2 Co. 6:2; Is. 49:8).

Key Verse

“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pe. 3:9).

Lesson Summary

The coming of the Lord and his judgment was the message of the prophet Enoch at the beginning of human history: “And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him” (Jude 14-15). From the beginning, Enoch saw the day of the Lord at the end (Mt. 24:14; 28:20). Peter explained that scoffers will mock in the last days, saying: “Where is the promise of his coming?” (2 Pe. 3:4; see Jude 16-18). What would happen if the coming of the Lord was today? Billions of souls, including the scoffers, would be unprepared and eternally lost. Fortunately, the Lord’s coming and judgment will be in God’s own time (Mt. 24:36). Peter wrote, “But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Pe. 3:8). The apostle established the doctrine of the Lord’s coming on the basis of God’s unique timetable: one day is like 1000 years; and 1000 years is like one day. Fallen mankind scoffs because he does not understand time from God’s eternal perspective (Ps. 103:14-17; 93:2). To rightly understand the Lord’s coming and judgment, we must first

understand that God's timetable is completely different from our own. His perspective of time and of human events is infinitely more expansive than our own limited point-of-view (Is. 46:9-10). Peter's explanation of God's time clarifies why the Lord is not negligent in regard to his delayed coming. Moreover, the Lord's coming is delayed because God is longsuffering and merciful to sinners. He does not want people to perish, but rather to repent of their sins and be saved (2 Pe. 3:9). Therefore, when the wicked scoff because Jesus has not already come, they actually are scoffing at God's saving grace. Every day that the Lord's coming is delayed affords another opportunity for people to repent and escape God's wrath (Ep. 5:6; Col 3:6; Ro. 2:4-5). Therefore, based on Peter's explanation of God's time, some may think the Lord is taking forever to come, that is, from the human perspective; but from God's eternal, longsuffering perspective, the Lord's crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension was only a couple of days ago. Peter wrote of Christ's coming, the day of the Lord, the day of God's judgment, and the destruction of the heavens and the earth (i.e. the new heavens and the new earth) somewhat concurrently (see 2 Pe. 3:4, 7, 10). Of course, Peter was not writing to give us a timeline of end-time events, but rather he wrote to warn and ready us for the coming of the Lord. Jesus will come like a thief in the night (1 Th. 5:2; 2 Pe. 3:10; Mt. 24:42-44). At his coming, the rapture of the church will usher in a new day for the children of God – a great millennial day (1 Th. 4:16-17; Re. 20:6). Thus, as Peter explained, the day of the Lord is not a single 24-hour day, but it encompasses 1000 years of Christ's earthly rule and reign to be followed by the new heavens and the new earth (Re. 21:1).

Scripture Study

The Lord's coming – 2 Pe. 3:4; Jude 14-18; Mt. 24:14, 36; 28:20

God's perspective – 2 Pe. 3:8-9; Ps. 103:14-17; 93:2; Is. 46:9-10

The day of the Lord – 2 Pe. 3:10; 1 Th. 5:2; Mt. 24:42-44; 1 Th. 4:16-17;
Re. 20:6

Conclusion

We eagerly expect Christ's coming. For the righteous, his coming promises glory and victory. For sinners, the day of the Lord will bring great tribulation. Moreover, Christ will judge the ungodly, and he will ultimately destroy this present world. The day of the Lord is surely coming; but for now, we are living in the day of salvation (2 Co. 6:2; Is. 49:8). Therefore, let us be diligent to proclaim the blessings of salvation to a lost and dying world.

September 17, 2017

“Living Holy and Godly”

Main Point

We must live holy and godly in this present wicked world because Christ is coming for a holy people set apart to God.

Introduction

What was Peter’s purpose in writing about the coming of the Lord? He was not giving us a chronological timeline of the last days. Instead, Peter gave us a clear warning. This world as we know it will one day pass away – it will be no more – for it will come under the judgment of God (2 Pe. 3:10). Peter’s point was readiness. We must be prepared when Jesus comes or calls. This is the message of the Scriptures because the Lord does not want anyone to perish (v. 9).

Key Verse

“Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless” (2 Pe. 3:14).

Lesson Summary

Jesus taught, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Mt. 24:35). Based on Christ’s teaching in 2 Peter 3:11-12, the apostle posed a question to provoke the saints: “What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?” Holiness is God’s standard for his church, here and now, as we prepare for Christ’s coming (Tit. 2:12-13). We are not holy merely because the church endorses the truth, but rather holiness is a life of obedience to God that stems from a sanctified heart – a heart set apart to God (1 Pe. 1:14-16). After all, what good are right beliefs in the church without right practices among the members of the church? Knowing the coming judgment of God upon this world – “Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved” – we should make no room in our lives for sinful flesh (Ro. 13:14). Where does this leave professing Christians who claim salvation yet find their fulfillment in the things of this world? Surely they should follow wholeheartedly the way of Christ. Peter leaves no room for those who straddle both sides of the fence. He does not blur the line between the church and the world. The church will be saved, but this world will surely perish. There simply is no in-between. The first part of Peter’s question, “what manner of persons ought ye to be,” speaks to our lifestyle; and the second part relates to our

perspective: “Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God” (2 Pe. 3:12). Each day, when we awake and go about our responsibilities, what should be our predominant focus in life? As Christians, we should live in the earnest expectation of Christ’s coming. Both of these aspects of our faith – the obligation to be holy and the expectation of Christ’s coming – will change our priorities and the way we live. Peter wrote of the coming destruction of this present heaven and earth to emphasize that we must be a holy people: “Wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat” (v. 12; v. 10). Although God will judge sinners and destroy this present world, the saints of God look for the promise of new heavens and a new earth. The clear difference between this present world and the world to come is indwelling righteousness (v. 13). Whereas the present world contains every kind of imaginable sin and wickedness, the future world – the new world – will only contain righteousness (Re. 21:1, 8, 27). For this reason, Peter admonished the church, the beloved, saying: “Seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless” (2 Pe. 3:14). An important key in being ready for the coming of the Lord is *looking*: 1) “looking for and hasting unto the coming . . .” (v. 12); 2) “look for new heavens and a new earth” (v. 13); and 3) “seeing that ye look for such things” (v. 14). Why is looking for Christ’s coming so important? Forgetful Christians – those who lose their heavenly, spiritual focus (Col. 3:1-5) – become worldly-minded and sinful. As Jesus taught, if we are not looking for him when he comes, then we will be caught unaware and condemned with the wicked (Luke 21:33-36).

Scripture Study

Living holy in this present world – 2 Pe. 3:11-12; Tit. 2:12-13; 1 Pe. 1:14-16; Ro. 13:14

Looking for the world to come – 2 Pe. 3:12-14; Re. 21:1, 8, 27; Col. 3:1-5; Lu. 21:33-36

Conclusion

Peter’s admonition to be ready for Christ’s coming centers on “diligence” – “Be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless” (2 Pe. 3:14). This admonition takes us back to 2 Peter 1:10 – “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.” Let us, therefore, be diligent to live holy and godly in this present wicked world because Christ is coming for a holy people set apart to him alone.

September 24, 2017

“Steadfastness”

Main Point

The church will fulfill her missionary purpose through remaining steadfast in the faith to the finish.

Introduction

Each year that passes without the coming of the Lord has afforded us another year of opportunity to win lost souls to Christ. Although we are saved, how many people in our communities would eternally perish if Jesus came this very second? Peter explained that Christ’s so-called “slackness” in coming again is nothing other than God’s longsuffering disposition toward humanity. Christ is most assuredly coming again in God’s own time. But until that day and hour, we should remain steadfast in the faith and win as many lost souls to Jesus as possible. In today’s lesson, we will focus on fulfilling our missionary purpose in the world.

Key Verse

“Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness” (2 Pe. 3:17).

Lesson Summary

What was Peter’s rationale in explaining the delayed coming of the Lord? He first wrote that the Lord is longsuffering (2 Pe. 3:9). Then he said, “And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation” (v. 15). Until the Lord comes, we, the church, have a missionary purpose that centers on reaching billions of lost souls with the gospel of salvation (Mk. 16:15-16). It’s an enormous, incredible task. Our mission is so extensive it encompasses “all the world,” yet our mission is so specific it targets “every creature” (v. 15). Since we will never know the time of Christ’s coming, but only the signs, exactly when he will come is somewhat irrelevant for the saints (13:32-37). The timing of Christ’s coming should not trouble us, as long as we are watching and praying until he comes. What should truly concern us is fulfilling our mission in the world because souls in spiritual darkness depend on us to reveal the light of Christ’s salvation (Jn. 12:46; Mt. 5:14). We should remember that the mission of the church was initially given to a small Jewish sect under the leadership of twelve apostles (Mt. 9:37-10:8). During Jesus’ earthly ministry, the seeds of evangelism were planted in Galilee, Judea, Samaria, and beyond. But the prospect of a fledgling band of believers going into the whole world with the gospel was huge. Nevertheless, the

New Testament saints “went every where preaching the word” and “turned the world upside down” (Ac. 8:4; 17:6). Of course, they did this through the anointing and power of the Spirit (1:8). Today, if we look at the big picture, it might seem impossible to finish what we are commissioned to do. Where do we start? The key to fulfilling our mission begins with obedience: going and preaching (Mk. 16:15). To finish any job, we must simply start somewhere – anywhere and everywhere the Lord opens a door. Jesus has commissioned us to finish what he began. Knowing that our mission was/is Christ’s mission first and foremost, we then can be fully confident that as we commit ourselves to his mission and work diligently, the Lord will work in and through us by his Spirit to fulfill his mission (vv. 19-20). Our mission is challenging, but we have an equally effective message. The gospel we preach is powerful, yet simple (1 Co. 2:1-5). Nevertheless, the truths of God’s Word are sometimes deep and mysterious (v. 10). In fact, some truths are hard to understand and keep us seeking, praying, and searching the Scriptures in order to be effective. As we move forward to fulfill our mission proclaiming the gospel in the world, we will contend with those who wrest (i.e. twist, pervert) the Scriptures, bringing destruction upon themselves and those who believe their erroneous doctrines (2 Pe. 3:16-17; 2:1-2). As Paul explained, in the face of such opposition, we must be established in the truths of the Scriptures (2 Ti. 2:14-18). We must remain steadfast in the faith, growing in God’s grace and in the knowledge of Christ, in order fulfill our missionary purpose (2 Pe. 3:18).

Scripture Study

Our mission – 2 Pe. 3:9, 15; Mk. 16:15-20; Jn. 12:46; Mt. 5:14; Ac. 1:8; 8:4; 17:6

Our effectiveness – 1 Co. 2:1-5, 10; 2 Pe. 3:16-18; 2 Ti. 2:14-18

Conclusion

Peter closed his epistle with two possible outcomes for us: we will continue to grow in the Lord, or we will fall from our steadfastness. How important is our spiritual growth? Our salvation depends on it. As an old gospel song says, “Child, you either grow closer, or farther away.” The success of our mission will likewise depend on our spiritual growth. According to the Scriptures, the church will surely finish what God has destined her to accomplish, namely, taking the gospel to the ends of the earth and becoming a glorious church. God’s church cannot be stopped. The church will grow and reach her appointed destination. Our job as individual members is to be steadfast and faithful to the finish.

Faith -N- Focus

Adult Bible Studies

October 2017

“Elisha’s Exploits”

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“Elisha’s Exploits”

Monthly Summary

In the Scriptures, the Lord called, anointed, and empowered specific individuals to fulfill crucial roles and responsibilities. For example, the Lord called Moses to lead his people out of Egypt’s bondage; he used Samson to judge their enemies; and God lifted up David to rule over his people. Another key figure in the Old Testament was Elisha, the successor of the great prophet Elijah.

Elisha began his service for the Lord as Elijah’s minister. He learned how to be a prophet by first serving the needs of Elijah. In many ways, he received on-the-job training. In God’s time, he stepped into the shoes of Elijah, but not without first receiving a double portion of Elijah’s spirit. Clearly, Elisha knew he could never fulfill his responsibilities as prophet unless he received the anointing and empowerment of God.

After Elijah was taken up into heaven, Elisha began his journey as a leading prophet among God’s people. The Lord used him mightily to demonstrate divine power and authority, especially in situations beyond man’s control and capability. He used Elisha to heal the water supply, to judge the rebellious children, and to bring victory in the battle. In all of these situations, Elisha magnified the Lord. He was God’s instrument bringing glory and honor to God.

Today, Elisha inspires us to believe in God’s power and authority over our lives. No matter what we face as God’s church in these last days, the Lord is able to do anything we need in order to fulfill his purpose in and through the church. Nothing can stop the Lord from finishing the good work he began in us. We are called, anointed, and empowered to serve the Lord and finish the mission he commissioned us to fulfill.

October 1, 2017

“Elijah’s Successor”

Main Point

The church should endeavor to establish new converts in the faith and to develop those who are called to serve in positions of leadership.

Introduction

Every believer has an opportunity and responsibility to pass on his/her faith. We must live out our faith effectively and inspirationally so that others will follow our footsteps. In many ways, this aim accomplishes the Great Commission, for we must not only proclaim the gospel of Christ but also embody it. Moreover, the church must excel in developing believers whom God is calling for service in leadership. In today’s lesson, we will consider the relationship of Elijah and Elisha as a model for passing on our faith and developing leadership.

Key Verse

“So he departed thence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him” (1 Kg. 19:19).

Lesson Summary

Elijah was a mighty prophet of God in word and deed. The Lord used him to bring drought upon the land of Israel during the reign of wicked king Ahab and his wife, Jezebel (1 Kg. 16:29-33; 17:1). Elijah’s powerful praying prevented rain in the land for more than three years (Ja. 5:17). Moreover, calling down the fire of God, Elijah triumphed over the false prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel and slew them at the brook Kishon (1 Kg. 18:22-40). He earnestly prayed again, and God sent forth rain upon the land of Israel (vv. 41-46; Ja. 5:18). So his reputation and integrity as a true prophet preceded him. Although Elijah was a great man of God who did mighty works, he was nevertheless mortal having the same human desires, emotions, and limitations as any other man (Ja. 5:17). Consequently, his days upon the earth were numbered. No matter how anointed a spiritual leader may be, the day will eventually come when he will lay down his spiritual role (mantle) of responsibility, and another must take it up. God planned for Elijah to anoint a successor to fill his shoes and continue his prophetic work in the land of Israel (1 Kg. 19:15-17). There were other prophets in the land, but God’s chosen successor to fill the room of Elijah was Elisha (18:4; 19:16). Obeying

the word of the Lord, Elijah searched and found Elisha plowing in the fields with oxen. Elijah then placed his mantle (outer garment) on Elisha. Elisha fully understood the significance of this action. It was not every day that God's prophet showed up to see you, much less, threw his mantle over your shoulders. God was calling him to follow in the footsteps of Elijah. In response to the call, Elisha did something profoundly significant. He slew the oxen, built a fire with the yoke, and cooked the meat. Then he called together his family and friends, and they shared a farewell meal. Elisha had no intention of returning to the plow. His farming days were over. He fully intended to answer God's call and follow Elijah. From that day forward, he began to serve Elijah and became his apprentice (vv. 19-21). Clearly, Elijah was an outstanding prophet and servant of God, and Elisha's immediate resolve to follow him attests to this point. We too must be men and women of such outstanding Christian character and commitment that others will be persuaded to follow our faith and example (1 Co 4:16; 11:1; Ph. 3:17). Like the apostle Paul, we should endeavor to pass on our faith to the next generation and to develop upcoming leaders called by God (1 Ti. 1:1-2; 2 Ti. 1:1-6; Tit. 1:4; 1 Co. 4:15). The church's mission is far from finished. Therefore, we must continue to mentor young believers and establish them in the faith in order to raise leaders up who will see the mission through to completion.

Scripture Study

Elijah, the prophet – 1 Kg. 17:1; 18:22-46; Ja. 5:17-18

Elisha, the apprentice – 1 Kg. 19:15-21

Developing disciples and leaders – 1 Co. 4:15-16; 11:1; Ph. 3:17; 2 Ti. 1:1-6

Conclusion

Sometimes, a leader is born into his position, as in the case of a monarch. One day, he/she will assume the crown at the appointed time. However, position and leadership are not the same things. True leadership does not arise out of thin air or by accident. Real leadership has the ability to lead; but ability is something that must be nurtured and developed. Therefore, future leaders should be mentored and groomed for this purpose, no matter how anointed and talented he/she may be. Elisha was anointed to fill the shoes of Elijah; but for several years he served as his minister (i.e. servant, helper, apprentice, or prophet-in-training). Likewise, church leaders should seek to pour their faith into others and develop those who evidence the call of God for leadership in the church.

October 8, 2017

“Double Portion”

Main Point

We all should desire and seek to obtain the same spiritual experiences as those who have paved the way for us in the faith.

Introduction

Not one of us has arrived where we are in the faith singlehandedly. Many faithful saints have sacrificed and endured great opposition in order to pass on their faith to us. In Zion Assembly, we are privileged to be the recipients of a spiritually rich Holiness-Pentecostal faith. Our spiritual forefathers restored the teachings of Christ and the apostles, preaching doctrines like: sanctification, holiness, baptism with the Holy Ghost, and speaking in tongues. Today, we all should desire and seek to obtain the same spiritual experiences as those who have paved the way for us in the faith.

Key Verse

“And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me” (2 Kg. 2:9).

Lesson Summary

Elijah was distinguished in the Scriptures as a mighty prophet of God. He was God’s ambassador declaring the Word of the Lord, and his words struck fear into the hearts of his adversaries (2 Kg. 1:1-18). In obedience to the Lord, Elijah anointed his successor, Elisha, because God was going to take him up to heaven. Elisha served Elijah as his assistant and learned everything he could about his future responsibilities (3:11). On the day of Elijah’s departure, Elisha did not leave his side. Although Elijah tried three times to persuade him to remain behind as he continued on his journey, Elisha persisted to stay close, and this paid off in the end (2:1-6). When they finally reached the Jordan riverbank, Elijah took his mantle and struck the waters, parting the river, and they crossed over on dry ground (vv. 7-8). Elisha knew God was about to take Elijah; and clearly, he needed and expected something from the Lord. After all, how could anyone begin to think he could take the place of such a great man of God? Elisha knew his master’s life and ministry; no doubt, he felt the gravity of stepping into his shoes. Moreover, seeing Elisha’s persistence and anticipation, Elijah said, “Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee” (2:9). The request was simple and to the point; yet it was profound: “I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me” (v. 9). Elijah called this request “a hard thing,” but not impossible. Receiving depended on Elisha’s

persistence. If he remained with Elijah and saw his translation, then Elisha would receive the double portion of God's Spirit that he desired (v. 10). He knew he could not fulfill his prophetic responsibilities without having the same Spirit that rested on Elijah. He desired more of the same Spirit. Because he deeply desired the promise of the Spirit and persisted to stay by Elijah's side in order to receive it, Elisha obtained his double portion (vv. 11-12). The fulfillment of the promise was evidenced by the mantle that fell from Elijah, and by Elisha's miraculous parting of the Jordan with the mantle. Like Elijah, the Spirit now rested on Elisha, using him mightily as a prophet in Israel (vv. 13-15). Today, under the New Covenant, the Spirit of God is not limited to only a few who are anointed for specific purposes like priest, prophet, and king (Ac. 2:16-18). Instead, the Word of God promises the Holy Spirit to those who ask the Father for this gift (Lu. 11:13). Jesus promised, "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you" (Jn 14:16-17). The fullness of Christ's promise is the baptism with the Holy Ghost inaugurated on the Day of Pentecost (Ac. 1:4-5). The saints "were filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (2:4). They could not see the Spirit himself, but they saw and heard the manifestations of the Spirit and experienced the results of his infilling (vv. 1-4). Jesus promised to send the Spirit from the Father – he made the promise – but it was up to the saints to desire, seek, and obtain the promise of the Father. Following the outpouring of the Holy Ghost on the Day of Pentecost, Peter extended the same promise of the Spirit to every believer: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (vv. 38-39). Praise the Lord! God is still calling today.

Scripture Study

Elisha's double portion – 2 Kg. 2:1-15

Holy Ghost baptism – Lu. 11:13; Jn. 14:16-17; Ac. 2:1-4, 16-18, 38-39

Conclusion

Jesus promised the baptism with the Holy Ghost. In fact, Jesus is our Holy Ghost baptizer (Lu. 3:16). The apostles continued to proclaim the Holy Ghost baptism in the New Testament era. At the turn of the 20th century, our spiritual forefathers restored this doctrine in the church. God's promise is still good today! But it's up to us to desire, seek, and obtain the same spiritual experiences as those who have paved the way for us in the faith.

October 15, 2017

“Healing the Waters”

Main Point

We need to ask God for healing and believe that he will heal according to his will (Word).

Introduction

As Christians, and as members in Zion Assembly, we are representatives of Christ and his church. We never know when someone will come to us needing God’s help. Sometimes, situations will arise requiring us to act in Christ’s stead. God will actually lead us into such circumstances in order to accomplish his divine purpose through us. In today’s lesson, we see how Elisha fulfilled God’s will in healing the waters at Jericho.

Key Verse

“So the waters were healed unto this day, according to the saying of Elisha which he spake” (2 Kg. 2:22).

Lesson Summary

Elisha saw Elijah taken up into heaven by a whirlwind. Just as Elijah promised, Elisha received a double portion of the same Spirit that rested upon him. Taking the mantle that fell from Elijah, Elisha went back to the Jordan River and parted the waters calling on the Lord God. Fifty sons of the prophets at Jericho saw him cross over the Jordan on dry ground. Elisha remained in Jericho while search was being made for the body of Elijah. While there, the men of the city came to him with a serious problem (2 Kgs. 2:9-19). “And the men of the city said unto Elisha, Behold, I pray thee, the situation of the city is pleasant, as my lord seeth: but the water is nought, and the ground barren” (v. 19). In bringing their need to Elisha, these men obviously understood that he was fulfilling Elijah’s room as God’s leading prophet in Israel (1 Kg. 19:16; 2 Kg. 2:15-16). Hundreds of years earlier, the city of Jericho was an impenetrable fortress in the land of Canaan. However, under Joshua’s leadership, the children of Israel completely destroyed the inhabitants of the city, burning it to the ground and leaving it uninhabitable (Jos. 6:21-27). The city was eventually rebuilt during the reign of wicked Ahab, king of Israel (1 Kg. 16:34; Jos. 6:26). Although people were again living in Jericho, the water supply was bad, and crops weren’t growing (2 Kg. 2:19). So the men of Jericho appealed to Elisha for God’s help. Again, we know the city was judged by God, and even cursed, when it

was utterly destroyed by the children of Israel. Now, generations later, the water supply contained “death” (v. 21). Perhaps, the water contamination actually stemmed from Jericho’s destruction hundreds of years earlier. Who really knows? Regardless, the situation served as an opportunity for God to demonstrate his mighty power (c.f. Jn. 9:1-3). Clearly, this problem was greater than man’s ability; they had no solution. So they turned to the prophet of the Lord hoping for a divine answer. Then Elisha healed the waters. But what would have happened if the men of the city had not asked Elisha to intervene? James wrote, “... ye have not, because ye ask not” (Ja. 4:2). Jesus said, “Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full” (Jn. 16:24). Receiving from the Lord begins with asking. In fact, faith in God will prompt us to ask; and when we ask anything believing, we can expect to receive according to God’s will (Mt. 21:22; 1 Jn. 5:13-15). When Elisha healed the waters, he took a cruse (container) of salt and poured it into the water source, declaring God’s healing of the waters and the land (2 Kg. 2:20-22). [For discussion: What was the significance of his using a “new” cruse, if any? Why did he pour the salt into the spring itself?] The Scriptures declare: “So the waters were healed unto this day, according to the saying of Elisha which he spake” (v. 22). Of course, the healing power was not in the salt itself, although salt has purifying and healing virtues. Rather, the salt, as a purifying agent, was only symbolic of God’s healing. For this reason, Elisha said, “Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters” (v. 21). The healing was not in the salt; the healing was not in Elisha. Both then and now, the Lord is our healer. Elisha was not speaking his own words according to his own will, but he was speaking the Word of the Lord for the healing of Jericho’s waters.

Scripture Study

Jericho’s problem – 2 Kg. 2:9-19; Jos. 6:21-27; 1 Kg. 16:34

Elisha’s solution – 2 Kg. 2:20-22; Ja. 4:2; Jn. 16:24; Mt. 21:22; 1 Jn. 5:13-15

Conclusion

There is power in God’s Word. Elisha spoke the Word of the Lord by the Spirit of the Lord, and the water source was healed “according to the saying of Elisha which he spake” (2 Kg. 2:22). God’s Word reveals his will for our lives. When people come to us asking for divine help and healing, we need to know God’s Word so that we can declare his will by the inspiration and anointing of the Holy Ghost.

October 22, 2017

“Cursed Children”

Main Point

As Christians, we are responsible to teach and demonstrate respect for governing authority, especially the authority of church leadership.

Introduction

Today, we are witnessing blatant disrespect for civil servants, public school teachers, government officials, and spiritual leaders. At times, the problem seems to permeate society at large, even infiltrating the fellowship of the church. The attitude behind the disrespect reeks with the spirit of rebellion. We are warned in the Scriptures against such resistance and lawlessness (2 Pe. 2:9-10; Ro. 13:1-2). In today’s lesson, we will consider Elisha’s example as the proof that God requires us to respect those over us in the Lord.

Key Verse

“Render therefore to all their dues; tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour” (Ro. 13:7).

Lesson Summary

In 2 Kings 2:23-25, we read what appears to be a rather disturbing story about the prophet Elisha. As he was traveling to Bethel, little children came from the city and jeered at him, saying, “Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head” (v. 23). In response, Elisha cursed them in the name of the Lord; and then two female bears came out of the forest and attacked them. No further explanation is given in the Bible. Our understanding of the story’s significance is completely left to our interpretation. No doubt, this is one of the most unusual stories in the Old Testament. But it is included in the events of Elisha’s life for our learning today. At first glance, Elisha’s reaction may seem harsh to some. Why didn’t the prophet just shake off the children’s comments as nonsense and foolishness? Clearly, their insulting words indicated a more serious issue. We should take notice of the spiritually dismal situation in Israel. The kings of Israel were exceedingly wicked men who led the nation into idolatrous worship and wicked practices (1 Kg. 12:26-33; 13:33-34; 22:51-53; 2 Kg. 1:1-4; 3:1-3, 13-14). Therefore, at this point in Israel, the nation had lost a healthy sense of respect for God’s authority; and the evidence is a gang of children mocking God’s prophet. This situation was not merely one or two children making fun

of a prophet; but at least forty-two children made a concerted effort to show contempt for Elisha, the man of God. Did they actually understand what they were doing? These children were being shaped and influenced by an idolatrous, disobedient people. Their crude words and actions demonstrated the rebellious nature of Israel's society, particularly toward spiritual authority. Seemingly, these children imitated a prevailing negative attitude toward the man of God and all he represented, stemming from the adult influences which shaped their thinking. Children and youth often emulate the attitudes and ideas of parents and other influential adults in their lives. Because the children mocked him, Elisha cursed them. But this was not Elisha's curse alone, for he spoke "in the name of the Lord." His curse was prompted by the Spirit of God. Based on God's immediate judgment, two bears mauled the children. Clearly, their mocking was not a light matter in God's eyes. His judgment – righteous and holy – was severity in this case (Ps. 145:8-9, 17-20). These children were not merely making fun of a prophet, but they were openly displaying blatant disrespect for God's authority when they mocked Elisha. In Romans 13:1-7, Paul wrote to the saints about respecting and submitting to "the higher powers" (i.e. governing authorities) because they are ordered by God. Although the governing authorities of this world are far from perfect, they nevertheless bring law and order to society, and should be respected. When people rebel against the ordained authority that God has set in place, they actually go against God and bring judgment upon themselves (Ro. 13:2). The apostle Peter likewise identified those who disrespect governing authority, particularly spiritual authority. These presumptuous, self-willed people will be judged for their rebellion against God (2 Pe. 2:9-12).

Scripture Study

Rebellion – 2 Kg. 2:23-25; 1 Kg. 12:26-33; 13:33-34; 22:51-53; 2 Kg. 1:1-4; 3:1-3, 13-14

Respecting authority – Ro. 13:1-7; 2 Pe. 2:9-12

Conclusion

Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans during the governance of the Roman Empire – an ungodly, immoral government showing hostility to Christians. Nevertheless, Paul urged the saints to be good citizens, pay their taxes, and show respect for governing authorities. How much more should we be faithful church members, paying our tithes, and giving honor and respect to our spiritual leaders in the church?

October 29, 2017

“Victory in Battle”

Main Point

God is able to give us victory over our enemies, even when our situation seems impossible.

Introduction

God is all powerful; there is no problem too big for our God. Miracles are the result of God’s supernatural intervention in circumstances beyond our control. When we can do nothing to fix the situation and then God steps in to make it right, we experience a miracle. In today’s lesson, we will see how God brought great victory in the face of defeat. He is a miracle-working God!

Key Verse

“For with God nothing shall be impossible” (Lu. 1:37).

Lesson Summary

After wicked king Ahab’s death, his son Ahaziah reigned. He was just as wicked as his father. He ruled for only two years and died in the aftermath of a critical accident. Jehoram, his brother, then reigned over Israel. After Ahab’s death, king Mesha of Moab rebelled against Israel (2 Kg. 1:1). Essentially, Mesha served king Jehoram, annually providing him wool from his large flocks (3:4-5). King Jehoram refused to release his control over king Mesha. Obviously, he did not want to give up the financial gains. But also, the Moabites posed a formidable threat to his national security. King Jehoram needed to stop the rebellion, but he could not do it alone. He called upon Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, to form an alliance against the Moabites, their mutual enemy (vv. 6-8). The king of Edom, being subservient to the king of Judah, also joined their alliance to fight against the Moabites (consider 8:20, 22). On their seven-day march toward Moab, they encountered a major problem: they were thirsty in the wilderness without water for their troops. Under these conditions, king Jehoram was convinced they were heading toward certain defeat (vv. 9-10). But Jehoshaphat believed they needed to seek the word of the Lord in order to receive an answer from God. Heeding Jehoshaphat’s counsel, the kings went to the prophet Elisha in order to hear the word of the Lord. Although the Lord did not respect Jehoram, he was willing to deliver them from their enemies for the sake of Judah and king Jehoshaphat (vv. 11-14). The situation looked bleak, but the

Lord gave them the path to victory. When we come to an impossible situation and don't know what to do, God has the answer we need. The Lord told them to do something strange – to dig ditches all over the valley. Before God moved on their behalf, the kings and their army had to demonstrate faith in God's Word through their obedience. The Lord promised to give them water in a miraculous way without any wind or rain. Moreover, the Lord promised to give them victory over their enemies. The three kings did not understand how all of this was going to take place. All they understood was the promise of God. In faith, they obeyed the Word of the Lord, digging the ditches and then waiting on God to move (vv. 15-18). The Lord is looking for this same kind of faith today – a faith that obeys the Word of God and then trusts the Lord for the outcome. They had to wait until morning for their miracle (v. 20; Ps. 30:1-5). The next day the ditches were full of water. The army was refreshed, and their animals drank their fill. Now they were ready for battle. But God was not finished with this great miracle; he had something more in mind. The Moabites gathered themselves together to fight; and in the morning as the sunlight reflected on the water in the ditches, the Moabites thought it was the blood of their rivals. They immediately proceeded to the camp of Israel expecting to find slain bodies and to take the spoil, but they entered into a trap. The Israelite army attacked them, and they slew the Moabites as they retreated back to their own country. Although the Moabites tried, retaliating was pointless. They were defeated (2 Kg. 3:21-27). As God instructed them, the Israelite army “beat down the cities, and on every good piece of land cast every man his stone, and filled it; and they stopped all the wells of water, and felled all the good trees” (vv. 19, 25).

Scripture Study

Overwhelming circumstances – 2 Kg. 3:4-14

Miraculous victory – 2 Kg. 3:15-27

Conclusion

God gave his people victory over their natural enemies. He performed a great miracle that turned the whole situation around. But even more than Israel's natural well-being, God wanted them to believe and trust in him. He wanted them to have faith and experience the salvation of the Lord. Today, the Lord wants his church to be victorious over the wiles of the enemy (Ep. 6:10-11). He does not want us to be a defeated people. In fact, the Lord promises us victory over this world through faith in Jesus Christ, God's Word (1 Jn. 5:4-5).

Faith -N- Focus

Adult Bible Studies

November 2017

“Elisha’s Exploits, Part Two”

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“Elisha’s Exploits, Part Two”

Monthly Summary

This month, we will continue to look at the life of Elisha and his amazing exploits. Elisha had big shoes to fill when he stepped into the responsibilities of Elijah, the leading prophet in Israel. Elijah’s words were powerful because he spoke the Word of God to the people. Moreover, his actions backed up his words, for God worked powerfully through Elijah to accomplish his divine will and purpose. Elisha proved to be just as much a man of God as Elijah. He carefully spoke the words of God to the people and demonstrated the power of God’s Word in his behavior and actions.

Elisha’s ministry is so reminiscent of Christ’s earthly ministry in terms of his many miracles and spiritual authority. When reading the marvelous narrative, we conclude, “Ah Lord God . . . there is nothing too hard for thee” (Jer. 32:17). In these lessons, he multiplied the widow’s oil. He caused a childless woman and her husband to conceive and have a son. He later raised her son from the dead. Finally, he healed a poisonous pottage.

Elisha’s example not only foreshadows the ministry of Christ but reminds us of the power of God available to the church today. We sometimes place people like Elisha and Elijah on a great spiritual pedestal. On this note, James reminded us that Elijah was just an ordinary man (“a man subject to like passions as we are”) with an extraordinary faith and a close relationship with God (Ja. 5:17). Like Elijah, Elisha was just an ordinary man. He was not Christ; he was only a type of Christ. He too had extraordinary faith to believe and follow God; and thus, the Lord used him mightily.

As followers of God, we are called into the ministry of Christ. Jesus said: “He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do . . .” (Jn. 14:12). Sometimes, we forget that God wants to use us to continue the works of Christ by the power of the Holy Ghost. Just as God used Elisha to do mighty works, he can also use us to do mighty works in these last days. But we must exercise the same kind of extraordinary faith in God and maintain a close relationship with the Lord.

November 5, 2017

“Multiplied Oil”

Main Point

We should consistently bring our needs to God because he is more than able to supply our needs in abundance.

Introduction

The Lord cares about every area of our lives. He is concerned about the things that concern us. For this reason, we are encouraged to cast all of our burdens on the Lord (1 Pe. 5:7). God should not be our last resort, but we should immediately go to him when we are overwhelmed by life’s circumstances. In today’s lesson, we will consider the cry of a desperate widow and how her great faith in God resulted in his miraculous provision.

Key Verse

“But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Ph. 4:19).

Lesson Summary

In 2 Kings 4:1, one of the sons of the prophets died and left behind his wife and two sons. He had served faithfully as a prophet (minister) in Israel under Elisha. But his widow found herself in a most desperate situation. Because she could not pay her creditor, her two sons were forced to become bondservants in order to pay the debt. So she cried to the prophet of God and appealed for help. “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (Mt. 7:7). Like her husband, she too feared the Lord. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Ps. 111:10; Pr. 9:10). Godly fear (i.e. deep respect for the Lord) and the faith that goes with such fear are the basis for receiving from the Lord (consider Psalm 34:1-9). Whereas, the fear of our circumstances undermines our faith, the fear of the Lord bolsters our faith and confidence in God’s ability to supply our needs (e.g. Ac. 16:23-26). The widow came to the man of God for help; but what could he do about her problem? Elisha was limited; he could only do so much. However, God is unlimited. He is able to supply all of our needs (Ph. 4:19). He can step into overwhelming situations and do the humanly impossible (Lu. 18:27). We may not think we have much to offer God, but the Lord can use anything we commit to him, however meager it may be. The widow only had one pot of oil (2 Kg. 4:2). What good is a pot

of oil when your sons are in jeopardy? This is where faith comes into play. Real faith believes that God is greater than our needs. Genuine faith believes that little is much with God (Mk. 8:1-9). Consider the woman's plight: 1) her husband was dead, 2) she was in debt, and 3) her sons were being taken away from her. When she explained her problems to the prophet, he told her to do something peculiar – to borrow empty vessels from her neighbors (2 Kg. 4:3-5). Initially, God increased her sense of emptiness by surrounding her with many empty vessels. Of course, the Lord had reasons for doing this: he had a plan, and empty vessels were a part of his plan. Moreover, God was testing and proving her faith (1 Pe. 1:7). Furthermore, when we come to the Lord empty and broken, and cry out to him in faith, he will minister to our needs (Ps. 34:17-19; Mt. 11:28; He. 4:16). At times, God even multiplies our emptiness in order to increase his fullness in our lives all the more. In other words, when we reach the end of ourselves and know that we can do nothing to resolve our situation, we understand that God, and God alone, is the one who satisfies our need (consider Ro. 3:23; 5:6; Ep. 2:8-9). Then he alone receives all the glory and honor. By faith the widow obeyed, and the results were bountiful (2 Kg. 4:6-7). Not only did she have enough to pay all her debts, but she used the remaining oil to support her family. Today, God's bounty is still more than enough. He is able to satisfy our needs beyond our greatest expectations (Ep. 3:20; Jn. 10:10).

Scripture Study

The fear of the Lord – 2 Kg. 4:1; Ps. 34:1-9; Ac. 16:23-26

God is able – 2 Kg. 4:2; Ph. 4:19; Lu. 18:27; Mk. 8:1-9

Faith in God – 2 Kg. 4:3-5; 1 Pe. 1:7; Ps. 34:17-19; Mt. 11:28; He. 4:16

God's bounty – 2 Kg. 4:6-7; Ep. 3:20; Jn. 10:10

Conclusion

Our God can do anything. He is more than able to supply all of our need. In fact, he can satisfy us in ways we have never considered. The apostle Paul explained that God "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Ep. 3:20). Therefore, we should never limit the power of God in our lives. Instead, we should believe and trust in God's ability, and consistently bring our needs to him because he is more than able to supply our needs in abundance. Nevertheless, let us keep in mind the admonition and warning of our Lord: "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Lu. 12:15).

November 12, 2017

“The Shunammite Woman”

Main Point

God knows our motives in everything we do, and he will reward us accordingly.

Introduction

Our motives – the true desires behind our words and actions – are of utmost importance to God. The Lord knows us completely. The psalmist David declared, “O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether” (Ps. 139:1-4). In today’s lesson, we will consider a gracious woman’s deeds and God’s gracious reward in return. The Lord knows our motives in everything we do, and he will reward us accordingly.

Key Verse

“Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts” (Ps. 139:23).

Lesson Summary

2 Kings 4:8-17 tells the story of the Shunammite woman. On one of Elisha’s journeys, he came to Shunem and was greeted by a woman who entreated him to eat with her. After this, he began stopping at her house to eat whenever he came near Shunem. The Bible simply describes her as “great,” likely indicating her prominence as a respected woman in Shunem. Although the Bible mentions nothing of her age, her husband is called “old,” and she has no children. She and her husband began to form a lasting relationship with the prophet Elisha. Exactly why she extended such friendship to him is unknown, but clearly her hospitality demonstrated her love for God and others (Mt. 22:37-39). No doubt, the Lord prompted her to reach out to Elisha and minister to his needs (Ro. 12:13). She fulfilled the pattern of the virtuous woman: “She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness” (Pr. 31:26). In the beginning, she did not know Elisha was God’s prophet, but in time she realized that he was truly a “holy man of God” (2 Kg. 4:9). Then she and her husband determined to bless the man of God by preparing a private guest room exclusively for his use. They supplied

the room with a bed, table, stool, and candlestick (v. 10). On one occasion when Elisha was resting in his guest room, he considered all of the kindness this woman had shown him. He desired to show his gratitude to her in some way, offering to petition the king or the captain of the host on her behalf. But she desired nothing from him; she was quite content with her life (vv. 11-13). Still Elisha desired to bless her. But even more, the Lord recognized her gracious works and desired to reward her for her kindness toward the man of God. When Elisha persisted to bless her, his servant Gehazi made a suggestion: “Verily she hath no child, and her husband is old” (v. 14). In other words, “This couple has no children; they are beyond the age of having children; but they need a son, an heir.” So Elisha sent for the woman and declared to her by the word of the Lord, “About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son” (v. 16). Of course, she reacted like any of us would react. In modern lingo, she said, “I can’t believe it. It’s too good to be true!” Nevertheless, she conceived and had a son just as Elisha declared. Who would have imagined that her acts of kindness would turn to bless her in this way? Clearly, she never thought feeding Elisha and providing him shelter would result in a son. She did none of this for personal gain. In fact, she wanted nothing in return. As Jesus taught, “And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again . . . lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest” (Lu. 6:34-35). She gave freely, not to gain favor or to be seen of men. Therefore, the Lord rewarded her openly because she gave with pure motives (Mt. 6:1-4; Lu. 6:38).

Scripture Study

The woman’s kindness – 2 Kg. 4:8-10; Mt. 22:37-39; Ro. 12:13; Pr. 31:26

Elisha’s gratitude – 2 Kg. 4:11-14

God’s miraculous reward – 2 Kg. 4:15-17; Lu. 6:34-35; Mt. 6:1-4; Lu. 6:38

Conclusion

This gracious woman gave with right motives, and in return, God miraculously and liberally rewarded her beyond her expectations. Jesus said, “For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again” (Lu. 6:38). The Lord knows us through and through. He knows our heart and thoughts. When we minister to the needs of others without thinking of ourselves, we can be sure God knows everything we do, and he will reward us accordingly, if not in this life then in the life to come.

November 19, 2017

“The Dead Is Raised”

Main Point

When we pray, we are calling on the Lord who has all power in heaven and in earth, even power over life and death.

Introduction

In our previous lesson, God gave the Shunammite woman a son to reward her kindness toward the prophet Elisha. She was a gracious woman who freely gave of herself without any hint of hidden motives. Because of her hospitality, the prophet desired to show his appreciation. But even more, the Lord desired to reward her for her great faithfulness. Now she and her husband would have a son to enjoy in the twilight years of their marriage. But when the child was older, the woman’s faith was put to the test. In today’s lesson, we will see her faith in action; and we will see God’s faithfulness once more.

Key Verse

“Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, thou he were dead, yet shall he live” (Jn. 11:25).

Lesson Summary

In 2 Kings 4:18-37, we read about the miracle of restored life. One morning, the Shunammite’s son went to the fields to see his father, but he wasn’t feeling well. The workers were reaping the fields. He complained of a bad headache to his father. So he had one of the young men to take him back to his mother. She held him until noon, and then he died in her lap. She took his body and laid him on Elisha’s bed in the special guest room, closing the door behind her. She had one thing in mind – getting to Elisha as soon as possible. So she urged her husband to give her a young man and a donkey in order to go to Elisha at Mt. Carmel. When he asked her why she was making a special trip, she did not tell him about the child but assured him that everything will be fine. Her servant speedily took her to see Elisha, who saw her coming in the distance. When Gehazi, Elisha’s servant, came to meet her, she again affirmed that everything was fine. Clearly, she was a woman of great faith in God. She believed the same God who miraculously gave her a son could also restore his life. Of course, no matter how much faith she had, she was still a mother robbed of her son, experiencing all of the emotional grief of her loss. When she came to Elisha, she fell at his feet

and grabbed him pleading for her son's life. Elisha sent Gehazi ahead of them and asked him to place his staff against the face of the child, but the child did not revive. When they arrived, Elisha went alone into his guest room where the lifeless child was laid upon his bed. Elisha closed the door behind him and began praying to the Lord for the child's life (c.f. Ac. 9:36-42). His method of praying was uncommon but effective. He laid on the child, placing his mouth on the child's mouth, his eyes on the child's eyes, and his hands on the child's hands, stretching himself upon the child. The child's body became warm. Elisha went back into the house and paced the floor, not worrying, but likely he prayed within himself as he waited upon the Lord. He went back to the room to pray and laid himself upon the child once more; the child revived, sneezing seven times and opening his eyes. What a miraculous restoration of life! The Shunammite's son was alive and well. As this story of Elisha demonstrates, when we pray, we are calling on the Lord who has all power in heaven and in earth, even power over life and death (Mt. 28:18). Jesus declared, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself" (Jn. 5:25-26). By his own resurrection from the dead, Jesus proved his power and authority over death (Ro. 6:9; Re. 1:18). He laid down his life, and he had the "power to take it again" (Jn. 10:17-18). Therefore, the power of life is in Jesus (Jn. 1:4). He said, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live" (Jn. 11:25). Because the Shunammite woman believed in God's resurrection power, the life of her precious boy was restored to her.

Scripture Study

The dead is raised – 2 Kg. 4:18-37

Power over life and death – Mt. 28:18; Jn. 5:25-26; Ro. 6:9; Re. 1:18; Jn. 10:17-18; 1:4; 11:25; Jn. 3:16; 17:2

Conclusion

No doubt, the greatest power of God we can experience is the power of salvation through Jesus Christ. He gives to us eternal life. Our natural bodies will surely pass away. The Shunammite's son lived out the rest of his life, and then he followed the natural course of mankind and died again. Natural life is not our goal in Christ, for we have everlasting life by faith in him (Jn. 3:16; 17:2). Therefore, at his coming, we will be raised in immortality (1 Co. 15:50-57).

November 26, 2017

“Healing of the Pottage”

Main Point

The Lord is our provision and protection in times of want and distress.

Introduction

As Christians, we believe God can do anything that does not conflict with his holy nature and perfect will. After all, he is our Creator, and nothing is beyond his power and ability to perform. But do we sometimes limit God by setting artificial parameters of what we think he will and will not do for us? Faith in God means that we believe **he will** help us in our time of need. But if we place God in a box, then we may limit the blessings we will receive from the Lord. In today’s lesson, the Lord worked in an “out of the box” sort of way. 2 Kings 4:38-41 tells about a peculiar kind of healing: the healing of the pottage.

Key Verse

“But he said, Then bring meal. And he cast it into the pot; and he said, Pour out for the people, that they may eat. And there was no harm in the pot” (2 Kg. 4:41).

Lesson Summary

At this particular time, the land was experiencing a significant famine. Israel had already been through 3 ½ years of drought during Elijah’s ministry (1 Kg. 17:1; Ja. 5:17). No doubt, the extended drought devastated the land for a time. After several years of recovery, they now experienced a food shortage during Elisha’s ministry. [Note: The Scriptures mention a famine of seven years in 2 Kings 8:1 – a famine ordered of the Lord.] Because the kings of Israel notoriously led the nation in rebellion against God, the Lord used hardships like drought and famine to judge and humble his people (2 Chr. 6:26-31; 7:12-14). Perhaps, because of the famine, Elisha traveled to Gilgal to be with the sons of the prophets for their encouragement. Nevertheless, regardless of the reason for this visit, he came together and met with them during the famine, and this occasion gave opportunity for divine intervention. God works in the context of human need. Time after time, he shows up in situations where we are powerless, and he receives glory by demonstrating his power in our lives (2 Chr. 16:7-9). Elisha asked his servant to prepare a great vat of pottage (i.e. soup, broth, or stew) for the prophets. Lacking adequate provisions for a meal – not even enough for

a pottage – someone went into the fields looking for herbs and gathered up wild gourds which turned out to be poisonous. Unknowingly, the poisonous gourds were shredded and cooked in the pottage, and it was served to the sons of the prophets. As they ate the pottage, the men began to cry out, “O thou man of God, there is death in the pot” (2 Kg. 4:40). Elisha’s servant unwittingly served the sons of the prophets a deadly meal, so they immediately stopped eating. We should notice that Elisha did not pour out the pottage and then have his servant to prepare another meal. Why? No doubt, the prophets were hungry and ready to eat; but more significantly, food was scarce because of the famine. With a food shortage, why throw out the pottage when God can heal it? Then Elisha did something strange. He asked for someone to bring him meal (milled grain) and cast it into the pot. There was no power in the meal itself, but the addition of the meal to the pottage was the physical representation of God’s miraculously healing the pottage. In an instant, it was no longer deadly although the poisonous gourds were still in the pot. They then poured out fresh pottage, and the men finished eating their meal without any harm whatsoever. God had the power to heal the deadly pottage and to turn it into nourishment. In this way, he both provided for and protected them. Today, the Lord continues to provide for us (Mt. 6:31-33; Ps. 37:25; Ph. 4:19) and to protect us (Mk. 16:18; Ps. 28:7-9; He. 13:5-6).

Scripture Study

Dearth in the land – 2 Kg. 4:38-39; 1 Kg. 17:1; Ja. 5:17; 2 Chr. 6:26-31; 7:12-14

Death in the pot – 2 Kg. 4:39-40

Delicious Pottage – 2 Kg. 4:41; Mt. 6:31-33; Ps. 37:25; Ph. 4:19; Mk. 16:18; Ps. 28:7-9; He. 13:5-6

Conclusion

The sons of the prophets had to exercise great faith in eating the “poisonous pottage.” They obviously had great confidence in Elisha’s relationship with God. Moreover, believing in God’s power and faithfulness, they ate with calm assurance. No doubt, this miracle was significant in its timing. God demonstrated to the sons of the prophets that he would continue to take care of their needs during a difficult time of famine. Truly, the Lord is faithful; he does not forsake us; and he will continue to supply our needs. So let’s firmly place our faith in a faithful God.

Faith -N- Focus

Adult Bible Studies

December 2017

“Elisha’s Exploits,” Part Three

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“Elisha’s Exploits,” Part Three

Monthly Summary

In this month of *Faith-N-Focus*, we will conclude our study of Elisha and his mighty exploits. His life and story inspire us to reach higher by faith in order to attain the miraculous works of God’s Spirit in the church today. Through Elisha, we see the limitless power of God demonstrated through the normal course of life. The Lord provided food for the hungry, healing for the sick, recovery of what was lost, and protection from the enemy. Because the Lord did such mighty works among his people under the Old Covenant, we can be absolutely sure that God will do the mighty works of Christ in the church today. In fact, Jesus said so (Jn. 14:12-14).

As we consider the exploits of Elisha, we conclude: “Nothing is too difficult for God” (Ge. 18:14; Je. 32:17; 26-27). Elisha’s faith and works encourage our faithfulness and obedience regardless of our challenges, knowing the Lord is the same yesterday, today, and forever (He. 13:8). Realizing God is powerful and able to meet our needs, we should exercise unwavering faith and confidence in his mighty power because his Word and promises are true and faithful. Moreover, understanding how much Jesus loves us and cares about us, we should be emboldened to pursue spiritual exploits in the church today.

Finally, Elisha was a man of God whose life demonstrated close communion with the Lord. If we want to see the same kind of mighty works in the church today, then we need to maintain the same kind of intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. Elisha seemed to have a direct connection to God; their lines of communication were always open. Likewise, we need to maintain close communion with God through praying in the Spirit, both talking to God and hearing from the Lord.

December 3, 2017

“Multiplied Food”

Main Point

God will accomplish all his Word says he will do.

Introduction

Elisha’s ministry was representative of Christ’s earthly ministry, especially in terms of his supernatural exploits. Jesus, the Word of God, did such mighty works that the people marveled at his teachings: “And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes . . . And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him” (Mk. 1:22, 27). Similarly, God used Elisha in miraculous ways that transcended human reason, so that the people would know his words were not merely the words of a man. In today’s lesson, God provided an abundance of food for the people according to the Word of the Lord by the prophet Elisha.

Key Verse

“So he set it before them, and they did eat, and left thereof, according to the word of the Lord” (2 Kg. 4:44).

Lesson Summary

In 2 Kings 4:42-44, we read another remarkable example of the authority and power of God’s Word demonstrated through the prophet Elisha. He declared the Word of the Lord, and God fulfilled it exactly as he had spoken. Let’s first consider the context of the passage. Based on the preceding verses, famine was in the land (4:38). Accordingly, the story itself seems to suggest that food was still scarce and times were difficult for many people, particularly in the region near Gilgal. Moreover, reading this passage as an extension of the former event, we can reasonably assume the one hundred men to be the sons of the prophets. Therefore, Elisha was likely with the sons of the prophets at Gilgal when a man from Baalshalisa came with provisions of bread and grain. He brought the prophet the firstfruits of his harvest (Ex. 23:19; 34:26). God had blessed him in the midst of a famine. The “firstfruits” indicate this was an offering to honor God and one that was particularly sacrificial because of the famine in the land. This man willingly gave in faith believing that God would meet his own needs (Pr. 3:9-10). No doubt,

the Lord sent him to the prophet at this particular time in order to supply the needs of his people. Elisha then told his servant to give the food to the people, but the servant said, “What, should I set this before an hundred men? (2 Kg. 4:43). He was not being obstinate, but he knew these provisions were insufficient to feed this crowd of hungry men. It just wasn’t enough! The servant was only being sensible. But Elisha insisted that he serve the food to the people anyway, and he added, “for thus saith the Lord, They shall eat, and shall leave thereof” (v. 43). By the Spirit of God, Elisha declared the Word of the Lord. God was going to multiply the provisions and meet the needs of his people with leftovers remaining. This story is distinctly reminiscent of the times when Jesus fed the multitudes (Mt. 14:14-21; 15:30-39). By comparison, it pales in magnitude, but in substance, the feeding of the hundred is the same as Christ’s feeding of the thousands. By the Word of God, the multitudes were fed through the multiplying (increase) of the meager provisions. “So he set it [*the food*] before them, and they did eat, and left thereof, **according to the word of the Lord**” (2 Kg. 4:44). How exactly did God stretch the provisions to feed so many? We have no scientific explanation for this; it surpasses natural reason (2 Co. 2:14). This is what constitutes a miracle. Indeed, all that transpired was spiritual; it happened by the Word of God. When God speaks, he speaks with authority and power (Lu. 4:31-32). His Word is everlasting; his words will never pass away (Mt. 24:35; 1 Pe. 1:25). Moreover, his Word will not return to him void but will go forth to accomplish God’s will (Is. 55:10-11). Therefore, we can be sure that God will fulfill all his Word says he will do.

Scripture Study

God provided for his people – 2 Kg. 4:42; Ex. 23:19; 34:26; Pr. 3:9-10

God multiplied their provisions – 2 Kg. 4:43; Mt. 14:14-21; 15:30-39

God fulfilled his Word – 2 Kg. 4:44; 2 Co. 2:14; Lu. 4:31-32; Is. 55:10-11; Mt. 24:35; 1 Pe. 1:25

Conclusion

The nameless man in this story believed God’s Word and honored the Lord by giving his firstfruits. Is there power in believing and obeying the Word of God? The Lord used the man’s faithfulness to minister to the needs of others; and by his faithfulness, the Lord then worked through his faithful prophet to provide for the needs of his people; and these men, in turn, continued to serve the Lord in Israel. We see then how God is faithful to his Word.

December 10, 2017

“Healing the Leper”

Main Point

Miracles serve the purpose of confirming the power of God and the authority of God’s Word.

Introduction

The story of Naaman’s healing is a story of mercy, faith, and obedience. God showed mercy to Naaman, the enemy of his people. Naaman demonstrated faith in God’s ability to cure him. Humbling himself, he obeyed the Word of the Lord and was healed. Let’s consider the specific details of this miraculous healing.

Key Verse

“And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came, and stood before him: and he said, Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel: now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant” (2 Kg. 5:15).

Lesson Summary

Naaman was the general of the Syrian army: a man of honor and valor. He was highly favored in the eyes of his king because he led the Syrians to great victory. Today, such men are “highly decorated” soldiers, receiving medals to honor their bravery and service to their country. Indeed, Naaman was a true success story as a soldier and statesman. No doubt, he was one of the king’s chief advisors. But despite his military ability and accomplishments, he physically suffered with a terrible disease – leprosy (2 Kg. 5:1). According to the Mosaic Law, lepers in Israel were ostracized and separated from their people because of such diseases in their flesh (Le. 13:1-46). Fortunately for Naaman, one of his servants was a maiden taken captive from Israel (2 Kg. 5:2). She told Naaman’s wife about the prophet Elisha, saying, “Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy” (v. 3). When someone came and repeated her words to Naaman, the king of Syria then sent Naaman to the king of Israel to be cured, sending many gifts – “ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment” – as payment for his healing (vv. 4-5). Naaman came to the king of Israel with a letter from the king of Syria, which read, “Now when this letter is come unto thee behold, I have therewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy” (v. 6). But these actions struck fear in the heart of

the king of Israel. When he read the letter from the king of Syria, he rent his clothes in despair thinking the king of Syria was plotting against him. At this time, the Syrians were the enemies of Israel, even their archrivals. The two nations engaged in an extended period of conflicts and warfare (1 Kg. 20:1, 21-22; 22:1-4, 31; 2 Kg. 5:7-8; 6:8, 24; 13:3, 22). Even if the king of Israel actually wanted to help them, how could he possibly guarantee Naaman's healing? After all, miracles are the supernatural work of God, not the work of man's will (2 Kg. 5:7). When the prophet Elisha heard of the king's predicament and his despairing reaction, he then called for Naaman, saying, "Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel" (v. 8). Who could have imagined that Israel's adversaries would come to Elisha seeking help from the God of Israel? This set of circumstances presented a great opportunity for God to demonstrate his power and the authority of his Word! When he came to Elisha for healing, Naaman's expectations were wrong. As the top commander of the Syrian army, he thought Elisha would make an elaborate display of his healing (vv. 9-11). But the prophet did not make a fuss over Naaman; he did not even come to greet him, but rather he sent a messenger with the following instructions: "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean" (v. 10). At first, he felt insulted by the prophet because he wanted to be healed in a manner worthy of his position. He was focused on the external ritual and method of healing, but nothing more was required of Naaman except his faith and obedience to God's Word. For the moment, his pride stood in the way of his cure. But with the encouragement of his servants, Naaman's faith prevailed through his humility and obedience; and he was miraculously cured (vv. 11-15; Ja. 4:6, 10).

Scripture Study

Naaman, the leper – 2 Kg. 5:1-6; Le. 13:1-46

Archrivals – 1 Kg. 20:1, 21-22; 22:1-4, 31; 2 Kg. 5:7-8; 6:8, 24; 13:3, 22

Healing the leper – 2 Kg. 5:9-15; Ja. 4:6, 10

Conclusion

After Naaman was healed, he concluded that the God of Israel was the only true God in the whole world (v. 15). Indeed, this is the purpose of miraculous signs and wonders: to establish the power of God and the authority of God's Word (Mk. 16:20). Now Naaman knew the Lord was almighty God, not only because the people of God said so, but because he experienced firsthand the life-changing impact of God's Word.

December 17, 2017

“The Axe Head Swims”

Main Point

God has power over man’s natural limitations. By faith, let us take hold of God’s miracle-working power.

Introduction

In today’s lesson, we see another’s of Elisha’s miracles that takes place in the routine of life. We often make future plans, but we certainly do not know the future. If we could see tomorrow, we would change many of our plans. Fortunately, God holds the future in his hands, and we can go forward by faith trusting him with the outcome of our lives.

Key Verse

“And the man of God said, Where fell it? And he showed him the place. And he cut down a stick, and cast it in thither; and the iron did swim” (2 Kg. 6:6).

Lesson Summary

As the chief prophet in Israel ministering in the room of Elijah, Elisha was the leader, mentor, and spiritual father of the sons of the prophets (1 Kg. 19:16; 2 Kg. 2:15; 4:38). They called him “master” (2 Kg. 6:5). In 2 Kings 6:1-7, the sons of the prophets were living with Elisha. Their communal lifestyle was somewhat comparable to the various monastic orders in Catholicism. Moreover, these prophets were consecrated servants of the Lord. When their dwelling became too small to house them adequately, the sons of the prophets desired to build a larger house. Consenting to their request, Elisha accompanied the sons of the prophets to Jordan in order to cut down trees along the riverbank for building a new structure. So they began working and felling trees. But as one of the prophets was cutting down a beam, the iron axe head flew off the handle and sank in the river (v. 5). In our technological age, particularly in an economically prosperous society, an axe head may not seem like a huge loss. If this happened to us today, we would likely make a quick trip to the nearest hardware store and replace the axe. Then we would go back to work and get the job done. No problem! But during Elisha’s time, an axe head was a valuable tool indeed, and was difficult to replace. Moreover, the man had borrowed it from a friend, and therefore, he was responsible for the loss. Even if he knew where he could acquire one, he could not readily afford to replace it. For these reasons, he panicked and cried, saying, “Alas, master! for it was

borrowed” (v. 5). Obviously, the son of the prophet was not prepared for this misfortune. Losing the axe head was one of those uncontrollable situations that leave us shocked and frustrated. We can almost hear him saying, “I can’t believe it! Everything was going great, and now this!” What was he going to do? These kinds of unexpected problems immediately put our faith to the test; they teach us to be patient and calm, and to wait upon the Lord (Ja. 1:2-3; 1 Pe. 1:7; Is. 40:31). No doubt, God is able to supply our needs; but do we truly believe that he will intervene and meet them? Once more, Elisha demonstrated the Lord is always in control. God knew the exact moment when the axe head fell into the water. In fact, he saw it even before it happened. He sees all of the future events of our lives (Is. 46:10; Re. 22:13; Mk. 14:27-31, 50, 72). Certainly, the Lord could have prevented the prophet from losing the axe head, but instead, this mishap served a higher purpose. The Lord has the final say in every situation we face, no matter how big or urgent it may seem to us. Therefore, by faith we always need to take our cares and problems to the Lord, and then trust him with the outcome of our lives (1 Pe. 5:7; Mt. 11:28; Ps. 37:39; Pr. 3:5-6). When the man cried out to Elisha for help, the Lord already had the solution. After he showed Elisha where the axe head sank, Elisha did something strange: he cut down a branch and threw it into the water. Why did he do this? We really don’t know, except that it had to do with Elisha’s obedience to God’s instructions. No doubt, this action placed visible emphasis on the miraculous work of God. A branch is naturally buoyant and floats in the water, but iron is dense and automatically sinks. Thus, the iron axe head miraculously swam, but only after the stick was cast into the water, and only as a direct result of God’s supernatural intervention (2 Kg. 6:6-7).

Scripture Study

The axe head sinks – 2 Kg. 6:1-5

Faith in God – Ja. 1:2-3; 1 Pe. 1:7; Is. 40:31; 1 Pe. 5:7; Mt. 11:28; Ps. 37:39; Pr. 3:5-6

The axe head swims – 2 Kg. 6:6-7

Conclusion

What kind of faith in God is required for iron to swim? The axe head first sank to the bottom, but then by the power of God, it floated back to the top and swam. All the man had to do was reach into the water and pick it up. When he picked up the axe head, he literally took hold of the miracle of God. By faith in God, let’s take hold of his miracle-working power (Mk. 5:35-36).

December 24, 2017

“Overcoming the Enemy”

Main Point

Regardless of our circumstances, we should never fear the enemy. The Spirit of the Lord abides in us; and we should trust him to keep and protect us.

Introduction

In Psalm 118:5-6, the writer exclaimed, “I called upon the Lord in distress: the Lord answered me, and set me in a large place. The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?” (See also He. 13:5-6). As children of God, we should not walk in fear but in faith and confidence in the keeping power of God. The Lord is our strength and shield (Ps. 28:7). In today’s lesson, we will see God’s powerful protection in action.

Key Verse

“And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha” (2 Kg. 6:17).

Lesson Summary

In 2 Kings 6:8-20, we read another example of God’s miraculous power and protection. Being their political enemies, the Syrians fought and plotted against Israel at this time. The Syrian king strategically placed his army for battle, but his plans were repeatedly foiled by none other than the prophet Elisha. Each time the Syrian king devised his wicked plans, Elisha exposed the threat to the king of Israel, and thus, he escaped the plots against him (vv. 8-10; Ps. 31:4; 59:1-3; 124:1-8; 1 Co. 10:13). The king of Israel was always one step ahead of the Syrians. The king of Syria could not understand how this was happening. Surely, one of his men must be a conspirator working to undermine him. He asked his servants, “Will ye not show me which of us is for the king of Israel” (2 Kg. 6:11)? Someone must be leaking his secret plans to their enemies. Although none of his men were traitorous, one of his servants knew the source of the leaks. Ironically, it was the king of Syria himself! The servant explained, “. . . the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber” (v. 12). Indeed, “For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou

knowest it altogether” (Ps. 139:4). Every time the Syrian king planned his military strategy with his leaders, he ignored the fact that God was listening. The Lord even heard the meditations of his heart (v. 2; He. 4:12-13). So the Lord knew all of their secret plans, start to finish. God was then revealing the king’s military positions to the prophet Elisha, who, in turn, warned the king of Israel to escape the enemy’s camp (Da. 2:47). In effect, it was like the king of Israel was listening in on the enemy’s conversations – like their private meetings were “bugged.” Thus, through the Word of the Lord, the king of Israel received insight and understanding regarding the enemy’s tactics (Ps. 119:169-70). Since Elisha repeatedly knew his strategy, the king of Syria decided to apprehend the prophet, thinking this would give him the advantage over the king of Israel. But he clearly underestimated the power of God. During the night, the king sent an army to surround the city of Dothan in order to take Elisha by force. When Elisha’s servant awoke and saw the Syrian host around the city, he panicked. But Elisha was confident in God’s powerful protection because he knew the Lord was with them to keep and defend them (Ps. 27:1-6). After the spiritual eyes of his servant were opened, he saw the surrounding mountain filled with horses and chariots of fire. “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid . . . Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear” (vv. 1, 3). When we are faced with the opposition of the enemy, we should likewise look at the situation with spiritual eyes of understanding. We always need to gain God’s perspective and see God’s presence in the situation. Elisha then prayed, his enemies were struck with blindness, and he led his helpless captives from Dothan to the king of Israel in Samaria (2 Kg. 6:13-20). What a miraculous deliverance! In this way, the Lord saved Elisha (and the king of Israel) from the hand of the Syrian king.

Scripture Study

The enemy’s strategy revealed – 2 Kg. 6:8-12; Ps. 31:4; 59:1-3; 119:169-70; 124:1-8; 139:1-4; 1 Co. 10:13; He. 4:12-13; Da. 2:47

The Lord’s powerful protection – 2 Kg. 6:13-20; Ps. 27:1-6

Conclusion

Elisha was one prophet against an army. Clearly, the odds were against him. To the world, he was far outnumbered and already defeated. But the Lord was on his side because Elisha was on the Lord’s side (Ps. 124:1-2; Ex. 32:26). Praise the Lord! We are on God’s victorious side.

December 31, 2017

“Arrow of God’s Deliverance”

Main Point

God is more than able to deliver his people, but we must exercise faith in God’s Word to receive the victory.

Introduction

In today’s lesson, we fast-forward to the conclusion of Elisha’s life. He was a remarkable prophet whose miraculous exploits not only build up our faith in God’s ability but also challenge us to exercise faith in God’s Word. Do we have the same quality of faith as Elisha? He was sick, dying, and physically weak, yet the Word of the Lord was still working powerfully through him. Let’s consider the final story of Elisha.

Key Verse

“And he said, Take the arrows. And he took them. And he said unto the king of Israel, Smite upon the ground. And he smote thrice, and stayed” (2 Kg. 13:18).

Lesson Summary

When Elisha was on his deathbed, Joash was distraught and wept over him, saying, “O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof” (2 Kg. 13:14). Losing Elisha was like losing a strategic part of Israel’s military and defense (3:15-19; 6:8-10). But before Elisha’s death, the Lord had a final word of deliverance for Joash (13:15-17). According to Elisha’s instructions, Joash took a bow and arrows and placed his hands on the bow. The prophet then placed his hands upon the hands of the king, establishing the blessing and favor of the Lord. Next, Elisha told Joash to open the window facing the east and shoot, saying, “The arrow of the Lord’s deliverance, and the arrow of deliverance from Syria: for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, till thou have consumed them” (v. 17). After years of oppression by the Syrians, Joash could not have hoped for a better promise (v. 3). The Word of the Lord should have bolstered his faith and moved Joash to rejoice greatly in his future victory. God then put Joash’s faith to the test. The old prophet told the king to “smite upon the ground” with the arrows (v. 18). The king did so three times and quit; but Elisha was outraged and rebuked the king for not smiting the ground five or six times. Therefore, their victory over the Syrians would not be complete; they would only defeat them three times (vv. 19, 22, 24-25). God promised a great deliverance for his people, but it was conditional. The

extent of their victory was contingent upon Joash's faith and obedience to God's Word. Unfortunately, Joash failed to demonstrate faith in God's complete deliverance. The Lord saw the king's heart (He. 4:12-13). He clearly lacked the faith to follow through with his actions and to receive all God desired to give him. Therefore, Joash received according to his faith (Mt. 9:29). He was compliant; he did exactly what the prophet said. Yet he was not altogether sincerely obedient; for God was looking for something more than going through the motions of obedience. His lack of passion for the Word of the Lord, only smiting the ground three times, demonstrated his lack of faith. So the Word of the Lord that should have brought ultimate victory provided only a partial deliverance for God's people – not because the Word was insufficient in some way, but rather the king's faith was deficient. For this very reason, when Jesus (i.e. the Word of God made flesh) visited his hometown of Nazareth, he did few mighty works because of their lack of faith. Jesus was more than able to meet their needs, but they did not receive from God because of their unbelief (Mt. 13:54-58). As Christians and members of Zion Assembly, in what sense do we smite the ground today? How do we exercise faith in God's deliverance? Figuratively speaking, prayer is one of the primary ways we smite the ground. Through the spiritual discipline of prayer, we demonstrate our faith in God's ability to deliver us. God has made many promises to us, and by prayer we establish our belief and confidence in his Word. Prayer is our means of attaining the promises of God by faith (Mt. 21:21-22). But we must not pray halfheartedly after the manner of Joash who smote the ground only three times and quit. Rather, we must persist in prayer until we get a breakthrough (Lu. 18:1-8). The apostle Paul admonished us to "Pray without ceasing" (1 Th. 5:17). Therefore, if we expect to receive God's deliverance in the church today, we should have the faith to persevere in prayer.

Scripture Study

God's Word to Joash – 2 Kg. 13:14-17

His faith tested – 2 Kg. 13:18-19, 22, 24-25; He. 4:12-13; Mt. 13:54-58

Praying for victory – Mt. 21:21-22; Lu. 18:1-8; 1 Th. 5:17

Conclusion

The apostle Paul declared, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh; (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)" (2 Co. 10:3-4). Certainly, God has given us the arrow of prayer for our deliverance.