

(For Monday, April 3, 2017) Are their exiles in your path?

“After Nebuchadnessar king of Babylon had taken into exile from Jerusalem Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, together with the officials of Judah, the craftsmen, and the metal workers, and had brought them to Babylon, the Lord showed me this vision: behold two baskets of figs placed before the temple of the Lord.” (Jer.23:1-ESV)

The astounding thing about the Babylonian Exile was the opportunity it represented for so many people. A community of gifted artisans was forced to move to a strange land. Now, these people had a choice: they could either waste away their days in a constant yearning for the home they knew. Or they could forge ahead with their lives, maintaining the ethnic identity which made them who they are, while taking advantage of the historic event which God had orchestrated. They could choose to interact with the new culture in which they found themselves, and grow their knowledge and wisdom. The same choice of either isolation from or integration with these exiles was also placed before the Babylonian peoples.

I have been wondering in these last months whether we, as God’s people in a great country do not find ourselves with a similar opportunity to grow ourselves in the eyes of God and of others, by welcoming those exiles who arrive in our own empire.

(For Tuesday, April 4, 2017) How sensitive are you to the worship needs of others?

“For my brothers and companions’ sake I will say ‘Peace be within you!’ [that is, in Jerusalem] For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good.” (Ps. 122:9-10-ESV)

Some scholars believe Psalms 120 – 134, known as the “Songs of Ascents” were composed to lament and proclaim the holiness which came upon the people when they climbed (i.e. “ascended”) the Temple steps in Jerusalem. This experience was denied the Children of Israel during their time in exile. Psalm 122 links the well-being of God’s house to the well-being of our “brothers and companions,” that is, those who dwell with us in our community. (Jesus’ concept of “neighbor”- See Lk.11:36) Too often, some influential members of a congregation are much more focused on worship being molded to their taste. Such people are rarely concerned that others in that fellowship-of-believers are being Spiritually nurtured by the worship and ministry experience in the parish. That insistence to please yourself on Sunday morning inevitably leads to the frustration and eventual departure of those who worship beside you. If you insist that your worship be perfectly geared to what you find meaningful, it can’t be really meaningful to anyone who is even slightly different from yourself.

Is it really so hard a thing to understand why present-day church attendance is in decline?

(Office Memo for Wednesday, April 5, 2017) Have you grasped the joys of willing servant-hood?

“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”

This verse is one of the most hotly debated in all the Bible. Did Paul mean “Christ is the “annulment” of the law?” Or was he saying that “Christ is the “completion” of the law.” The original language doesn’t help much here, since the Greek word “*Telos*” is used in the Bible to indicate both concepts. For me, Christ is the completion of the law, since the grace of God through faith in Jesus as inspired by the Holy Spirit births in the heart of the believer the true desire to be

Holy, as God required of his children, going all the way back to his command in Leviticus. (See Lev.11:44) The grace of salvation properly embraced through our faith in Christ makes it possible for the Christian to truly love the life of God's servant, something that was never possible through the crushing burden of the law.

Have you realized the immense joy that is to be found in living your life to please and glorify God?

(Office Memo for Thursday, April 6, 2017) **Do you understand the “acid test” of Christian faith?**

“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” (Rom.10:9, ESV)

This verse is both bold and comforting. It is also both explicit and inclusive. The explicit boldness of the verse comes in the proclamation that “Jesus is Lord.” Because those who proclaim such a truth have to “put-up or shut-up.” If we say that Jesus is truly Lord of our lives, then by heaven we had better be ready to live our lives in such a way that people will come to believe we mean what we say. And some will surely be led to the Cross by such a witness. Rom.10:9 is also comfortingly inclusive, since the formula is so readily embraceable for all believers. It doesn't matter if you were sprinkled or dunked, if you use wine or grape-juice, if you confess to somebody with a collar on, or if you confess quietly and earnestly to your God in heaven. Either way, if we live our lives in such a way that people are drawn to God by our example, and if we truly believe and profess that this Jesus went to the Cross for us, died for us there, and three days later was raised from the dead for the sake of our eternal life, nothing more is necessary.

Ain't God great! ☺

(Office Memo for Friday, April 7, 2017) **Whose schedule are you on?**

“Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.” (Jn.11:5-6, ESV)

The statement, “*Lord, if you had been here, my brother [Lazarus] would not have died,*” appears twice in this chapter. It's a kind of accusation, launched first by Martha of Bethany and then repeated by her sister Mary. And actually, they were right! Having loved Lazarus so much and having healed so many, surely Jesus would have restored to health this special friend he loved so much. But we read in verses 5 and 6 of John 11 that Jesus delayed coming to Bethany an additional two days, specifically because he “loved Martha and her sister Mary and Lazarus.” How strange, from an earthly point of view! But the truth is, Jesus had more in mind than just restoring health to his friend Lazarus. He wanted to do so much more, and restore to his special friend the very gift of life itself. I can't help but wonder what immense blessings we forego when we are too impatient for God to arrive with the fullness and beauty of his plan.

Do we sometimes “pre-empt” the great blessings God wants to give us by trying to force him into our own time-tables?