

Devotional

Spelling JOY

Week of February 2, 2020

Monday

Read Job 29

Reading the whole chapter gives us a bit more context. As you read, it was not a foreign concept to Job to equate earthly success with God's favor. He was righteous and he prospered and it all makes sense. This is why his friends are so adamant that he confesses his sins. They have seen what has happened to him and this tremendous evil and misfortune is obviously the result of a great evil he has done. Why won't Job just admit it? Job is adamant that he has done nothing that would warrant this wrath. And he is correct.

Many of us, if faced with Job's patently unjust situation (or anything remotely like it), would give up on God. Sadly, far too many have done just that. In the face of suffering and injustice, we throw up our hands in anger, frustration, and exasperation and reason that if God were worth a hill of beans that these things wouldn't be happening. It is heart-breaking. Yet, Job still puts God highest in his life. He will not forsake God or abandon God. He is angry and baffled, but he does not attempt to tear God down because he doesn't understand.

The conclusion of Job's story can be found in chapters 38-41. God responds to Job's central query of why he is suffering. If, after reading these chapters, you aren't sure you understand God's answer, I will happily help by giving you eight easy to understand words that form the divine, but humanly frustrating, answer. :)

Tuesday

Read Luke 12:32-34

Let's not over-spiritualize this text. Jesus is saying that we should abandon the pursuit of money, give to the poor, and focus on following Him in everything. Easier said than done, obviously. If you are anything like me, at a minimum you are concerned about the economic welfare of your family and making your funds last in your future (or current) retirement. And yet Jesus says that it is our Father's pleasure to give us the kingdom. Most people in the world today and almost all people throughout history have no concept of being able to retire. You stop working when you physically cannot work (usually because you die). So, retirement is a bit of a unique "problem" to us. Everyone has always been concerned about their family. Jesus knew that. And he knows you'd struggle with this retirement thing, too. And whatever it is that you are concerned about in this economic life. The essential question for us is who are our priorities and how will we shape our character to reflect that they are our priorities?

Wednesday

Read Matthew 25:34-40

The sheep are welcomed to inherit the kingdom that the Triune God has prepared for them from the beginning of the world because they are blessed. In the Greek, this form of 'blessed' is indicating that they were blessed in the past by God and continue to be blessed. Blessed with what? The salvation given by Jesus Christ. The sheep are chosen before the foundation of the world (see Ephesians 1:4).

And as they are blessed, they are to be a blessing to others. Blessing others with things that are pretty basic: food, drink, welcome, clothes, and visiting. These aren't giant miracles being worked, they are humble ministries. Jesus doesn't say, "I was sick and you healed me" or "I was in prison and you freed me." I was sick and you visited. I was in prison and you visited. I was hungry and you gave me some food. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink.

Don't discount your impact on the world because you aren't in the headlines – be thankful for that – and find joy in serving in simple ways.

Thursday

Read Matthew 25:31-46

Jesus tells the sheep that when they did these things, they did them to him. But the sheep respond that they are baffled at what he has said. When did we do any of this for you? They are ignorant of their virtue. They did not do these things to curry favor with Jesus. They did not give up their afternoon to make meals for the homebound, or to visit people they barely knew in the hospital, or clean bathrooms after people had been sheltered in the fellowship hall to make a grand display before God. For if the sheep were so cunning as to merely be nice to the less fortunate so they could gain Jesus' favor, they would hardly be sheep. They would be engaging in a kind of evil righteousness that expects God's favor for their token deeds of kindness. No, the sheep are the sheep because it is the core of their character to serve others. And Jesus says that in serving others the sheep are serving him.

Jesus, Others, Yourself.

Friday

Please read and reflect upon Proverbs 11:24-25 and Luke 6:37-38 in preparation for Sunday worship.