



WHERE LIFE & PURPOSE CONNECT

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of January 21, 2024

Weekly Prayer

Lord God, open my heart to your presence. Touch and heal any brokenness. Lift any despair and doubt. Comfort and nourish me with the blessings of your love. O God, I am here to meet with you and to grow in the warmth and compassion of your love and grace. Amen.

Monday, January 22

Scripture: Isaiah 25:6-9; Daniel 12:2-3

On this mountain,

the LORD of heavenly forces will prepare for all peoples
a rich feast, a feast of choice wines,
of select foods rich in flavor,
of choice wines well refined.

He will swallow up on this mountain the veil that is veiling all peoples,
the shroud enshrouding all nations.

He will swallow up death forever.

The LORD God will wipe tears from every face;

he will remove his people's disgrace from off the whole earth,
for the LORD has spoken.

They will say on that day,

"Look! This is our God,
for whom we have waited—
and he has saved us!

This is the LORD, for whom we have waited;

let's be glad and rejoice in his salvation!"

Many of those who sleep in the dusty land will wake up—some to eternal life, others to shame and eternal disgrace. Those skilled in wisdom will shine like the sky. Those who lead many to righteousness will shine like the stars forever and always.

Observation

An eternal God would surely give those who love him eternal life. Doubts about "heaven" -- one word for eternal life -- are a subset of doubts about God. The Hebrew prophet Isaiah

said when God has fully restored his rule, he will prepare “a rich feast” -- the way rulers in that day marked victories. Later, the book of Daniel more clearly promised resurrection. God promised to “swallow up death forever,” to “wipe tears from every face.” God’s banquet was for “all peoples,” “all nations,” “the whole earth.”

Application

By Jesus’ day, many of Israel’s religious leaders were sure only they would be guests at God’s great final banquet. They’d missed a crucial part of the vision. In one of many expansive visions in Isaiah, God is imagined preparing a banquet not just for the elders on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24), nor even for Judah, but for all the nations. Do you ever limit your vision of God’s “banquet” to your own church, nation or ethnic group? How does your heart react to God’s generous vision?

Prayer

Lord God, I do not want my walk with you limited to this time-bounded existence. Thank you for inviting me to participate in your eternal banquet. Amen.

Tuesday, January 23

Scripture: Mark 9:30-32; John 14:1-3, 19

From there Jesus and his followers went through Galilee, but he didn’t want anyone to know it. This was because he was teaching his disciples, “The Human One will be delivered into human hands. They will kill him. Three days after he is killed he will rise up.” But they didn’t understand this kind of talk, and they were afraid to ask him.

“Don’t be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me. My Father’s house has room to spare. If that weren’t the case, would I have told you that I’m going to prepare a place for you? When I go to prepare a place for you, I will return and take you to be with me so that where I am you will be too.

Soon the world will no longer see me, but you will see me. Because I live, you will live too.”

Observation

Jesus’ disciples winced when he spoke of dying and rising again. In this period [Jewish people] did not normally expect the Messiah to be martyred. Jesus’ disciples expected to follow him to the kingdom -- not to martyrdom. But Jesus fully linked his dying and rising to the hope of life beyond death — “because I live, you will live too.” He said those who trust him have eternal life — present tense (John 3:36, 5:24, 6:47 and 54), and spoke of God’s house having plenty of room for everyone.

Application

Jesus promised that, after he died, he would rise, and then when he returned his followers would always be with him. “Heaven” is not an abstract subject — it’s about whether we believe Jesus’ promise. So, what do you trust in? When you strip away everything else,

what is it? At the bedrock in your life, what do you trust in? Christ calls us to trust in him, to count on him.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you went where most of us most dread going — into death itself — and you came back alive! Help me claim your victory, and live and die in calm trust in your eternally loving life. Amen.

Wednesday, January 24

Scripture: John 20:24-29; Acts 23:6-10; 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, 12-14

Thomas, the one called Didymus, one of the Twelve, wasn't with the disciples when Jesus came. The other disciples told him, "We've seen the Lord!"

But he replied, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, put my finger in the wounds left by the nails, and put my hand into his side, I won't believe."

After eight days his disciples were again in a house and Thomas was with them. Even though the doors were locked, Jesus entered and stood among them. He said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here. Look at my hands. Put your hand into my side. No more disbelief. Believe!"

Thomas responded to Jesus, "My Lord and my God!"

Jesus replied, "Do you believe because you see me? Happy are those who don't see and yet believe."

Knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, Paul exclaimed in the council, "Brothers, I'm a Pharisee and a descendant of Pharisees. I am on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead!"

These words aroused a dispute between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. This is because Sadducees say that there's no resurrection, angel, or spirit, but Pharisees affirm them all. Council members were shouting loudly. Some Pharisees who were legal experts stood up and insisted forcefully, "We find nothing wrong with this man! What if a spirit or angel has spoken to him?" The dispute became so heated that the commander feared they might tear Paul to pieces. He ordered soldiers to go down and remove him by force from their midst. Then they took him back to the military headquarters.

Brothers and sisters, I want to call your attention to the good news that I preached to you, which you also received and in which you stand. You are being saved through it if you hold on to the message I preached to you, unless somehow you believed it for nothing. I passed on to you as most important what I also received: Christ died for our sins in line with the scriptures, he was buried, and he rose on the third day in line with the scriptures. He appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve, and then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at once—most of them are still alive to this day, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me, as if I were born at the wrong time.

So if the message that is preached says that Christ has been raised from the dead, then how can some of you say, “There’s no resurrection of the dead”? If there’s no resurrection of the dead, then Christ hasn’t been raised either. If Christ hasn’t been raised, then our preaching is useless and your faith is useless.

Observation

The New Testament never pretended it was easy to believe in Jesus' resurrection (and its key role in helping us trust in life beyond the grave). Jesus was patient with Thomas' doubts, and in the end, Thomas called the clearly alive Jesus “my Lord and my God.” Hebrew Sadducees and some Corinthian Christians steeped in Greek ideas said, “There’s no resurrection of the dead.” The apostle Paul replied, “If Christ hasn’t been raised, then our preaching is useless and your faith is useless.”

Application

The risen Jesus was different in some ways (John 14:26). But he was not a ghost—that was the point of “Put your hand into my side.” This was the physical Jesus, now in a body his grave could not hold captive. The Word who became flesh (John 1:14) arose as flesh still, with what Paul would call a “spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). How can these somewhat mysterious hints about what the risen Jesus was like start to “flesh out” your hope for life with him eternally?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you are my Lord and my God. You are my Creator and my Redeemer. Because you live, I too will live forever. I thank you and I praise you today. Amen.

Thursday, January 25

Scripture: Isaiah 64:1-4; 1 Corinthians 2:4-9

If only you would tear open the heavens and come down!
Mountains would quake before you
like fire igniting brushwood or making water boil.
If you would make your name known to your enemies,
the nations would tremble in your presence.
When you accomplished wonders beyond all our expectations;
when you came down, mountains quaked before you.
From ancient times,
no one has heard,
no ear has perceived,
no eye has seen any god but you
who acts on behalf of those who wait for him!

My message and my preaching weren't presented with convincing wise words but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power. I did this so that your faith might not depend on the wisdom of people but on the power of God.

What we say is wisdom to people who are mature. It isn't a wisdom that comes from the present day or from today's leaders who are being reduced to nothing. We talk about God's wisdom, which has been hidden as a secret. God determined this wisdom in advance, before time began, for our glory. It is a wisdom that none of the present-day rulers have understood, because if they did understand it, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory! But this is precisely what is written: *God has prepared things for those who love him that no eye has seen, or ear has heard, or that haven't crossed the mind of any human being.*

Observation

Scholar William Barclay wrote, "When John said [John 1:18] that no [one] has ever seen God, everyone in the ancient world would fully agree with him." Mark 1:10's phrasing indicated Jesus had fulfilled Isaiah's prayer in Isaiah 64:1-2. And in 1 Corinthians, Paul used the words of Isaiah 64 to indicate "how unimaginably [God's past actions] would be transcended" by the wonders to come through the salvation that Jesus offered.

Application

Do you ever think something like, "If only God would part the clouds and show me the reality of his person and rule, I wouldn't have to doubt"? The prophet had that idea long before you in Isaiah 64:1. Yet Mark 1:10 said that in Jesus God gave us the clearest view of divine reality we could process, yet many who saw Jesus still wouldn't believe. What makes trust, rather than "proof," an important element of your personal spiritual journey?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you came from eternal dimensions that go beyond all I can imagine. And you promise that I can be with you in those unimaginable dimensions for eternity. I trust you and thank you. Amen.

Friday, January 26

Scripture: Hebrews 2:10-15

It was appropriate for God, for whom and through whom everything exists, to use experiences of suffering to make perfect the pioneer of salvation. This salvation belongs to many sons and daughters whom he's leading to glory. This is because the one who makes people holy and the people who are being made holy all come from one source. That is why Jesus isn't ashamed to call them brothers and sisters when he says,

I will publicly announce your name to my brothers and sisters.

I will praise you in the middle of the assembly.

He also says,

I will rely on him.

And also,

Here I am with the children whom God has given to me.

Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, he also shared the same things in the same way. He did this to destroy the one who holds the power over death—the devil—

by dying. He set free those who were held in slavery their entire lives by their fear of death.

Observation

From ancient Rome to now, the ultimate human threat is, "I will kill you." We still have Roman Empire records in which officials puzzled over how little that threat seemed to affect Jesus' followers. In a way that those officials couldn't grasp, Jesus, dying and rising again, set all his followers free from even the fear of death.

Application

The human fear of death is so deep-seated that, if we haven't faced it, we may be unable to "be there" emotionally for friends, family members or even ourselves when illness or accident threatens someone's life. Can you accept that one day in this world you will die? Bone deep, do you move beyond thinking of Jesus' resurrection as a long-ago story to "counting on it" to give you peace that there is, in fact, life on the other side of death?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, "fear not" (in various forms) are your words that the Bible repeats most often. Teach me how to look to you as my light even at the most frightening times. Help me live free from a debilitating fear of death. Amen.

Saturday, January 27

Scripture: Revelation 21:1-7, 21:23 - 22:5, 22:17

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. I heard a loud voice from the throne say, "Look! God's dwelling is here with humankind. He will dwell with them, and they will be his peoples. God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more. There will be no mourning, crying, or pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." Then the one seated on the throne said, "Look! I'm making all things new." He also said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." Then he said to me, "All is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will freely give water from the life-giving spring. Those who emerge victorious will inherit these things. I will be their God, and they will be my sons and daughters.

The city doesn't need the sun or the moon to shine on it, because God's glory is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day, and there will be no night there. They will bring the glory and honor of the nations into it. Nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is vile and deceitful, but only those who are registered in the Lamb's scroll of life.

Then the angel showed me the river of life-giving water, shining like crystal, flowing from

the throne of God and the Lamb through the middle of the city's main street. On each side of the river is the tree of life, which produces twelve crops of fruit, bearing its fruit each month. The tree's leaves are for the healing of the nations. There will no longer be any curse. The throne of God and the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. Night will be no more. They won't need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will shine on them, and they will rule forever and always.

The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' Let the one who hears say, 'Come!' And let the one who is thirsty come! Let the one who wishes receive life-giving water^[a] as a gift."

Observation

Revelation ended with a set of glowing, symbol-laden pictures of the glory that awaits God's people when God makes our world new. This expanded on Jesus' teaching that, for God's people, the end of the world is about redemption, not fear (Luke 21:25-28). Scholar Catherine Cory noted that "John isn't being transported to an otherworldly place; rather, he's experiencing a new transformed heaven and earth (see Isaiah 65:17-19)." We need to avoid "getting lost in the weeds" of giant jewels and objects more precious than our minds can imagine. The vision used those objects, not as ends in themselves, but as symbols showing that the greatest eternal reward is that "God's dwelling is here with humankind.... God himself will be with them as their God" (21:3).

Application

As Rome exiled him and ridiculed (and all too often killed) Christians, John confidently wrote of a splendid future for God's people. He ended the Bible's big story as it began, using images from Genesis 2 to picture the restored (and if anything, better than ever) garden of Paradise. John's vision put the promise of eternal life into powerful, mind-stretching images. And the exiled seer made it plain that anyone who will willingly live in God's kingdom can choose to be part of that ultimate, life-transforming hope. "The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.... Let the one who is thirsty come! Let the one who wishes receive lifegiving water as a gift" (21:24, 22:17). Have you said yes to that invitation? How can you live every day in the light of that hope?

Prayer

King Jesus, I am yearning for the world you will make new. I open my heart and ask you to help me start living now with you as my eternal hope, as my God. Amen.