

Changes

Then a voice said to him, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat them." Acts 10:13 NLT

As I write this, my son just got married. Yesterday. He's never left home before, and now with that single ceremony he's starting a new life with his wife. Lisa and I are thrilled and excited.

And sad. We miss him.

All of us face change in our lives. I love change, unless I don't. Change is strange and complicated. Feelings are mixed.

In Acts 10 we see Peter dealing with change. In this passage we find insight. The Lord shows Peter a vision of animals that he's forbidden to eat. Then the Lord says, *"Get up, Peter; kill and eat them"* (Acts 10:13 NLT). Gasp. *"No, Lord, ' Peter declared. 'I have never eaten anything that our Jewish laws have declared impure and unclean'"* (Acts 10:14 NLT).

Peter needs help with this one, so God repeats the vision three times. Peter's reaction? *"Peter was very perplexed. What could the vision mean?"* (Acts 10:17 NLT).

Of course he was perplexed. The Lord doesn't explain what the vision means. He doesn't say it's a metaphor for His plan to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles, uniting them with the Jews. Many blanks are unfilled.

And there's our lesson. Change is confusing.

Why is this happening? Why do I feel this way? Lord, what are You doing? What does it all mean?

If you're in the middle of change and are confused, that's okay. Peter will understand what God is doing at the right time, and so will you. I think God wanted Peter to scratch his head for a while. It prepared him to participate in God's bigger plan.

Peter's confusion had purpose.

Maybe yours does too.

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One-Year Bible Reading

Isaiah 62:6-65:25
 Philippians 2:19-3:3
 Psalm 73:1-28
 Proverbs 24:13-14

Changes – 3

Don't long for "the good old days." This is not wise. Ecclesiastes 7:10 NLT

Years ago there was a book on change called *Who Moved My Cheese?* It was about two mice and two little people. One day their source of food—cheese—is gone. The people want the old "normal" to come back, but the mice adjust and find new cheese. They embrace the "new normal."

Has your cheese been moved?

In Acts 10 Peter is going through change. First, God shows him a strange vision, telling him to kill and eat animals against Jewish law. Then three Gentile men show up at Peter's door and ask him to accompany them to a Roman officer's home. The next day Peter visits the home of the Roman officer: *"Peter told them, 'You know it is against our laws for a Jewish man to enter a Gentile home like this or to associate with you. But God has shown me that I should no longer think of anyone as impure or unclean. So I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. Now tell me why you sent for me'"* (Acts 10:28-29 NLT).

Peter isn't a little person. He's a mouse. He understands the old is gone, and it's a new beginning. This is a good example for us.

"Don't long for 'the good old days.' This is not wise" (Ecclesiastes 7:10 NLT). If we only see change as an end, we long for the old days to come back. But endings mean new beginnings, and new beginnings can be pretty great.

Our son just got married and moved out. We miss him. But there's a new beginning. We have a fantastic daughter-in-law. Maybe we'll be grandparents someday. I get to see them live out their love of Christ in new ways.

So many new things. Good things.

The new normal.

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Jeremiah 1:1-2:30
 Philippians 4:1-23
 Psalm 75:1-10
 Proverbs 24:17-20

Changes – 2

"Why have you come?" Acts 10:21 NLT

As I write this, my wife Lisa and I are experiencing a change in our home. My son just got married and started a new life. His room is empty and quiet. Lisa doesn't have to make sure we're stocked with his favorite potato chips. We can't hear him play the notes of Bach from his room anymore.

The change feels unfamiliar.

In Acts 10 Peter experiences change. Our Lord shows him the Gospel is now for all people, not just Jews. Peter sees a vision where the Lord tells him to eat animals he's not supposed to eat. It perplexes Peter.

Then there's a knock on the door: *"So Peter went down and said, 'I'm the man you are looking for. Why have you come?'"* (Acts 10:21 NLT).

Peter would know these men were Gentiles. Peter grew up shunning Gentiles. He believed they were "unclean" and inferior to Jews. But "They said, 'We were sent by Cornelius, a Roman officer. He is a devout and God-fearing man, well respected by all the Jews. A holy angel instructed him to summon you to his house so that he can hear your message'" (Acts 10:22 NLT). Peter connects this to the vision God gave him. And he does the unexpected: "So Peter invited the men to stay for the night. The next day he went with them, accompanied by some of the brothers from Joppa" (Acts 10:23 NLT).

A Jew would never do this. He wouldn't allow Gentiles in his home, much less invite them to stay for the night. But Peter does. What's he doing? Peter knows God is at work here, so he enters the unfamiliar.

Are you experiencing change? Remember, God is always at work in your life, making you more like Jesus.

Even if that involves the unfamiliar.

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Isaiah 66:1-24
 Philippians 3:4-21
 Psalm 74:1-23
 Proverbs 24:15-16

Changes – 4

When the others heard this, they stopped objecting and began praising God. Acts 11:18 NLT

As I write this, our son is married and on his honeymoon. As Lisa and I get used to life without him at home, I'm thinking about change. Peter's example in Acts 10 is helpful. God is teaching Peter to no longer think of anyone as inferior to Jews. This rocks Peter's rowboat. We see: Change is confusing. Change is unfamiliar. Change leads to a "new normal."

And now, as we dip into Acts 11, there's another principle. Peter's Jewish friends hear about what Peter has done, and they're not amused: *"But when Peter arrived back in Jerusalem, the Jewish believers criticized him. 'You entered the home of Gentiles and even ate with them!' they said"* (Acts 11:2-3 NLT).

Only Peter received a vision from God. But this new "normal" wasn't for Peter only. This was something our Lord wanted all the Jews to understand. How would the Jews understand? God had a plan, and that plan had a name: Peter.

Peter went through the whole story with them: "Then Peter told them exactly what had happened" (Acts 11:4 NLT). The result? "When the others heard this, they stopped objecting and began praising God. They said, 'We can see that God has also given the Gentiles the privilege of repenting of their sins and receiving eternal life'" (Acts 11:18 NLT).

Cool. A happy ending. What's the lesson?

Peter goes from confusion to being a spokesman. Peter has changed.

God does more than just create a new "normal." He creates a new *you*. Change is more than just different circumstances. It's a different you: new understanding, a new heart.

More Jesus. A new you.

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One-Year Bible Reading

Jeremiah 2:31-4:18
 Colossians 1:1-17
 Psalm 76:1-12
 Proverbs 24:21-22

Your Testimony

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due His name. Psalm 96:8

So often when I think of sharing my testimony, I think of my salvation story, that unique time when Jesus stepped into my life to move me from eternal death to eternal life. While this is a powerful story for each of us, God continues to uniquely step into our lives to do things that keep us in awe of His wondrous deeds.

No doubt, the birth of each of our children is a miracle worth telling, especially that of our youngest son. At the time, we had no health insurance that covered my pregnancy and birth so we knew we would have to pay thousands of dollars that we didn't have. We prayed to the Lord for wisdom and help and through a series of interesting twists and changes, our son had a wonderful hospital delivery that we ended up paying \$5 for.

We felt strongly that each of our sons should take piano lessons, but we had no piano. I looked in the newspaper classifieds (yes, this was back in the 1990s), and found a used one at a price we could afford. I went to look at it, and the owner and I started talking. I found out she was a neighbor to a couple who had attended our church. She adored this couple—since we knew them, she gave us the piano as a gift!

A year ago September one of our sons got married on the marsh in Pawley's Island, South Carolina. The location was beautiful but there was one problem. Hurricane Florence was supposed to flood the wedding venue with ten feet of water. We claimed Nahum 1:4—"He dries up all the rivers"—and prayed fervently that God would answer our prayers. Guess what? No flood at all!

Are these all coincidences? Good karma? NO! These are blessings from God and He deserves the glory. What's your story?

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One-Year Bible Reading

Jeremiah 4:19-6:15
 Colossians 1:18-2:7
 Psalm 77:1-20
 Proverbs 24:23-25

Monday, October 7

Significant and Radical Transformation

And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:18 NIV

The Christian life is one of significant transformation. Even its inception is one of radical change. In John 3 Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be born again. He didn't say that he needed to tweak a few things. Rather he needed a total and supernatural rebirth.

In 2 Corinthians 5:17 it says that everyone in Christ is a "new creation." It's not like we were savage wolves who were tamed to be family pets. No, the change that took place in us was so radical that it lacks fitting illustrations. Perhaps the closest living example is when during metamorphosis a caterpillar melts into a liquid that contains nothing but mush and a memory disk—no caterpillar parts and no butterfly parts. Yet out comes a butterfly! That is a new creation!

And that is just the beginning. After salvation there is a transformational process of ever-increasing glory. As we imitate Him (Ephesians 5:1-2) and put on our new selves (Ephesians 4:22-24), Christ is being formed in us (Galatians 4:19). Our thinking is being transformed, and our actions are following along.

Sadly, we often view ourselves simply as people who are forgiven but not significantly changed. We see our process of growth as one that is so slow and gradual that it is hard to see any discernable progress. The transformation that God talks about bears no resemblance to this view. God's transformation is one that results in significant and radical change.

May we embrace the miraculous work God is doing in us and not allow His mark on our lives to stop at our forgiveness!

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One-Year Bible Reading

Jeremiah 8:8-9:26
 Colossians 3:1-17
 Psalm 78:32-55
 Proverbs 24:27

Be Transformed!

Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.

Romans 12:2 CSB

We all want to be (or at least should want to be) better versions of ourselves. God has created us in His likeness and to do good works (Genesis 1:27 and Ephesians 2:10).

But we get stuck—a lot. Changing is hard.

It's a good thing that God helps us change into what He wants us to be.

I love Romans 12 because it's a turning point in the book between the first 11 chapters as God tells us who we are and the next several chapters as God tells us what we're supposed to do.

This is the link.

God changes us. He transforms us as we renew our minds in His truth.

So you're struggling to change. Aren't we all?!

Let's pray and ask God for help, but then let's dive into the truth of His Word and allow it to renew our minds. Then we'll see transformation. It may not be all at once; in fact, it'll probably be just a little at a time. But we will be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

We can do this renewal daily through reading the Bible, meditation, memorization and prayer.

God also has a chance to do this at church on Sunday when we gather as His people. Let's get ready to be renewed!

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One-Year Bible Reading

Jeremiah 6:16-8:7
 Colossians 2:8-23
 Psalm 78:1-31
 Proverbs 24:2-26

Monday, October 7

Tuesday, October 8

All in All

And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Ephesians 1:21-23

... a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all. Colossians 3:11

The Ephesians 1 verse above completes a prayer by Paul for the church. These two verses are packed with a very important message for all of us. Paul says that God put all things under Jesus's feet. These are the same things that we originally had and lost responsibility for in the fall of the Garden. Jesus bought it all back at the cross.

Then God gave Jesus to the church which is His body—so that everything (including us) would be filled with Him, all in all. What does that mean exactly? It means to yield to Jesus your everything, to recognize Him as Lord of all in your life, since He is Lord of everything anyway.

"But, Greg, you don't understand my circumstances. I'm not a good person. I've done bad things. I can't come back. I've backslidden. I don't deserve all that goodness." No, you don't. No one does. Be filled anyway.

There are no conditions made on any of this. Colossians 3:11 above says that Greek or Jew, barbarian, slave, freeman, black, white, killer, priest are all human, all bought with a price. All can be transformed.

So can you be changed—all of you. The question is not what is keeping Jesus from you, but what is keeping you from Jesus? If you are a Christian, be filled in the areas you have hidden from Him. He said, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you. I appointed you. . . ." (John 15:16). Fulfill your appointment. If you do not know Jesus as your personal Savior, acknowledge His gift to you, be transformed by the renewing of your mind, and be filled, all in all.

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Jeremiah 10:1-11:23
 Colossians 3:18-4:18
 Psalm 78:56-72
 Proverbs 24:28-29

A Boy's Questions

Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him! Matthew 7:9-11 ESV

I remember a time when I was about seven years old. Dad had purchased some lumber and carried it into the backyard. Dad was my hero, especially when it came time for building things, and my brothers and I were bursting with curiosity. Walking beside him as he carried his tools out to where the lumber lay, I asked him one more time, "What are you building, Daddy?" But all he would answer was: "Something to make little boys ask questions." He wanted to keep it a secret, to make it a surprise, and in that way to make it all the more special.

In spite of my ignorance of what he was building, I sensed it was going to be something good and eagerly helped as much as a seven-year-old could. Somewhere in the process, one of us figured out what it was going to be—a swing set! It turned out to have two swings, a homemade slide, and a teeter totter. It brought us hours of delight for many years.

Sometimes I wonder if our Heavenly Father is the same. He doesn't always tell us what He's doing. Maybe He wants to surprise us so that the end result is all the more special. Let's trust Him today, like a little boy working alongside his father. Let's trust His good heart, even when we don't know what in the world He is doing, even when what He is building seems mysterious, strange, or meaningless. Certainly whatever He is doing will end in delight.

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Jeremiah 12:1-14:10
 1 Thessalonians 1:1-2:8
 Psalm 79:1-13
 Proverbs 24:30-34

Friday, October 11

Paths

My child, listen to me and do as I say, and you will have a long, good life. I will teach you wisdom's ways and lead you in straight paths. Proverbs 4:10-11 NLT

Autumn is one of my favorite times of year. We are fortunate to live across the street from a metro park that has many walking paths. Several of these paths intersect, and if you aren't careful you can find yourself on a different path than you intended. There have been times I have wandered around for an hour before finding my way back to where I needed to be.

This has so many connections to my spiritual life. When I am out walking, if I slow down and pay attention I can see the signs that point me in the right direction. Similarly, the verse at the beginning of this entry gives concrete, practical ways to stay on the right path. God implores us to listen to Him, and He promises to teach and lead us. If I slow down and am aware of His presence, He will show me my next step.

It is tempting while walking to leave the path and go searching for something that looks appealing. The problem is that you can find yourself on your own with no direction. Another verse in Proverbs 4:14-15 talks about this: *Don't do as the wicked do, and don't follow the path of evildoers. Don't even think about it; don't go that way. Turn away and keep moving (NLT)*. It is so easy to be pulled away from God's leading, to want to be in control, or to chase after what is popular and enticing. God's warning is emphatic and clear: don't do it.

Wherever the journey of this day takes you, keep your eyes and heart open to the beautiful path God has chosen for you.

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One-Year Bible Reading

Jeremiah 16:16-18:23
 1 Thessalonians 4:1-5:3
 Psalm 81:1-16
 Proverbs 25:6-8

This Is My Father's World

The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein. Psalm 24:1 ESV

During the time of my brief visit to my dad at a retreat for Alzheimer's patients near his home in Albuquerque, I spent most of the time outside. The courtyard was attractive and pleasant. My brother and stepmother and I would stroll around the intertwined, paved paths with Dad using his walker, or sit in the shade. Dad's hearing is mostly gone, as is his memory, so there were not long conversations. But he enjoyed having us create conversation and community around him, evoking feelings of home.

Another thing Dad enjoyed was watching me do a bit of gardening. I noticed one planter filled with some giant kale plants along with several herbs. The plants were leaning at awkward angles; weeds had emerged. While the patients were very well cared for, this planter had escaped notice! So I shifted a few plant cages, found sticks to support the kale, and did a little weeding. The others watched in approval and laughter with Dad smiling.

My thought was, "My dad worked hard for almost 35 years planting his hillside acre with cacti, piñon pines, Russian sage, and rosemary, watering his trees, cutting dead growth, and spearing fallen leaves—till he was 91." His new world needed to be brought up to his standards.

Shall we not apply the same thought in care of our Father's world every day? Not just to gardens but to cultivating the lives of "those who dwell therein"? Paul said, ". . . just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children, so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory" (1 Thessalonians 2:11-12).

This is our Father's world.

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Jeremiah 14:11-16:15
 1 Thessalonians 2:9-3:13
 Psalm 80:1-19
 Proverbs 25:1-5

Saturday, October 12

The Case for Morality

Let your eyes look straight ahead, and your eyelids look right before you. Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established. Do not turn to the right or the left; remove your foot from evil. Proverbs 4:25-27 NKJV

Morality is on the chopping block. I read where, in a letter to her daughter heading to college, a mother understood if her daughter wants "to have sex just for the fun of it." Also, Amy—from the "Dear Amy" advice column—says, "The rules have changed." Lord, help us!

Proverbs, more than any other book of the Bible, makes the case for morality. More ink, more column inches, are given to bolstering sexual morality and warning against its decline. Here is an abbreviated *literature review* of the issue.

The man trapped in sexual immorality is described as "simple" and "devoid of understanding" (7:7). The immoral woman likely had a falling out with a lifelong friend and forgot the commitment she made to God (2:16-22). The man who falls prey to her is reduced to a "crust of bread" (6:26). He is an otherwise strong man but succumbs, possibly because of an emotional wound he suffered (7:26). Prominent men have destroyed themselves (31:3). Besides her outward beauty, the immoral woman's words seduce him (7:21). She promises "sweet water" and "pleasant bread"—and it is so (9:17), but only briefly. Later life becomes bitter (5:4). Her guests are in hell; yielding to her is like falling into a deep pit—good luck getting out (9:18; 22:14)! The seduced man has only himself to blame (5:22).

Is there forgiveness? Of course. God traffics in forgiveness. But on this side of that panoply of sins, we do well to heed the warnings. Dads, win your children's hearts (23:26) and moms, be just as vocal in the crusade (31:1-3). Win!

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One-Year Bible Reading

Jeremiah 19:1-21:14
 1 Thessalonians 5:4-28
 Psalm 82:1-8
 Proverbs 25:9-10

The Plumb Line for Morality

Let your eyes look straight ahead and your eyelids look right before you. Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established. Do not turn to the right or the left; remove your foot from evil. Proverbs 4:25-27 NKJV

I have a friend who, with his wife, contracted to have a house built in the country. It was to be their dream home as they raised and home-schooled their children in tranquil North Dakota. But problems surfaced almost immediately. Door frames were crooked and a host of other issues made the whole project appear amateurish at best. The contractor sure could have used a plumb line and other devices to insure verticality and structural integrity. It took a lot of prayer and negotiations, but my friend was able to walk away from the mess, later buying another house in the country.

The Word of God is our plumb line for life. Particularly the book of Proverbs proffers wise counsel for right living. It touches on a wide spectrum of human needs and issues: humility versus pride; wise counsel; foolishness versus prudence; harsh versus healing speech; honesty versus lying in speech; generosity; healthy eating; government and leadership; child training, and more.

But that which receives the most press is sexual morality or immorality. Smart move, Solomon! In today's society, that which used to make people blush is not just tolerated, but celebrated. There are moral deviations practiced now that weren't even on our radar when I was young.

Christian, the **best** way to combat and resist the appeal of sexual immorality is to memorize and meditate on those Scriptures that address the issue. Give the Holy Spirit ammunition! Scores of proverbs await your mind. As you meditate, the fruit of moral righteousness will be born and your life will align with the plumb line for morality!

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Jeremiah 22:1-23:20
 2 Thessalonians 1:1-12
 Psalm 83:1-18
 Proverbs 25:11-14

Tuesday, October 15

Imitate Their Faith

... and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith. Hebrews 10:24; 12:1; 13:7

Have you ever wondered how different Christians, meeting in different churches, from a long time ago actually tried to live out their faith? John Wesley recorded some of the habits of Christians he ran with. Here are a few guidelines, practices, and questions for self-examination that he wrote down from the early Methodist days.

1. Have I embraced every probable opportunity of doing good and preventing evil?
2. Have I spent an hour at least every day in speaking to someone?
3. Have I in speaking to a stranger explained what Christianity is not . . . and what it is—the acceptance of Christ as our personal Savior?
4. Have I persuaded all I could to attend the Bible studies, Sunday morning meetings and breaking of bread?
5. Have I after every visit asked him who went with me: "Did I say anything wrong?"
6. Have I when anyone asked my advice, directed and exhorted him with all my power?
7. Have I rejoiced with and for my neighbor?
8. Has goodwill been the spring of all my actions toward others?

What were John Wesley's leaders like? Tomorrow we will look at how his leaders tried to behave.

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One-Year Bible Reading

Jeremiah 26:1-27
 2 Thessalonians 3:1-18
 Psalm 85:1-13
 Proverbs 25:16

Level Path

*Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God;
 Let Your good Spirit lead me on level ground. Psalm 143:10*

The slope of a path makes a big difference in the difficulty of walking. I feel like I can walk pretty much forever if the ground is level, but add a steep uphill? I feel the strain in my breathing and leg muscles immediately! Last May my husband John and I decided on exploring a new place; he chose the northeast corner of Portugal on the edge of a national forest. The *On Foot* tour company had planned a course of six days of walking between towns with guesthouses or hotels ready to receive their customers and transport their luggage. Directions, maps, and GPS were all ready for us.

The first two days the GPS app on John's phone would not work for us. Thus our course over mountains was confusing—we got lost a few times and added extra climbing. By Day Three GPS kicked in, and our mountain walks with beautiful vistas, wild flowers, and flowing streams went so much better. On Day Five we followed the Roman Road most of our walk. Ancient cylindrical stone marked off the miles. For the first time I appreciated Roman soldiers—they had the good sense to build their roads (6-8 feet wide) along the sides of the mountains. Traveling on a level path around a mountain is so much better than climbing over one!

Doing God's will sometimes leads us into heart-straining places where we really don't know if we will make it. Crises, conflicts, and criticism take us by surprise, and life seems an uphill battle. Generally, though, "Her [Wisdom's] ways are pleasant ways and all her paths are peace" (Proverbs 3:17). Let us remember regularly to pray "lead me not into evil" and "lead me on level ground," as we keep walking with God. "O Upright One, make the path of the righteous level" (Isaiah 26:7).

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One-Year Bible Reading

Jeremiah 23:21-25:38
 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17
 Psalm 84:1-12
 Proverbs 25:15

Wednesday, October 16

Imitate Their Faith – 2

Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith. Hebrews 13:7

Wesley, while caring for the forms of organization and the disciplines we all need in our lives, was anxious that the inner light be not dimmed in the hearts of his preachers. He felt that even with proper organization and executive control, he could not afford to permit his preachers to lose the inner glow. Here are a few of the guidelines he left for his leaders.

1. Be diligent; never be unemployed a moment; never be triflingly employed.
2. Be serious. Let your motto be: *Holiness unto the Lord*. Avoid all silliness as you would avoid hellfire, and coarse joking as you would cursing and swearing.
3. Touch no woman; be as loving as you will, but hold your hands off them. Custom is nothing to us.
4. Do nothing as a proud gentlemen: you have no more to do with this character than with that of a dancing-master. You are the servant of all.
5. Be ashamed of nothing but sin: not of fetching wood, or drawing water, if time permits; not of cleaning your own shoes or your neighbor's.
6. Be punctual: do everything exactly at the time.
7. You are to begin and end every meeting with prayer.
8. You are to be men full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom, that you may do all things in a manner acceptable to God.
9. You are to consider whenever you meet, "God is here."

When asked what would keep his work alive, John answered: "The Methodists must take heed of their doctrine, their experience, their practice, and their disciplines" Paul said the same to his disciple Timothy: "Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching" (1 Timothy 4:16).

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Jeremiah 28:1-29:32
 1 Timothy 1:1-20
 Psalm 86:1-17
 Proverbs 25:17

A Song of Seasons

Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you Isaiah 46:4 NIV

For those of us who live in a northern climate, the arrival and advance of autumn or “fall” brings obvious changes. Appropriately, the leaves oblige their namesake season: they fall! Yet what a display they put on before they drift from their branches! Greens turn to reds, oranges, and yellows . . . all vibrant against the blue sky. There is beauty even in the dying process.

Fall moves to winter, winter to spring, spring to summer, until once again fall is upon us. Cycles or seasons, each with its beauty and also its challenges, play out before us.

I have often thought of seasons when surveying my life: once young, now much older, once a child and “spring chicken,” now grandma to many! The years with their seasons have moved steadily on. There have been so many changes- so many new beginnings, winding downs, and endings! Sometimes I just feel sad as I honestly embrace some of the losses that I’ve experienced in life.

Recently I found myself weeping alone over photo albums of our family of years past, remembering our kids as babies, then children, and now grown men and women. Was that even *me* back then? Such a seemingly long season ago!

Yet there is one unchanging, common denominator in all of my seasons: God! Through them all He has been there as my Creator and Father who brought me into this world and has carried and sustained me through all my days. Just as He has faithfully been there in all of my yesterdays, so He will be there for all of my tomorrows!

Submitted by:

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One-Year Bible Reading

Jeremiah 30:1-31:26
 1 Timothy 2:1-15
 Psalm 87:1-7
 Proverbs 25:18-19

Saturday, October 19

God’s Reminder

When I send clouds over the earth, the rainbow will appear in the clouds, and I will remember my covenant with you and with all living creatures. Never again will the floodwaters destroy all life. When I see the rainbow in the clouds, I will remember the eternal covenant between God and every living creature on earth.

Genesis 9:14-15 NLT

Do you use the alarm on your phone? Is your phone alarm set daily to wake you up, to remind you to take daily medication, or even to pray at a certain time each day? I love having my phone alarm so handy. As I get older I need reminders to call people at certain times, wish someone a happy birthday, or even leave for a scheduled appointment.

God set a reminder too. It’s called the rainbow. When I see the beautiful bow in the sky, I remember God’s promise that no matter how bad things get on earth, He will never destroy it by flood again. But the above verses also tell us the rainbow is *God’s reminder* that He will never again send a flood to destroy the world. I often wonder how God can continue to tolerate so much evil these days. After all, it only took six chapters in the Bible for God to regret He had made human beings. But no matter how bad society gets, God is a promise keeper, and the rainbow is His reminder: no more flooding the whole earth ever again.

I’m not sure I am more encouraged that God uses reminders, or that He has made sure, by a visible sign to Him and to us all, that He will not go back on His promise.

What a wonderful God we know!

Submitted by:

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One-Year Bible Reading

Jeremiah 33:1-34:22
 1 Timothy 4:1-16
 Psalm 89:1-13
 Proverbs 25:23-24

Forever

Then we will be with the Lord forever. 1 Thessalonians 4:17 NLT

A while back, we saw the film *The Old Man and The Gun*. It stars Robert Redford as real-life bank robber Forrest Tucker, who escaped from San Quentin at 70 to continue his life of crime.

It made me feel kind of melancholy.

I remember seeing Redford in *The Sting* in theaters when I was a kid, the same with *The Way We Were* and many others. Now in his eighties, he looks old, but I can still see in his face his glory years.

But my daughter couldn’t.

After the movie I asked her if she knew Robert Redford used to be one of the most attractive men alive. She didn’t know that, nor could she imagine it based on the movie we just watched.

It’s hard to see celebrities we grew up with get older. Lisa and I saw Paul McCartney in concert and loved it. However, his voice warbled with age. He reminded me of the old men singing hymns in the church I grew up in.

In 1 Thessalonians, Paul gives us a glimpse of Jesus coming back, and also reminds us why that Robert Redford movie made me feel sad. He says this: *“Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever”* (1 Thessalonians 4:17 NLT).

Forever.

When Jesus comes, all things will be new. Including “forever.” God creates us to live forever, and when we age and die, it violates how God created us. The Fall is why we get old. The only reason I have gray hair in my whiskers is because sin entered the world. Sin causes us to age. Yet we still long for eternity, and it bothers us when things don’t last.

But someday, that longing will be satisfied. Forever.

Submitted by:

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One-Year Bible Reading

Jeremiah 31:27-32:44
 1 Timothy 3:1-16
 Psalm 88:1-18
 Proverbs 25:20-22

Sunday, October 20

Do You See Heaven?

I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. 2 Peter 1:13-14

Peter wrote his final letter shortly before his execution. He wasn’t discouraged or heavy-laden; he was looking forward to his future, a bright future, an eternal future. He beheld it—a future without the burdens or cares of life, or the pain and sufferings in a broken and fallen world.

He spoke of “looking forward to these things.” His future was so bright, so optimistic, so hopeful, he considered his present situation but a *tick on the clock* compared to the eternal bliss and joy he was about to enter.

A great glimpse and a great understanding of our eternal destination will always put our present circumstances in perspective and give us hope for today. As Paul states, “who hopes for what he already sees?” (Romans 8:24).

Life is full of hard times and heaviness. But Peter reminds us, and we are to remind others, that we have the eternal promise of God that our future in Jesus Christ is ever-brightening like the noonday sun. We have a purpose for being here—to refresh the memory of others regarding the things of the Lord.

For we’ll soon put aside the tent of our earthly body, and what a relief! Goodbye, earthly burdens! Goodbye, hardships and heaviness! Goodbye, trials and troubles! Hello, Jesus! Hello, heaven! Hello, eternity! Hello, unending joy! Hello, golden streets! Hello, glorified bodies! Hello, fresh air of an unending sweetness of a new heaven: a world without end!

The hope of eternity gives us strength. If you’re prone to worry, turn your thoughts upward and close your eyes, thinking of heaven and its eternal throne.

Submitted by:

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One-Year Bible Reading

Jeremiah 35:1-36:32
 1 Timothy 5:1-25
 Psalm 89:14-37
 Proverbs 25:25-27

Surely Not

This is what the Lord says: "Whoever stays in this city will die by the sword, famine or plague, but whoever goes over to the Babylonians will live. He will escape with his life; he will live." Jeremiah 38:2

Jeremiah is prophesying bondage and slavery for Judah. Israel should give up. Jerusalem will definitely fall. There is no hope. However, Hananiah, the false prophet, prophesies peace. Who did the people listen to? Hananiah, of course. What Hananiah prophesied is what everyone wanted to hear.

The people asked Jeremiah what God wanted, but when they heard it, they refused to listen and did the opposite of what they were told. We are so quick to shake our heads and point our fingers at the Israelites. Yet, like them, we are stubborn, hardheaded humans. We refuse to believe the truth when we hear it. Do I refuse to listen and obey when I hear God's Word? "That can't be what You mean, God, surely not."

God's truth isn't always easy to hear. For the people of Judah, God's words which Jeremiah was speaking were devastating. Be careful not to discount God's Word because you don't like it, or it offends. Don't only listen to people who tickle your ears. The ear ticklers might make you feel good, but are they from God?

God isn't here to make us feel good. He is here to shape us into a vessel for His use, molding us so that we can be used *by Him*. If your ears are only tickled, but your heart isn't touched or changed, if you aren't challenged to live for God, then maybe you need to question whether God is in the message.

Submitted by:

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 Clarksville, Maryland

One-Year Bible Reading

Jeremiah 37:1-38:28
 1 Timothy 6:1-21
 Psalm 89:38-52
 Proverbs 25:28

Brokenhearted

For the Lord will not reject forever, for if He causes grief, then He will have compassion according to His abundant lovingkindness. For He does not afflict willingly or grieve the sons of men. Lamentations 3:31-33

My heart goes out for Jeremiah, weeping over the destruction of Jerusalem. But he gives us such a picture of God. God is not hard-hearted and uncaring. He is soft-hearted. God wants the best for us. It is so easy to see the God of the Old Testament as harsh, mean, unloving. But God gives us Jeremiah so we can see His heart.

Amid the punishment ordained by God, Jeremiah was weeping. He was brokenhearted. Even *while* giving God's message of coming destruction to Jerusalem, Jeremiah wept. God's heart was breaking. His children wouldn't listen, they wouldn't obey. He begged and pleaded, but they refused. The destruction came because of Israel's disobedience, their unfaithfulness. There was no pleasure for God, no joy in the destruction of Jerusalem. Just sadness—and the hope that during it all hearts would turn back to Him, would become faithful once more.

When I see Jeremiah pleading, crying, brokenhearted, I see God. The same God Who sacrificed His only Son so that we would turn to Him. Both sacrifices broke His heart. Both sacrifices were necessary because of our sin, because of the hardness of our hearts. There was no other way.

This is our God. God desires that we serve Him. Not just for His glory—though that should be reason enough—but also for our benefit. God pleads and cries over the wickedness around us. It breaks His heart. Like Jeremiah, God is right now pleading with you to turn to Him. Will you listen?

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One-Year Bible Reading

Jeremiah 42:1-44:23
 2 Timothy 2:1-21
 Psalm 92:1-93
 Proverbs 26:3-5

Yes To God, No To Sin

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Hebrews 11:24

Moses could have had it all. The treasures of Egypt were at his fingertips. Wealth, women, and wine were available to him whenever he wanted them. Yet Moses chose not to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin but rather to endure mocking and ridicule with the people of God. How was Moses able to successfully resist such strong temptations? What caused him to choose persecution over pleasure?

The first thing we learn is that Moses made his choice by faith. If he had chosen by sight, he would have chosen the kingdom of Egypt. But he had eyes of faith, and he chose the kingdom of God. Moses lived by faith, not by sight. He believed and trusted in the promises of God for His people and their future. He evaluated his situation and the choice he had to make—God or mammon. He chose God. He viewed the riches of Christ as far greater than all the riches of this world combined. Moses saw the riches of this world as passing, whereas Christ's riches are eternal. Moses wasn't into instant gratification. He put off his desires for pleasure and waited on God to fulfill them at the proper time.

Moses didn't get detoured, and he didn't take any "shortcuts" because he had his eyes fixed on the One who is unseen. As a dove can only focus on one thing at a time, and as an athlete in competition is also focused on mastering his sport, even so Moses was focused on the eternal King. Because he had a big YES imprinted on his heart for the Lord, he was able to resist and say no to temptations and ungodliness.

What motivates you to say yes to God and no to sin?

Submitted by:

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One-Year Bible Reading

Jeremiah 39:1-41:18
 2 Timothy 1:1-18
 Psalm 90:1-91:16
 Proverbs 26:1-2

My Own Attorney

As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. Psalm 103:12 HCSB

The speaker at a Great Commission conference I attended as a young man talked about Psalm 103:12 and the fact that the east and the west never meet. Because of what Jesus did on the cross for us, and through faith in Him, our sins have been completely removed from us: past, present and future. They are gone; we are cleansed.

This truth is repeated throughout the Bible. For example, Paul wrote to the Romans: "Therefore, no condemnation now exists for those in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1 HCSB).

God will never condemn us for our sins. Why? He already condemned His Son for those sins. Therefore, it would not be just to condemn us as well.

Someone has illustrated it this way: when God forgives our sins, He buries them in the deepest sea and then puts up a sign that says, "No Fishing Allowed."

Now it's hard to believe sometimes that our sins are truly and completely forgiven. We feel there is something we need to do to make things right. We forget that Jesus paid in full the debt we owe.

Do you realize that when we sin, Jesus actually comes to our defense? John, one of Jesus' closest friends, wrote in 1 John 2:1: "My little children, I am writing you these things so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ the Righteous One" (HCSB). In the context here, the word "advocate" means "a defense attorney." Satan may accuse us before God, but we have Jesus right there speaking on our behalf!

"Father," He says, "I've paid for that."

Submitted by:

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One-Year Bible Reading

Jeremiah 44:24-47:7
 2 Timothy 2:22-3:17
 Psalm 94:1-23
 Proverbs 26:6-8

We Can Walk Cleansed

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9

Many people, when they first place their faith in Christ, experience an amazing joy because they know they are forgiven. They feel clean and right with God. But then they sin. And they try to do things that could be viewed as penance in order to get right with God again.

God's grace means that all the sins we have ever committed have been charged to Jesus. They've been removed from you and placed upon Him. The justice of God was then poured out on His Son for what you and I have done wrong. The debt has been paid in full. We are forgiven.

Therefore, what we really need to do when we sin is believe the gospel freshly. We are only saved once, but we need to remember repeatedly. This is part of the reason we are to regularly celebrate communion. We need to remember that Jesus paid in full the debt we owed.

So let me tell you how I practically learned to apply this.

As I mentioned before, when I used to feel guilty about my sin, I would tell God I was sorry over and over again, and I would do things to prove to God I was sorry. It was almost the equivalent of Protestant penance. And when I had done enough and I felt sorry enough, I would finally feel forgiven. It was almost like I finally "deserved" my forgiveness, which is the opposite of grace.

But now, when I know I've done something wrong, I immediately turn to God and claim 1 John 1:9 as a promise. I don't claim it as a condition of my forgiveness, but as a promise. John wrote today's verse to give us the assurance we need that we can walk cleansed and close to Jesus!

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One-Year Bible Reading

Jeremiah 48:1-49:22
 2 Timothy 4:1-22
 Psalm 95:1-96:13
 Proverbs 26:9-12

Sunday, October 27

Only God Can Be God!

For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, "In returning and rest you shall be saved, in quietness and in trust shall be your strength. . . ." Isaiah 30:15 ESV

Imagine taking on an assignment at an engineering firm of designing a bridge that is to span a large river, and yet you have never had any training in structural design. Imagine going out onto a football field to play line-backer for an NFL team, and you have never played a day of football in your life. Imagine attempting to fly a group of people to Hawaii on a commercial airliner when you had never had a single flight lesson.

In each of those scenarios, you would be attempting to be something you are not capable of being and to do things you are not capable of doing. Imagine the stress, anxiety and despair that would result inside of you and the danger in which you would place others.

Yet we do this very thing in a far worse way! We attempt to be God! We seek to decide what is best, rather than consulting the Word of our Creator—we try to control our circumstances to protect ourselves—we try to satisfy our souls with earthly things!

Here is God's gracious call to us in our foolishness: "Cease striving and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10). The most dangerous way we try to be God is when we try to make ourselves right with God. Only God can reconcile us to Himself through the death of His Son in our place and through His victorious resurrection from the dead: "I am the Lord, and besides Me there is no Savior" (Isaiah 43:11). "Jesus said to him, I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). When we trust God to be our salvation through His Son and that He and His Word are everything we need, then we are acknowledging that God is God!

Submitted by:

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One-Year Bible Reading

Jeremiah 51:1-53
 Titus 2:1-15
 Psalm 99:1-9
 Proverbs 26:17

God's Forgiven Ones

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9 ESV

This might surprise some of you, but I am confident that I am forgiven even if I don't confess my sins. We sin constantly in our words, deeds or thoughts. We couldn't possibly keep up with all the sins we commit each day. If forgiveness is conditioned on remembering or confessing them all, we're all in trouble.

Our forgiveness is based solely on what Jesus did for us and not on what we do for Him. But I love claiming 1 John 1:9 as a promise. I will pray something like this:

"God, You said that if I acknowledged my sin, You would forgive me, and that You'd not only cleanse me from what I just did but from all the unrighteousness in my life. I believe You are faithful and that You are just in doing so. In fact, God, You'd be unjust if You didn't, for I am taking refuge in the spilled blood of Your Son on my behalf. He paid the price so I would not have to. And so thank You. I thank You for the forgiveness You've given me in Jesus' name and based upon what He did for me. Amen." And I walk away by faith believing what I know to be true: I am completely forgiven and ready to be used by God.

I am convinced we need to preach the gospel to ourselves every day. We are saved only once. But we need to constantly remember the truth of the gospel. We are children of God through faith in Christ. We are God's forgiven ones. And our standing with God is not based on anything we do. It is based on grace: God's favor extended to the undeserving. Grace means Christ died for us so that we might be forgiven.

Submitted by:

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One-Year Bible Reading

Jeremiah 49:23-50:46
 Titus 1:1-16
 Psalm 97:1-98:9
 Proverbs 26:13-16

Monday, October 28

Resting in Jesus and the Pistol

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Matthew 11:28-30 NIV

In the late 60s and early 70s there was a basketball player named Pistol Pete Maravich. He is arguably the best college player ever to have graced the court. At a time when there was no three-point line and when the game was much slower because they didn't use a shot clock, Pete averaged 44.2 points per game. Not only is that still the record, but it is 10 points higher than the guy in second place!

Pistol Pete was notoriously disappointed in himself. It was a lot of pressure to be that good. Just think about it; he could score 34 points, and kick himself because that was 10 points below his average and only half of what he scored on his best night! To anyone else, that would be a great game! To him it was a depressing failure.

Many Christians take a similar approach to life. Instead of enjoying the freedom of being forgiven and set free from their sins, they feel burdened by their constant shortcomings. Jesus did not intend for us to be laden by the weight of unattainable perfection. Instead, He wanted to give us rest for our souls. There is work in the Christian life, but His yoke is easy. His burden is light. And He is gentle and humble as He lovingly leads us into the work He has set out for us.

I wish Pistol Pete could have just enjoyed being awesome, and I wish Christians could just enjoy resting in Jesus.

Submitted by:

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One-Year Bible Reading

Jeremiah 51:54-52:34
 Titus 3:1-15
 Psalm 100:1-5
 Proverbs 26:18-19

Compelled by Love

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15 NIV

We must not serve God thinking that we somehow can earn His favor or His merit. We serve God because of His grace, not to gain His grace. That is a fundamental principle to understand.

Paul said the love of Christ is what compels him. As you read about Paul's life, you might wonder how could a man like that suffer so much, hang out in prisons, and then praise God in the midst of that. How could a man do that? It was because he understood the love of Jesus Christ and the gospel of Jesus Christ and what it meant for him. That's what drove him to be the kind of follower of Christ he was.

This verse has always been a motivator for me. As a pastor, as a leader, and as a person who is walking with God—I have to battle a performance mentality. I can fall into thinking, "If I do enough, I will somehow gain God's favor." No! I need to fall in love with Jesus and fall in love with His Word. I need to understand the gospel of grace and walk in that. That is the best motivator for Christ-like living that we could possibly have.

I pray and hope that you too would fall more in love with Jesus and His Word today.

Submitted by:

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One-Year Bible Reading

Lamentations 1:1-2:22

Philemon 1:1-25

Psalm 101:1-8

Proverbs 26:20

A Kairos Moment

Do you not say, "There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest"? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest. John 4:35

I prayed, "Lord, I want to invest my life in the places where people have the least opportunity to hear the Gospel, but where they are most receptive to the Gospel."

You can go to places where people are receptive, but they have lots of opportunity to hear the gospel. These are places where there are many churches, all plowing the same ground. You can also go to countries where nobody is sharing the gospel, but it seems like you couldn't find a person who was interested if you looked for a lifetime.

God is working all over the world, but there are special opportunities that God puts together where people are suddenly receptive in a place where they have not yet had a chance to hear the gospel. That's where I wanted to go.

Soon after the Soviet Union had collapsed, I went on a short-term mission trip to Ukraine. To have an opportunity to be a part of that was incredible. I came back after that short trip and with my wife decided to become missionaries to Ukraine. There were people there who were crying out for the gospel. Of course, there were people who were lost in the community where I lived, but there were 500 churches plowing the ground in Columbia, South Carolina. There were entire regions of Ukraine with no churches. If not me, who? If not then, when? It was a *kairos* moment—a moment of special opportunity that God gives.

We need to be looking for these *kairos* moments. He's working everywhere, but He's working in special ways in some places. We need to have spiritual eyes to see it.

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One-Year Bible Reading

Lamentations 3:1-66

Hebrews 1:1-14

Psalm 102:1-28

Proverbs 26:21-22

Selling All?

This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come. Matthew 24:14

Should everybody just sell everything and go to the mission field? I'm asked that question a lot. Gifting, circumstances, and calling may determine *your role* in the Great Commission. But it can never determine *your commitment* to the Great Commission. Jesus did not give us that option. He commanded it!

Some people try to say that The Great Commission in Matthew 28 was for Christ's followers at the time or for the universal church. Guess what? We're part of the followers of Christ! We're part of the universal church. Didn't He just say, "Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you"? Well, He had just commanded them to make disciples of all the ethnic groups. To all the people who dismiss this verse, we can say that He commanded us to reach all nations and it is our responsibility.

Recently I've really reengaged with today's verse, Matthew 24:14. It's found in the Olivet Discourse, Jesus' teaching near the end of His life on the Mount of Olives. Some of this discourse is talking about the end times, and some of it is not. If you read today's verse and look at it in context, I believe, as do many scholars, that this verse applies now! Therefore, the church has a mandate to preach the gospel to every ethnic group, and then the end will come.

Every person in the world is equally valuable to God, but not every person has an equal opportunity to hear the gospel. That's got to say something to our hearts. Will you be committed to the Great Commission?

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One-Year Bible Reading

Lamentations 4:1-5:22

Hebrews 2:1-18

Psalm 103:1-22

Proverbs 26:23