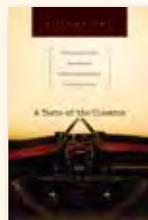


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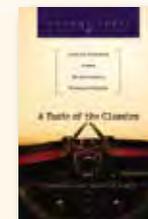
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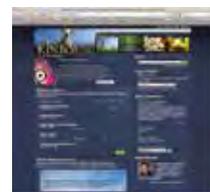


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THE PROMISES OF GOD

BECAUSE HE FORGIVES - PSALM 51

Sometimes we have to talk to someone who's "been there." When it comes to our sin, and whether the backdrop of God's forgiveness is really tall and wide enough to encompass what we've done... we need to talk to David. It is hard for us to imagine that one with a tender heart like the shepherd-king of Israel could have done what he did. But he did, and so have we in one way or another. Maybe we haven't done exactly what David did, but we have probably felt like he did. And because our sin probably hurts the same way his did, he can help us know that the forgiving character of God is adequate for us like it was for him.

David forcibly took for himself the wife of one of his most trusted military officers. He committed adultery with her and then had her husband killed. To make a long story short, David's passions, selfishness, and fear of man overruled his wisdom, integrity, and fidelity to God. Around nine months later, when a son had been born as a result of his illicit affair (2 Samuel 11-12), David confessed his sin to God. Psalm 51 is a record of his confession.

In David's prayer we discover the character of God: he is merciful and compassionate, shows unfailing love, blots out sin, and washes and cleanses us from our guilt (vv. 1-2). He knows our sin before we confess (yet waits for our confession), and is perfectly just when he pronounces us guilty (vv. 3-4). Though we are life-long sinners, he still expects us to be truthful with him (v. 5). When we are,

cleansed and hear joy and gladness as he hides his face from our sin (vv. 6-8). He gives us a pure heart, restores our spirit, and does not drive us away from himself (vv. 10-12). And, he lets us encourage others to turn to him (v. 13).

Do you see why David went to God, hard as it must have been? It's why we should go to him as well, hard as it might be. It's because he forgives.

God's Promise to You:

*"As I was with David,
so I will be with you."*

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REFLECTIONS

Reflections on God's revealed truth

MAY 2014

THE *ministry* OF THE *Holy Spirit*

God of all comfort, I thank You for the rich ministry of Your Holy Spirit in my life—for His encouragement, counsel, teaching, conviction, comfort, empowering and filling.

You have given me all the resources in Christ that I need to live a life of fidelity and ministry to the people You have placed in my life. Still, it is easy to neglect Your resources and panic when times become difficult. In those times, I am more tempted to run than to rest and to react than to reflect. Please keep me from making decisions out of fear and haste, and direct me to Your wonderful resources in problematic times. Like Jesus, I want to live with the poise, peace and patience that are derived from time spent in Your presence. May I treasure times of being so that they will empower me in times of doing.

A teaching letter to encourage believers to develop a clear mind and a warm heart



THE FEAR OF THE LORD

We would be wise to cultivate a holy fear, awe, and wonder before the magnificence, might, glory, and greatness of the Creator and Ruler of heaven and earth. Like John, when we see the glorified Christ, what we now dimly perceive about His powers and perfections will become much more clear. Perhaps we will react as did two of the animals in *The Wind in the Willows* when they saw “the Piper at the Gate of Dawn”:

“Rat!” he found breath to whisper, shaking.
“Are you afraid?”

“Afraid?” murmured the Rat, his eyes shining with unutterable love. “Afraid! Of Him? O, never, never! And yet—and yet—O Mole, I am afraid!”

Then the two animals, crouching to the earth, bowed their heads and did worship.

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding”
(Proverbs 9:10).

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A teaching letter of



THE TEMPORAL AND THE ETERNAL (PART 21)

Remembering Our Creator

Remembering was a key theme for the Hebrew people, and it embellishes and envelopes Old Testament thought. For the Hebrews, remembering is a spiritual discipline – remembering who God is, remembering who you are and to whom you belong, remembering blessings and being thankful. Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, those who failed to remember became autonomous and arrogant. Ecclesiastes Chapter 12 is a beautiful allegory of aging in which Qoheleth (“the Preacher”) calls us to remember our Creator while we are still young. There are those who come to faith later in life; and I believe God can redeem the years we’ve spent lost. However, those of us who are aware of our mortality now should take heed while we are still young. Recalling our discussion

*but all their songs grow faint;
when men are afraid of heights
and of dangers in the streets;
when the almond tree blossoms
and the grasshopper drags himself along
and desire no longer is stirred.
Then man goes to his eternal home
and mourners go about the streets.*

The Preacher speaks of the decline of our physical capacities: failing eyesight, trembling legs and stooping posture, lost teeth, loss of hearing and fitful sleep. With these declining capabilities come new fears and decreased strength, and Qoheleth speaks of them poetically. Instead of saying we become less agile, he says that the grasshopper “drags himself along,” which is a wonderful image. A grasshopper that can’t even walk is pathetic, because that’s not what grasshoppers were meant to do. They were meant to spring high

We are reminded in Ecclesiastes that we too will one day die, and he pleads with us to remember our Creator before this happens...

of *Dead Poets Society*, it is the Preacher’s own Keating-like, yet eternally grounded admonishment to “make much of time.”

*Remember your Creator
in the days of your youth,
before the days of trouble come
and the years approach when you will say,
“I find no pleasure in them”-
before the sun and the light
and the moon and the stars grow dark,
and the clouds return after the rain;
when the keepers of the house tremble,
and the strong men stoop,
when the grinders cease because they are few,
and those looking through the windows grow dim;
when the doors to the street are closed
and the sound of grinding fades;
when men rise up at the sound of birds,*



in the air and move quickly. Still, there he is, dragging himself through the last part of his life with great difficulty.

This metaphor is an infamous parable of old age with allusion to vision, hearing, aging hair, and, eventually, death.

Included in this catalog of aging features is also when “...the caper berry is ineffective” which is an allusion to the use of the caper berry as an aphrodisiac. But

by this stage in life, the writer says, it’s not going to work for you.

We are reminded here that we too will one day die, and he pleads with us to remember our Creator before this happens, while we still have vitality, before the thin cord that holds our body and soul together is severed. Identifying him in our early years sets a pattern that will help us through the somewhat grueling points in later life, as well as giving us occasion to be fruitful for the kingdom. What we gain spiritually will replace what we are losing physically.

Vanity and Fear

*Remember him—before the silver cord is severed,
or the golden bowl is broken;
before the pitcher is shattered at the spring,
or the wheel broken at the well,
and the dust returns to the ground it came from,
and the spirit returns to God who gave it.
“Now all has been heard;
here is the conclusion of the matter:
Fear God and keep his commandments,
for this is the whole duty of man.*

“Vanity of vanity,” ends the Preacher.” I believe it is vanity if we’re only living by the assumption that God is not there; but vanity turns to hope and purpose when we acknowledge that God is there. And that is what the Preacher says at the end of Ecclesiastes.

We hear very little about the fear of God these days, even though it’s a recurring theme in the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. The lack of comprehension concerning this kind of fear is a considerable problem if it is, as some of the Hebrew writers say, “the beginning of wisdom” (Psalm 111:10, Proverbs 1:7, Proverbs 9:10). Not to mention that the Preacher’s proposed conclusion of everything is to “fear God and keep his commandments.” There are those who say that if “perfect love drives out fear” (1 John 4:18), we should no longer fear God. Peter Kreeft, a philosophy professor at Boston College, responds to that perspective in this way:

Terror is a bond, however primitive, between us and God. It is supposed to be there, and it is supposed to be cast out. It is supposed to be there

*Terror is a bond
however primitive,
between us and God.
...and it is supposed
to be cast out.*

because we are born original sinners, and the sinful self is naturally and rightly terrified of the goodness of God, which is sin’s enemy. It is meant to be cast out because God saves us from sin, and then the relation changes from enemies to friends, and from terror to wonder.

If there is no fear for love to cast out, the love will not arrive as a great conqueror. If there are no dragons, a knight is just a big boy in a tin suit.

We must return to the desire we had at the beginning, to be pleasing to the Lord, because, as the Preacher says, “God will judge us for everything we do, including every secret thing, whether good or bad” (Ecclesiastes 12:14). There is a thin cord, to which the wise Preacher alludes, that keeps our body and soul together and eventually “the spirit will return to the God who gave it.” Knowing this, if mid-life doesn’t bring us to *phobos*, a holy awe, a fear of divine displeasure and an appreciation of the arrival of the great and powerful forgiveness of God, then we’ve missed something.

When Wisdom sneaks in quietly, guides you to that mirror with her sage hand, points to your sagging skin and whispers “Seize the day,” listen closely. She is not reminding you to simply make the most out of life and “gather rosebuds” before it is too late. She is telling you that you are here for his reason, that life exists because of God, and that your identity is with him, the Creator. She gently informs you that his powerful play will go on with or without you, but that God has placed you on the stage, and she advises you to contribute a verse.

What will your verse be?