

Journey Into God's Word



Genesis 39-50

Psalms 39-58

Matthew 22-28

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

During the past few weeks, we have gone from creation to re-creation in our Bible reading. In this week's study of Genesis we have seen this re-creation process at work in Judah, who went from one who remained silent when Joseph was sold into slavery to one who was willing to be a slave in order that his brother Benjamin might go free (Gen. 44:18-34). This re-creation took place in Joseph where he went from being a spoiled kid into a man of God who saved his nation. In Jacob's life, we see a man who went from being a self-centered deceiver to one who recognized that God was the shepherd of his life (Gen. 48:15). I encourage you to study the lives of each one of these individuals, noticing what events brought them to the "end of themselves" to the extent that they had to turn to God.

Jesus says in John 12:23-25*, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life." In Matthew 22-28, we see Jesus giving His life as the ultimate sacrifice for our sins. He was resurrected from the dead, in order that we may experience life both now and for all eternity. In order to experience this life, what does Jesus say we must do in Matthew 22:37, 38? How does this relate to Matthew 25:31-46?

"Then He will turn to the goats, the ones on His left and say, 'Get out, worthless goats! You're good for nothing but the fires of hell. And why? Because - I was hungry and you gave me no meal, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was homeless and you gave me no bed, I was shivering and you gave me no clothes, sick and in prison, and you never visited.' Then those goats are going to say, 'Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry or thirsty, or homeless or shivering, or sick or in prison and didn't help?' He will answer them, 'I'm telling the solemn truth. Whenever you failed to do one of these things to someone who was overlooked or ignored, that was me - you failed to do it to me.'" (Message Bible) How are we to see Jesus in each poor and homeless person? Acts of compassion are not humanistic efforts but result from dying to ourselves and being resurrected into Christ Jesus. Paul expresses it this way in Gal. 2:20, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." The initial sacrifice, before any other sacrifice on our part can take place, is described in Psalm 51:16, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." Call it repentance, brokenness or whatever, but before you can really do that which God is calling you to do, you must first be so broken over what you are that you

cry out in desperation for what He is. 2 Cor. 10:5 says, "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

I know from personal experience that as I bring "into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" I can experience a peace that passes all understanding. The challenge is doing this every moment of every day with the self-demanding it's own way. That is why I must always remember, "The world's a huge stockpile of God-wonders and God-thoughts." (Ps. 40:5, Message Bible) Realizing this, how does Psalm 42 illustrate our deep desire to get to know God better and better? "God is a safe place to hide, ready to help when we need him." (Ps. 46:1, Message Bible) That is why I must consistently bring myself to "trust in God's unfailing love for ever and ever." (Ps. 53:8) Now is the time to obey when it says "Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never let the righteous fall." (Ps. 55:22) "When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?" (Ps. 56:3,4)

When Joseph and Jesus experienced injustice, what steps did they take to see the fulfillment of Psalm 58:6, 7 where it says, "Break the teeth in their mouths, O God; tear out, O Lord, the fangs of the lions! Let them vanish like water that flows away; when they draw the bow, let their arrows be blunted?" Describe the resurrection that Joseph and Jesus experienced. What impact should that have on our lives today? "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds." (2 Cor. 10:3,4)

I have found that in the midst of overwhelming odds I must not lose hope. I need to know in the depths of my very being that even though the dark nights of injustice surround me, the bright dawn of deliverance will soon arrive. Archbishop Oscar Romero declared prior to his death by an assassin's bullet, "Don't be led astray either by the allure of power and money or by following false ideologies. True hope is not found there either. True hope is not found in a revolution of violence and bloodshed, and hope is not found in money and power – neither on the left nor on the right. The hope that we must account for and that makes us speak with valor is found in Christ, who reigns even after death, even after murderous death. And with him reign all who have preached his justice his love, his hope, his peace."

As we study the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, may it impact our lives as it did Oscar Romero's who on another occasion declared, "To each one of us Christ is saying: If you want your life and mission to be fruitful like mine, do as I. Be converted into a seed that lets itself be buried. Let yourself be killed. Those who shun suffering will remain alone. No one is more alone than the selfish. But if you give your life out of love for others, as I give mine for all, you will reap a great harvest. You will have the deepest satisfactions. Do not fear death or threats; the Lord goes with you."

Pilate's question in Matt. 27:22 is one that each of us must ask ourselves, "What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?" We can follow Him from a distance like Peter did in Matt. 26 and end up denying him, or betray Him as a result of our lusts for power and money as Judas did. Another way of dealing with Jesus is to

crucify Him as the crowds demanded in Matthew 27:22, 23 by doing our own thing or wash our hands to Him, declaring self righteously, "I am innocent of this man's blood" as Pilate proclaimed in Matt. 27:24. That's how most people deal with Jesus Christ in one way or another. The crowds may have mocked Him, but it was our sins that crucified Him. As He died, the curtain of the temple (representing the OT covenant of the law) "was torn in two. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life." (Matt. 27:51) As we read this, does anything beyond a stirring of the emotions take place? I know the time has come for me to ask myself, how does the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ make a difference in my life? For Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. it meant, "the cross is the eternal expression of the length to which God will go in order to restore broken community. The resurrection is a symbol of God's triumph over all the forces that seek to block community."

The brokenness of our community can be found in the face of each hurting, homeless and hungry person around us. It can be found in the loneliness of the jail cell, the nursing home and the hospital bed. This brokenness is all around us. Dr. King further stated, "We have lived under the agony and darkness of Good Friday with the conviction that one day the heightened glow of Easter would emerge on the horizon."

Those who crucified Jesus said he was an extremist. Believers today, who have died to themselves and have been resurrected unto Christ Jesus, to the extent that what touches His heart also touches theirs, are also called extremists. Lillian Smith, in her speech on the first anniversary of the Montgomery bus boycotts, declared, "for all America to see that in times of crisis, only the extremist can meet the challenge. The question in crisis is not: Are you going to be an extremist? The question is: What kind of extremist are you going to be? The time has come when it is dangerous not to risk. We must take risks in order to save our integrity, our moral nature, our lives and our country."

This year as a community of brothers and sisters, we have taken risks. We have taken the prosperity preachers off our stations, knowing it may create financial problems for us. We have stood up to those who fight the integration of downtown St. Louis with shelter for the homeless. We have had, and continue to have, battles on many fronts, but the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ pulses within us until Paul's proclamation in Philippians 3:7-11 becomes our proclamation. Please read this and apply it to your personal life.

"The angel spoke to the women: 'There is nothing to fear here. I know you're looking for Jesus, the One they nailed to the cross. He is not here. He is risen, just as He said. Come and look at the place where He was placed. Now get on your way quickly, and tell His disciples He is risen from the dead.'" (The Message Bible) Where do you find this in Matthew 28? Who have you told recently that Christ is Risen? What great commission does He give us at the end of Matthew 28?

Please join me this week in reading Acts 1-7 and witness how the reality of the resurrection transformed lives. Study Exodus 1-15 and see that when Moses came face-to-face with God, he could not remain indifferent to the suffering and oppression

of others. Meditate on Psalms 59-72 and discover daily strength as you move forth as God's instrument of healing and deliverance under the power of the Holy Spirit.

As you reach out through the love of Christ, I know there will be those moments when you may feel overwhelmed and alone. Please remember, after Jesus gave us the great commission in Matt. 28:18-20, He declared, "surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Never forget that you are not alone. Christ is Risen and He loves you.

How I thank God for the privilege of being able to serve Christ with such dedicated individuals as yourself. Please be assured of my prayers and don't forget to keep Penny, me, and the rest of the NLEC staff, in your daily prayers.

Yours in Christ Service,

Larry Rice

*New International Verse used unless noted in the case of the Message Bible.