

That is why it is good to study the times in which our Lord walked on earth to understand those idioms, customs, and ways to which he referred. Otherwise, we might unknowingly misinterpret Scripture. Many Bibles have commentaries and guides in them for this purpose.

Tradition and rituals are very important, especially in our church services. They tie us to the apostolic succession and early church beginnings. They give us checks and balances to avoid heresies.

But we need to be wary. When *how* we do things become more important than *Whom* we are doing them for, things can get muddled and priorities confused. It did for the Pharisees. It can for us in our worship and Christian walk as well.

Genesis 47:27—48:7; Psalms 87, 90; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

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PO Box 380, Winter Park, FL 32790
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Good News Daily

Volume XXIV

March 3-9, 2024

Number 9

Sunday, March 3

Genesis 44:1-17 “*What can we say to my lord?*” Judah replied. “*What can we say? How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants’ guilt.*” (v.16 NIV)

We are into the third week of Lent. Have you kept your Lenten pledge to give up something? Have you felt tested, suddenly craving whatever it was you decided you didn’t need in your life for 40 days?

Lent is more than just giving up chocolate or TV. Giving up something reminds us that we humans are frail and often fail. We need the Lord’s strength and mercy to make changes in our habits and attitudes.

Just as Joseph tested his brothers’ integrity, God can allow trials in our lives in order to test the strength of our faith. We that confess Jesus as our Lord, however, if *we* ask for mercy when we fail, He grades on a curve—the curve of Jesus’ nail-scarred palms reaching out to help us try again.

Psalms 93, 96; Romans 8:1-10; John 5:25-29

Monday, March 4

Psalms 80 Restore us, O God; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved. (v.3)

This phrase is repeated three times throughout this psalm. When things come in threes in Scripture, it is as if typing in a bold font. Pay attention, this is important.

But it seems strange that David would say this when, in Old Testament times, people thought seeing God’s face meant death. However, when Moses’ face glowed after communing with God, it was so brightly reflected in his skin he had to wear a veil. Why did he not die? Because Moses was faithful, thus he could come before God.

God wants the same for all His children. The Aaronic blessing states: “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace” (Numbers 6:23-26).

To commune with God requires one thing—sinlessness. And Jesus provides that if we confess. So, in essence, the psalmist is asking God to forgive our sins so we can come into His presence. Only Jesus can restore us to a right relationship. And that is what this season is all about, isn’t it?

Genesis 44:18-34; 1 Corinthians 7:25-31; Mark 5:21-43

Tuesday, March 5

1 Corinthians 7:32-40 *I would like you to be free from concern.* (v.32a)

To many people, Chapter 7 may appear antiquated and not relevant today. Marriage is an option now. Couples live together, buy houses together, and have kids together without ever visiting the courthouse.

But we Christians are not to follow the standards of the world. And that is the point Paul is trying to make. If you scan your eyes up to verse 17, it states, “Nevertheless, each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them.” Wherever God has you at the moment, be it single, married, or widowed, He has a purpose for your life. Each of us must seek first His righteousness. Each of us must strive to consider Him first and foremost in our thoughts and actions.

Do others see you as serving Him first? Do you see yourself doing that? If not, then spend some time asking the Lord to give you the strength and faith to change—not your circumstance, but your attitude toward it.

Genesis 45:1-15; Psalm 78:1-39; Mark 6:1-13

Wednesday, March 6

Mark 6:13-29 *...Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him.* (v.20)

Oh, how sin can entangle us! Herod was definitely caught in a trap, and like a fly trying to struggle free from a spider’s web, he became more and more bound by it.

Non-Christians are just like him. There is something attractive about us Christians. We are more kindhearted, forgiving, and seem to possess a wisdom that they do not have. But they still struggle, unable to free themselves from the snares of this world.

If we are honest, so do we. That is why it is important to confess our sins to God and to the person we have offended before things get out of hand. Otherwise, we spin our own trap and the longer we let the sin stick to us, the harder it will be to break free.

Confession takes strength of character, and the Holy Spirit can assist us in that effort. No matter the consequences of our actions, God’s mercy and grace will reign.

Genesis 45:16-28; Psalm 119:97-120; 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

Thursday, March 7

Psalm 42 Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. (v.5)

Whoever said life as a Christian would be “blessed” by the world’s definition had it wrong. In Hebrew, blessed (baruch) doesn’t mean gifted with

no worries, or endowed with riches and health. It means to be content in the presence God. No guilt, no shame, no anger or hurt.

Whenever I feel down or not quite right in my attitude, I turn to Scripture. I play praise music and sing. I recall the blessings God has bestowed on me and the times when I felt Him move in my life.

Within minutes, my attitude shifts from my problems to His gracious mercy. From my plight to His magnificence and power, infinite wisdom, and love for me. And yes, no matter what is happening, I begin to feel baruch. And that always ends with me praising Him in humbled gratitude. Because deep down I know He remains faithful and His love for me is not dependent on my mood.

How about you? Do you feel baruch?

Genesis 46:1-7, 28-34; Psalm 43; 1 Corinthians 9:1-15; Mark 6:30-46

Friday, March 8

Genesis 47:1-26 *...and Joseph reduced the people to servitude, from one end of Egypt to the other.* (v.21)

Did Joseph do his people and the rest of Egypt a favor? In his effort to save them from famine, he allowed the people to exchange their freedom for food. Thus began the 400 years of slavery from which God, through Moses, would eventually free them. The people asked for this to happen, thinking immediately of their needs and not the consequences of their actions.

So, what lesson can we take from this? The adage, “be careful what you ask for” comes to mind. Instead of trusting God to provide, they turned to Joseph. 400 years later they would whine in the wilderness and ask Moses to provide. Then ask David as king to provide safety from their enemies.

How often do we get to the end of our efforts and then seek God to provide during our “famine”? What if we trusted God to begin with and sought to do His will instead of our own, believing that He will not forsake us.

And in times of plenty and safety, will we put Him back on the shelf until we need Him again? Will we ask Him to provide in the way we want or trust in His faithfulness?

Psalm 88; 1 Corinthians 9:16-27; Mark 6:47-56

Saturday, March 9

Mark 7:1-23 *And he continued, “You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!”* (v.9)

“But we have always done things that way in this church.”

A visiting bishop spoke at our Diocesan Altar Guild meeting about the things we do that fall under the category of a small “c”, i.e. custom. We should not put more emphasis on the *way* we do things rather than *why* we do things.