

Good News Daily

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Sunday, September 19

Luke 3:7-18 *John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. (v.16 NIV)*

John wasn't just being polite at the Jordan when he introduced Jesus as a man of power over sin. Jesus is God, the creator of space-time and all that is!

John's answer to sin was the customary answer: have it washed away by the water of baptism. Good works would provide proof of the cleansing. But cleansing can be only partially effective as Jesus' parable of the one and seven demonic spirits demonstrates (Luke 11:24-26).

I believe that Jesus has the power to radically transform me by fire through the Holy Spirit if I will let him. He will burn away all that is the materialistic and selfish me—the inordinate desires (addictions) of my body and my spirit. Out of the ashes he will create a person informed by love of God and neighbor, attracted to what is good and abhorred by what is evil. But I must want it, and want it very much because the cost is high—death and a rebirth that is never complete and always in process this side of the veil of mortality.

2 Kings 4:8-37; Psalms 93, 96; Acts 9:10-31

Monday, September 20

Matthew 5:21-26 *"But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell." (v.22)*

When I was young, I held grudges. It stimulated my anger against the other (persons, "the universe," or God) and generated a certain amount of hellish, but oddly pleasurable, excitement in my life. My pride was on the line and needed satisfaction.

I later came to realize that anger was my entryway into the comparison game. This is a game of foolish pride where I determine that the other is either better than I, comparable to me, or inferior. If better, I am humiliated and dismiss the person from my life or get even in some way; if worse, I denigrate the person as unworthy of me; if comparable, I am always looking over my shoulder to see if the other is surpassing me. That which is evil delighted in my playing this prideful game because it is a lose-lose pastime that brings only anxiety, misery, resentment, and sometimes despair.

Righteous anger, as modeled by Jesus, is an entirely different matter. It is directed externally to a cause outside myself rather than stoking my pride.

2 Kings 5:1-19; Psalm 80; 1 Corinthians 4:8-21

Tuesday, September 21

1 Corinthians 5:1-8 *Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb has been sacrificed. (v.7)*

I want to be who I really am—unleavened, sinless, and united with God. I seek eternal citizenship in God's kingdom. To fulfill my hopes, God has a plan to transform me as I journey through life.

The Exodus foreshadows my journey in many ways. At the outset, the Hebrews rid their homes of every trace of leaven (representative of sin). I asked forgiveness for my sins and was forgiven through Jesus' sacrifice (but not truly transformed). They, like me, travelled in darkness, not really knowing where they were going. God was their Light, and mine, as long as they and I loved God, each other, had faith and hope, and avoided sin. Lacking in these essentials, even to

the smallest measure, separates Guide from followers with serious consequences. The Hebrews' imperfections led to many tribulations as mine did for me.

Transformation from my false self to true self has been slow and agonizing, and is currently incomplete. I cannot do it alone. My loving Lord does the hardest work; but I must fully cooperate and trust God totally.

2 Kings 5:19-27; Psalm 78:1-39; Matthew 5:27-37

Wednesday, September 22

Psalm 119:97-120 *Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.* (v.105)

I imagine a lone Christian trekking along a narrow, rutted, and winding road at night. The traveler shoulders a rucksack and holds a lantern. The path is unfamiliar, but its destination is passionately desired. Clouds completely cover the moon and stars. Only alertness and the lantern's light illuminating a few feet ahead keep the wayfarer from stumbling or losing the way.

The rucksack contains stones representing the pilgrim's belief system and practices. Many must be discarded and replaced by gemstones the lamp illuminates. The pilgrim finds this very difficult to do. Others have turned back; but some of these resume again later.

On occasion the clouds part slightly, and a bright star appears briefly. These experiences bring the pilgrim great inner joy, even ecstasy. But the experiences are not ends in themselves, only encouragements.

If God wills and the traveler keeps the lamp alight, the star appears more often as journey's end draws nearer. In the disciple's lifetime the night may give way to early morning and a dim view of the glorious destination longed for so ardently.

2 Kings 6:1-23; 1 Corinthians 5:9—6:8; Matthew 5:38-48

Thursday, September 23

1 Corinthians 6:12-20 *"I have the right to do anything," you say—but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"—but I will not be mastered by anything.* (v.12)

Jesus knew that it would be impossible to codify laws for all situations people encounter in living with God, themselves, and others. Besides, people can rationalize their way around any rule. Don't want to spend money to help "honor your father and your mother"? Simply call what you should rightfully give "a gift consecrated to God" (Corban). Instead, Jesus gave us a law applicable in all places and at all times. The law of love completes but does not abolish the Hebrew codes. "Love and do what you will," says Augustine. But how do I allocate my finite time and resources among God, others, and myself?

Paul knew that people become inordinately attached to things (including ideas) such that they become habits or addictions. "I need that morning coffee." Some habits glorify God or otherwise demonstrate love. They bring me closer to our Lord. Others separate me from God, some being so subtle and obscure that I don't even recognize them. Lord, help me identify the hidden habits and have the courage to overcome all those that separate us.

2 Kings 9:1-16; Psalms 83, 146, 147; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Friday, September 24

Matthew 6:7-15 *"And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words."* (v.7)

People tell me that as they grow in Christian maturity their vocal prayer of petition simplifies. In many cases it becomes a humble: "Your will be done." It could hardly be otherwise since the will of our omniscient God is always right in any decision situation.

True contemplatives find that there are times when they simply do not want to pray verbally. And they find themselves unable to pray; the words and thoughts are not there. Finally, they just want to be quiet and love God with peaceful affection. When all three come together at one time, God is enlightening them from within. Over time they become different persons—

closer to God and more loving, with greater faith and hope. This may be the state described in Romans 8:26 where the Holy Spirit intercedes with untranslatable words.

Sometimes contemplatives are accused of being Quietists—people who suppress human efforts in prayer and action. Instead, the ones praying should be actively involved by being alert, open, and receptive to God’s action in them.

2 Kings 9:17-37; Psalm 88; 1 Corinthians 7:1-9

Saturday, September 25

Matthew 6:19-24 *“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”* (v.24)

According to economic theory, money serves as a means for transactions in place of barter, a unit of account used to quote prices, and a store of wealth. In those senses it is neutral. Money becomes dangerous when used as a measure of personal worthiness in the eyes of God or others, i.e., as points used to determine who wins the comparison game. The Pharisees in Jesus’ time concluded that the poor (including Jesus) must be poor because they were sinners. Like today’s prosperity gospel, they preached that God rewards the good people with material wealth. Do the Pharisees really win?

Money also becomes dangerous when it elicits the all too common “it’s just business” response. Unethical behaviors are often rationalized by this logic. Money used without love separates us from God and is unacceptable.

It’s best to believe that all money belongs to God. We are only agents with the job of managing it to God’s glory. Finally, I think it essential to understand that *no* master in this universe, not just money, should replace the service of God.

2 Kings 11:1-20a; Psalms 87, 90; 1 Corinthians 7:10-24

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