

The Bigger Story – Live in Freedom

Week Thirty-One

Notes & Discussion Questions on Isaiah 44:6-8

Isaiah 44:1-5: A promise to pour out the Holy Spirit and to belong to God

- God *pours* out His Spirit, He is not stingy with it but desires to give it. **Why?** There is life, abundance and freedom in the giving of the Holy Spirit...**how?**
 - “Without the Spirit of God we can do nothing; we are as ships without wind, or chariots without steeds, like branches without sap, we are withered; like coals without fire, we are useless...Charles Spurgeon
- **Who receives this gift?** All who are thirsty. Then we may say, “I am the Lord’s”. When the Holy Spirit is poured out on us, we know we belong to God (Ephesians 1:13). We aren’t afraid to share it.

Isaiah 44:6-8: The Lord alone is God, the first and the last

- An idol can never be first, as it needs someone to make it. God is first, the uncreated One, self-existing (Isaiah 41:4, Revelation 1:17, 22:13).
- As God, He proclaims things before they happen. Yet we are not afraid. When we know who God is, His power and authority, we do not fear. **Why? Where does your hope, comfort, peace come from?**
- Since God is the only God, the True God, the Living God, He is the only solid ground (Rock) on which to build our lives. **How do you build your life on God?**

Notes & Discussion Questions on Psalm 119

Psalm 119 is the longest psalm in the Bible. There are **22** sections, corresponding to the **22** letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Each section has **8** verses, each written in alphabetic acrostic form, so every verse of that section begins with the same letter. This Psalm is about delighting in God’s Word and the blessings of Scripture.

Yod ך: Confidence in the Creator and His Word

The yod stanza represents the small Hebrew letter Jesus referred to as a “jot” in Matthew 5:18: “Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.”

Psalm 119:73: God is Creator!

- **Why do some deny God as Creator? What does it mean to recognize God as Creator? Why is it significant that we understand that God made, fashioned, YOU?**
- **How does this recognition humble us? Make us wish to learn more from Him, our masterful Creator?**

Psalm 119:74: Those who likewise live for God are united and encourage one another. **How? Has this been your experience?**

Psalm 119:75-77: God’s Word gives perspective and wisdom

- **What does it mean that His judgements are right? That He is mercifully kind and comforting? That He invites us to ask for these things?**
- “Tender mercies” describe the kindnesses of a father to his child. The psalmist prayed for God’s tender mercies to come through God’s Word...letting it fill his life, he received these mercies.

Psalm 119:78-80: **Contrast** the proud and those who fear God: The proud love lies and live by them...the psalmist loves God’s Word and lives by it.

- **How can you see the fellowship of believers? How can we live lives unashamed before God?**
- Reread this section and focus on the repetition of “let”. **How does this guide our relationship with God?**

This Week’s Readings

Nehemiah 11-13 Acts 25	Esther 1-2 Acts 26	Esther 3-6	Esther 7-10 Acts 27	Job 1-3, Acts 28	Job 4-7 Romans 1
Isaiah 44:6-8, Psalm 119:73-80, Galatians 5:1-14, Matthew 13:44-52					

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16

Notes & Discussion Questions on Galatians 5:1-14

Galatians 5:2-4: Christ justifies, not the law. Walk with God! *Freedom to sin becomes bondage to sin!*

- Legalists in Galatia were returning to the system of law rather than embracing Christ.
- “Fallen from grace” literally “fallen out of grace” When we embrace the law as our mode of walking with God, we depart from Jesus and the saving grace that He offers... We are then estranged from Christ, separated from Him and His grace. **Discuss** the saving grace of Jesus.

Galatians 5:5-6: Faith through love – **how does this connect with the previous Bigger Story Theme: God’s Love?**

- “Wait”: An intense yearning...the believers eager desire and expectation for continued righteousness from Jesus to be produced in us as we yield and follow Him. **What are you waiting for?**
- “In Christ” is our location, united in Him. **Discuss.**
- Those walking in the Spirit know that being circumcised or uncircumcised means nothing. What matters is faith working through love... **How? Discuss.**

Galatians 5:7-12: A final confrontation about legalism and distractions from Jesus

- “Hindered” means “to break up a road so as to render it impassable”... The Galatians were leaving faith in Jesus, returning to empty teachings (like legalism)...they were doing well until someone broke up the road they were running on... **how can we start well but also finish well and endure?**
- “Little leaven” A negative influence (like legalism) can infiltrate and corrupt the whole church. **How do you see this today?**

Galatians 5:3-15: How then do we live in the liberty of Jesus?

- **How is the Christian life a life full of liberty? What were we set free from? To?**

Notes & Questions on Matthew 13:44-52

The three previous parables (wheat & tares, mustard seed, leaven) warned about potential corruption in the church. The next two detail how highly the King values, pursues and purchases the people of His Kingdom. “The Kingdom of Heaven” is referenced over 30 times in Matthew. **What is the Kingdom of Heaven? How can you be a part of it, giving Jesus rule over your heart, mind and life? Who/what is ruling in your life?**

Matthew 13:44: The Parable of the Hidden Treasure – This is about you and me!

- The world is the field and Jesus is the One who gave all He had to buy the field...with joy! Believers are the treasured so much by Jesus that He joyfully gave everything to redeem His treasured people. **Discuss.**
 - “So did Jesus Himself, at the utmost cost, buy the world to gain His Church, which was the treasure which He desired.” Charles Spurgeon
 - God pursued YOU. God purchased YOU. YOU are that treasure. He paid for YOU.

Matthew 13:45-46 The Parable of the Costly Pearl – This is about you and me!

- Jesus is the buyer and the believer (YOU, individually!) is something He sees as so valuable, He sells all He has for it to have it forever (see 1 Corinthians 6:19-20)
 - **How does this show the love of God? Your value in His eyes?**

Matthew 13:47-50 The Parable of the Dragnet – This is about a day of reckoning and separation

- Like the parable of the wheat from the weeds (13:24-30, 36-43), the righteous from the unrighteous...
 - The righteous from the unrighteous are not separated by their good deeds but by God’s goodness, Jesus’ righteousness imputed to us by faith in Him.
- Today, there are approximately 35 kinds of fish in the Sea of Galilee...Jesus died for every kind of person, that all may call out to Him and be saved...the Kingdom is open to all who believe in Him as Savior (Revelation 5:9)
 - **Whose job is it to separate the fish?**

Matthew 13:51-52: Understanding & Instructions

- “Every scribe instructed concerning the Kingdom...” “Scribe here means “teacher”...all who understand what Jesus taught can go bring it to others... as if bringing out treasures from a storehouse...
- **How does a better understanding of the Kingdom of God impact the way your live? Share with others?**

The Bigger Story – Live in the Light

Week Thirty-Two

Notes & Discussion Questions on Isaiah 60:1-5

Isaiah 60:1-4: The glorious light of God’s Kingdom

- Isaiah depicted darkness in 59:9-10, but now: rescue from the Redeemer! The light has come! So we respond to it, we “arise” and “shine” (Verse 4 continues: “lift up your eyes all around and see...” *What can we see when we know the Messiah?*)
- “But the Lord rises upon you...” *What other life-changing “buts” do you remember from Scripture?*
- This is not an earthly or electric light but one that comes from the glory of the Lord (Matthew 17:2). Sometimes, bright light can be harsh, uncomfortable, but this is a warm, wonderful, life-giving light from the Lord. *Discuss the light of the Lord.*
- People from all nations will be attracted to His light, fulfilled in the Millennial Kingdom!

Notes & Discussion Questions on Psalm 119

Psalm 119 is the longest psalm in the Bible. There are **22** sections, corresponding to the **22** letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Each section has **8** verses, each written in alphabetic acrostic form, so every verse of that section begins with the same letter. This Psalm is about delighting in God’s Word and the blessings of Scripture.

K. Kaph כ: Revived by God’s Word

Kaph is a curved letter, like a half circle, and, in Biblical times, it was thought of as a hand extended to receive a gift or blessing...*How does God’s Word bless us? How is it a gift to us?*

Palm 119:81-84: The psalmist aches for God...and finds hope in His Word

- “Faint” carries the idea of loss of strength, being weak, empty and unable to stand. *What is our hope in these times?* (See 2 Corinthians 4:8-9)
- Verse 82: The psalmist’s eyes hurt from reading so much of the Word...*Why is He reading it so much?*
 - He is searching for “comfort”
 - We can search the Word and find God’s comfort and strength...the afflictions may continue, but His comfort is there.
- Verse 83: “Smoke” Though difficult, our trials are smoke, not fire. *What is the difference?* They are uncomfortable, even harmful, but not consuming
 - Despite his feeling of weakness, he will not forget God’s Word.

Palm 119:85-86: In any time of attack, weakness, persecution or confusion “help!” is a fitting prayer.

- *How can you pray for God’s help? How is He faithful?*

Palm 119:87-88: *What will make the psalmist forsake God’s Word?*

- *What causes us to forsake His Word?* (Consider: compromise with sin, arrogance and pride, coldness of heart, worldly goods and distractions, busyness, persecution) *What are some Biblical examples of this? And what does the Word say about clinging steadfastly to God?*
- “Almost”: Even if it seems like the darkness is winning, God wins. He preserves us. He allows some attacks, yet He sets a limit to the success of the attackers. “Almost” shows God’s gracious protection
- *What is revival? A revived heart?* The Psalmist understood the purpose of his God-revived spirit... to keep God’s testimony...to be equipped for a steadfast, faithful, God glorifying and obedient walk with Him. This is the lovingkindness of God.
- “The testimony of Your Mouth”: The Word of God comes from the mouth of God, though He chose to use/direct human authors...His Words (the Bible) are infallible (without error), not merely ideas but the Words from God. *Discuss.*

This Week’s Readings

Job 8-12

Job 13-17

Job 18-21

Job 22-27

Job 28-31

Job 32-35

Romans 2

Romans 3

Romans 4

Romans 5

Romans 6-7

Notes & Discussion Questions on Ephesians 5:6-14

Ephesians 5: Life in the Spirit, forsaking the darkness and walking in His light and love

- Verse 6: “empty words” minimize or excuse the judgement resulting from sin (previous verses detail practice of sins)...*How do we minimize sin?*
- Verse 7: The encouragement to not live lives marked by habitually or even occasional sin...but rather...walk in the Light...
- Verse 8: We were all in sin, in darkness (and were darkness itself) but, God called and enlightened us to “walk as children of the light” *What does it mean to walk and live as children of the light?*
- Verse 9: *How can goodness, righteousness and truth mark our lives?* (See Galatians 5:22-23)
- Verse 10: *How can we discern what is pleasing to the Lord?* (See Psalms 119:82)
- Verse 11: We don’t expose unfruitful works to gossip, but to educate ourselves to avoid them. *What can we learn here?* Notice that we avoid works of darkness, not the people who are in darkness. *How can we love and minister to others?*
- Verse 12-14: The reason for avoiding and exposing the unfruitful works of darkness is thus given: these works are destined for exposure...*What does this mean?*
- Verse 14: Possible quote from a worship chorus...our participation in the light is shown by being awakened (“made alive” – Ephesians 2:5) with/in Jesus. *What does it mean to be asleep? How can a Christian be asleep and not know it? How do we wake up?*

Notes & Discussion Questions on Matthew 5:13-21

Matthew 5:13: Followers of Jesus should be like salt... *what would the world be like without salt?*

- In this time, salt was a rare commodity (Roman soldiers were paid in salt, “worth your weight in salt” spilling salt was a shameful thing, the word “salary” comes from a word meaning “salt money”)
- *What does salt do?* Salt adds flavor!
- Salt was a necessary ingredient in grain offerings (Exodus 30:34-35, Leviticus 2:13)
- Salt is a good antiseptic (Ezekiel 16:4) and an effective antiviral for the common cold
- Salt was used to preserve *How can we be a preserving influence?*
- *How can we be like salt? Useful? Precious? Flavorful? A part of worshipping God?*
- *What happens when we lose our flavor? What causes this? What would the world be like without salt?*

Matthew 5:14: Followers of Jesus should be like light...*what would the world be like without light?*

- *Discuss how* light can guide and expose, light can provide energy and warmth, disinfect
- Light is mentioned **250+** times in the Bible (Gen. 1:3, John 8:12, 1 John 1:5, 3:19-21, Rev. 22:5)
- “You are the light of the world”: a great compliment and responsibility! Jesus claimed that title for Himself (John 8:12, 9:5)...our shining is not for others to see how bright we are, but the grace/light of God in us!

Matthew 5:15-16: Let your light so shine before men:

- The purpose of light is to illuminate...*is it useful in isolation? How can we be intentional shiny?*
- A city set on a hill is visible! *How can Jesus’ followers live visible lives attracting attention to God?*
- *What is the purpose of letting the light shine?* “so that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven”

How do these three illustrations work together to show the impact of Jesus through His disciples?

Matthew 5:17-20: Jesus came to fulfill the law

- Even though He challenged man’s interpretation and addition to the law (specifically around Sabbath practices) Jesus never broke the law of God. He did what we couldn’t: lived in perfect obedience to God. *What does this mean?*
- “jot” “tittle”: small marks in Hebrew writing. Jesus is saying that not only the *ideas* of the Word of God are important, but the *words themselves*...even their letters! This shows us how highly God regards His word. *Discuss. How does this play out in Psalm 119?*
- Verses 19 & 20 show: we don’t gain righteousness through the law. The law exposes our sins, it points us to Jesus to be justified, redeemed! After we come to Jesus, He sends us back to the law to learn the heart of God for our conduct and sanctification. *How does this fit with the idea of being salt and light?*

The Bigger Story – Live with Joy

Week Thirty-Three

Notes & Discussion Questions on Nehemiah 8:5-12

The book of Nehemiah was likely written between 445 and 420 BC and continues the story of Israel's return from captivity, rebuilding Jerusalem. The person Nehemiah was a Hebrew in Persia, who grew anxious when he learned the Temple was being restored in Jerusalem. He asked God to use Him and God worked through King Artaxerxes to allow Nehemiah to go to Jerusalem to oversee the building/restoration and serve as governor.

In an incredible feat with much opposition, the people rebuilt the city's wall in **52** days. However, the people fell into apostasy when Nehemiah left, so he established true worship through prayer and adherence to the Word of God. It had been approximately **100** years since the people had heard the Word of God. See here how the Spirit of God works through the Word of God in the lives of the people of God.

Nehemiah 8:5-6: Presenting the Word of God

- Ezra was standing above all the people, indicating he stood on a platform. They took the time to build a structure, so that The Word could be heard effectively. ***What can we do to hear the Word? To spread the Word?*** Remembering, of course, our hearts need to be prepared to receive it, that hearing the Words themselves is greatly important (Romans 10:17).
- The people stood to hear... indicating respect for the Word. ***How can we have respect for the Word?***

Nehemiah 8:7-8: Understanding the Word of God

- Specific men were appointed to help people understand the Word. ***Why do we need help to understand the Word?***
 - The ways and means of God are spiritually discerned, not intellectually discerned... The Spirit brings discernment to us (through Himself, through use of teachers) in our heads and hearts...
 - The Word of God was written in different languages, cultures, places and times and we need help to understand the context: The goal is to understand the Word better
- ***Reflect*** and ***discuss*** Bible studies and passages that have been significant to you. ***Why were they impactful?***

Nehemiah 8:9-11: Responding to the Word of God

- The people wept... out of conviction and correction (2 Timothy 3:16) ***What did they understand? Why did it impact them?***
- They were encouraged not to mourn or weep... though it is good to understand (our sin condition and God's perfect holiness), our understanding of our own sin shouldn't be the focal point, Jesus as our Savior should be.
 - ***How can you make Jesus your focal point? How is He your strength, when convicted of sin?***
 - ***How are even our emotions under God's control? How can we find joy in Him?***

Nehemiah 8:12: Choosing to rejoice

- ***Discuss*** how the people praised and thanked God, as His Word brings joy.

Why is it so important to read the word? How can you see the care Nehemiah had for these people in sharing the Word? How can we do likewise?

Notes & Discussion Questions on Psalm 119

L. Lamed ל: God's powerful Word

Psalm 119:89-91: God's Word is settled, not a mere opinion, but fact

- God's Word is objectively settled, true, determined, fixed, sure, immovable, eternal
 - ***Where is it settled? How does the truth and authority of Scripture give us hope here on earth?***
- His settled Word shows His faithfulness, which is extended to all generations.
 - ***How can we see the faithfulness of God throughout history? Throughout our life?***
 - God's Word prevails, remains, abides (Isaiah 40:8, 55:11, Matthew 24:35)
 - Creation serves and obeys God and His purposes

Psalm 119:92-93: God's Word sustains... ***How can reading the Word be a delight? Is it to you?***

- God’s Word is breathed out by God...God meets us in His Word...our relationship with Him sustains us through affliction.
- God’s Word brings life because it is alive (Hebrews 4:12)
 - “The Bible is alive, it speaks to me; it has feet, it runs after me; it has hands, it lays hold of me. The Bible is not antique or modern. It is eternal.” Martin Luther
- Delight in the Word of God is not just memorizing facts or verses, but being in relationship with God, this is what brings delight... **discuss.**

Psalm 119:94-96: God’s Word is safety

- “I am Yours, save me”
 - **Discuss** this verse, the relationship expressed between man and God. We are the Lord’s. The Psalmist recognized:
 - God was his God, and he was in need of saving
 - Salvation was from God (not from himself)
 - God hears and saves
- “For I have sought Your precepts” **How did his relationship with God, based on the solid foundation of God’s Word, help during wicked times. Why is this significant?**
- “Your commandment is exceedingly broad” “Broad” means: useful to all persons, in all times, in all considerations, in all purposes, to inform, convict, correct, equip, comfort, sanctify, save... **Discuss**

<u>This Week’s Readings</u>					
Job 36-39	Job 40-42, Psalm 1-3, Romans 8	Psalm 4-11 Romans 9	Psalm 12-18 Romans 10	Psalm 19-25 Romans 11	Psalm 26-32 Romans 12

Notes & Discussion Questions on Philippians 2:12-18

Philippians 2:12: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”

- This does not mean that we work to earn our salvation, but we work to see how the fact of our God-given, Jesus-paid salvation is evident in all areas of our life
- “Fear and trembling” this isn’t terror but awe-inspired reverence to God
- “As you have always obeyed” **Read** of the humble obedience Jesus showed (Philippians 2:8), **how are we to obey? How can we work well, live humbly in Jesus’ example?**

Philippians 2:13: **Why Christians must work out their salvation with fear and trembling?** Because God “works in you...for His good pleasure” **How can we offer dedicated service to Him?**

- God’s work in us increases our responsibility, transforms our will, for His good pleasure
- **When your child completes an assigned task well, are you pleased? Proud?**

Philippians 2:14-16: **What examples do you see here?**

- Through a non-complaining spirit, we may show ourselves to be true, trusting, obedient followers of God...
- “harmless” can mean “pure” or “unalloyed” and also “hornless” as if creatures without the ability to inflict harm...Jesus and His Word are our defense, we stand firm in Him
- “Crooked and perverse generation” could refer to Deuteronomy 32:5...Christians should not rebel and grumble like the Israelites who wondered in the desert.
- “Shine as lights in the world” This is written more as a statement of fact (Christians are lights who shine) rather than a directive...**how brightly do we shine? What are lights used to do?**
 - Lights guide, warm, make things evident, warn, bring cheer, make things safer...
 - **How can being in a dark place give more incentive to shine? What’s the impact?**
- **How can we** “Hold strong” or “Hold fast to the Word of life”? **Knowing it is not in vain?**

Philippians 2:17-18: An offering to Jesus

- Both the Jews and the pagans would pour out wine or perfume as a sacrifice to God (Numbers 15:4-5, 28:7). Paul is writing in the present tense, “I am being poured out...” in service to God or His cause
- Yet Paul rejoices and encourages others to rejoice, seeing his life as a sacrifice for Jesus, in life or death (Philippians 1:20, Acts 20:24, Romans 14:8). **How can we choose to rejoice? How can we see joy, not based on emotions or circumstances but on Christ?**

The Bigger Story – Live as a New Creation

Week Thirty-Four

Notes & Discussion Questions on Isaiah 56:1-8

Isaiah 56:1-2: A call to righteousness

- “Keep justice and do righteousness, for My salvation is about to come” God gives this prophetic Word to the discouraged people, who have wondered from obedience, seeing no reason to repent when things are so unjust... God is calling them, reminding them, to keep justice and act righteously (Micah 6:8) in the hopeful anticipation of what He will do. Come!
 - *What can we learn from this?*

Isaiah 56:3-8: Promises and Invitations for the foreigners

- Using the example of foreigners and eunuch, Isaiah describes how: if God says you belong, you belong
- This is God’s call those who may feel like outcasts: Walk right. Live in obedience and God will honor and bless you...give you a place and an everlasting name: With God we are known and named. **Discuss.**
- “My House shall be called a house of prayer for all nations” – The violation of this, turning the Temple into a money-making marketplace, made Jesus angry (Matthew 21:13). *Why? What should it have been? For whom?*

Notes & Discussion Questions on Psalm 119

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Mem 2: Loving the sweetness of God’s Word, this section has no petitions and is all praise!

Psalm 119:97: Meditate on the Word: constant and diligent study

- *How can we meditate on the Word? Give it our time, attention and appreciation, which leads to our dependence love and praise?*
- “Let your Bibles be everything to you. Carry this matchless treasure with you continually, and read it, and read it, and read it again and again. Turn to its pages by day and by night. Let its narratives mingle with your dreams; let its precepts color your lives; let its promises cheer your darkness, let its divine illumination make glad your life. As you love God, love this Book which is the Book of God, and the God of books, as it has rightly been called.” Charles Spurgeon

Psalm 119:98-102: From God’s Word comes wisdom, keeping us from evil

- *Where does wisdom come from? Understanding?*
- Teachers are helpful but understanding may also come from time alone with the Word
 - Our rule of faith/doctrine/living comes from God’s Word, not the understanding or interpretation of the Bible from great teachers
 - *How do we keep His precepts?*
- *How can we better understand God’s Word by avoiding evil? Why is this so?*

Psalm 119:103-104: The sweetness of understanding God’s Word

- *Why is the Word of God sweet? How is time spent in the Word not indented to be a boring chore but a sweet experience?*
- While the Psalmist began this section with love and sweetness, it ends with hate... “I hate every false way”. The Psalmist gained understanding and the discernment to hate that which is not of God. **Discuss.**
- “The Christian life is not all sweetness. It has its sweet moments and there is incomparable beauty in God. But we still live in a sour, ugly world and it is equally important to learn to hate evil as well as love the good.” Boice

<u>This Week’s Readings</u>					
Psalm 33-37 Romans 13	Psalm 38-43 Romans 14	Psalm 44-50 Romans 15	Psalm 51-57 Romans 16	Psalm 58-65 1 Cor. 1	Psalm 66-70 1 Cor. 2

Notes & Discussion Questions on Colossians 3:1-11

Colossians 3:1-4: This section begins a focus on practical Christian living, built on Biblical truths.

- **How is “raised with Christ” our identity? What does it encourage us to do?**
 - “Seek those things which are above” Seek indicates: our aspiration, desire and passion. **How do we set our minds on things above?**
- “You will appear with Him in glory” The promised return of Jesus is not just that we will see His glory but that we will appear with Him!
 - How is Christ our life? See also Philippians 1:21.

Colossians 3:5-7: Put to death that which is worldly and against God

- “Therefore” connects back to our foundational identification with Jesus
 - **Who will I identify with? The World or Jesus?**
- The verb here is very strong, indicating a complete elimination of the old life, starving/killing the sin. **Why is it significant to name the sins? What do you notice about the listed sins?**
- While Christians once walked in these sins, we should not live in disobedience, we cannot be comfortable in habitual sin.

Colossians 3:8-11: Remove the traces of worldliness and put on the new man

- This list of “smaller” sins challenges us to put off sins in every area of life. **What do the sins prioritize? How can you practically “put off the old man”?**
- **What is different about the “new man”**
 - **Discuss** how he is renewed in knowledge, hungry for the Word (Psalm 119)
 - **Discuss** how he is created in God’s image (Genesis 1:27)
 - **Discuss** how there is no race, nationality, class or culture, but Christ, “all in all”
 - **How does this new identify, patterned after Jesus, break down barriers? Unify all under Christ?**

Notes & Discussion Questions on Matthew 21-28

Matthew 15:21-22: Tyre and Sidon were Gentile cities 50 miles away. We read of nothing else Jesus did here, indicating that Jesus traveled here just to meet this woman

- The woman came to intercede for her daughter and seemed to know who Jesus was, the Son of David (Heir to the King). **What can we learn from this?**

Matthew 15:23-27: Their conversation

- “He answered her not a word” Yet His silence made her more energetic. **Why?**
- **How does Jesus define His mission? What is the mission He gives the disciples later?**
- **Why does she say “help ME” when she is interceding for her daughter?**
- She didn’t debate her status or demanded to be treated differently... Her response is especially meaningful considering the increasing rejection of Jesus by the Jewish leaders, as if she said, “I’m not asking for the portion that belongs to the children, just the crumbs that they don’t want.” Said as the leaders were rejecting Him...

Matthew 15:28: Jesus’ rewards the faith of the women: “great is your faith”!

The only two people to receive this compliment from Jesus were these Gentiles (centurion in Matthew 8:10)

- Great faith may be found in unexpected places: not just Gentiles, but a *centurion* and a *woman*!
- Their faith was great, even with the advantage of being inherited by the institutions of Judaism.
- Faith is often greatest when it is expressed on behalf of someone else’s need. **Discuss**

Next Week’s Readings

Psalm 71-76 1 Cor 3	Psalm 77-79 1 Cor. 4-5	Psalm 80-88 1 Cor. 6	Psalm 89-93 1 Cor. 7	Psalm 94-102 1 Cor. 8	Psalm 103-106 1 Cor. 9
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The Bigger Story – Live with Compassion

Week Thirty-Five

Notes & Discussion Questions on Jonah 4:1-11

The book of Jonah was likely written between 793 and 758 BC by Jonah, though the book is written in third person. Jonah was called by God to preach repentance to the people of Nineveh, but his fear, pride and prejudice caused him to run away instead. He worried God would not destroy the people of Nineveh, though they acted evilly, but grant them repentance and mercy instead (Jonah 4:2).

What does this reveal about the character of God? Of man?

Instead, Jonah boards a ship for Tarshish (Jonah 1:3), in the opposite direction, to a remote and distant place. But a storm causes the sailors to cast lots to determine the cause of the tempest. Jonah confesses he is running from God and is thrown overboard.

How could God use Jonah's disobedience to show His power and might to the sailors? What does this reveal about God? Can we ever run or hide from God? (See: Jeremiah 23:24)

Jonah is swallowed by a great fish (Jonah 1:17) and is in its belly for three days and nights, during which time he repents of his sins. Jonah 2:2: "In my distress I called to the Lord, and He answered me. From the depths of the grave, I called for help, and you listened to my cry."

Where can you see parallels to Jesus here? (See Matthew 12:40-41, Luke 11:32, John 41:6, Romans 11:36)

He is spit up on the shore and goes to Nineveh to preach repentance, leading to a revival (Jonah 3:5-9). He is then upset at the repenting hearts of the people and the loving kindness of God. Jonah 3:10: "When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, He had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction He had threatened."

What do we learn about God's love and mercy? The salvation He offers?

How can we be the means through which God tells the world of His offer of salvation? How can we live reflecting the compassion of God?

Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria, now Iraq (2 Kings 19:36). It is first mentioned in Genesis 10:11-12 and was known for its wealth and power, while the Assyrians were known for being cruel and bloodthirsty, practicing idolatry, specifically worshiping the "goddess" Ishtar.

Jonah 4:1-3: Jonah complains and is exceedingly angry (Hebrew: "to be hot"):

Why is Jonah angry? He is angry at God for granting repentance to the Ninevites... He knew God was full of grace and mercy and that is why he didn't want to ministry to these people! ***What if God treated Jonah the way Jonah wanted God to treat them?***

Jonah 4:4: God responds, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

We are welcome to express our feelings to God, but must remember: not all our feelings are justified. ***What do we do with such emotions?***

Why does God ask questions? They reveal our heart. ***Can you think of examples from Scripture which illustrate this?*** (see: Genesis 3-4, 1 Samuel 13:11, 2 Samuel 12, etc.)

Jonah 4:5-11: A lesson for Jonah

Previously, God prepared a storm and a fish, now He has prepared a plant, the wind and a worm... ***what does this show about our Creator God's authority and power? Can you see His work preparing Jonah? Yourself?***

Discuss Jonah's brief expression of pleasure and happiness... both centered around himself! ***Discuss*** how he seems to treat the plant as an idol. He felt justified in his anger. ***Why?***

Verse 11: "cannot discern between their right hand and their left" indicates those who are unable to make moral judgments... ***Where do we learn judgements and wisdom?***

Jonah's last recorded words are of anger. Jewish tradition teaches, after God's words to him, Jonah fell on his face and said: "Govern your world according to the measure of mercy, as it is said, To the Lord our God belongs mercy and forgiveness." (Daniel 9:9). We can hope Jonah (and us) have such a humble response, recognizing God's power, authority and judgment.

God’s care for people goes beyond one people group. Salvation is of the Lord (Jonah 2:9, Acts 10:34-35, Colossians 3:11). He has plans for us and is faithful to His promises (Ephesians 2:10). ***How can we defer to Him? Live with compassion and share Him?***

Notes & Discussion Questions on Psalm 119

Psalm 119 is the longest psalm in the Bible. There are **22** sections, corresponding to the **22** letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Each section has **8** verses, each written in alphabetic acrostic form, so every verse of that section begins with the same letter. This Psalm is about delighting in God’s Word and the blessings of Scripture.

N. Nun ן: Never-ending confidence in God’s Word

Psalm 119:105: The light and guidance of God’s Word

- ***How do we know where to step without the guidance of God’s Word?***
- ***How does He show us individually where to step and what path we should remain on?***
- This image shows us that the Word of God is light and brings light... it doesn’t make things darker or harder to understand – We can trust in the Word. We can trust in God. He lights our way, one step at a time and guides our path

Psalm 119:106-110: God’s Word was the joy of the psalmist’s heart, even in affliction

- The psalmist’s determination to be firm in God’s Word came from a season of affliction... ***How can God use our trials to draw us closer to Him? To rely on Him?***
- “Teach me” ***How do the repeated petitions for instruction show humility? The overwhelming greatness of God?***
- There are dangers (physical and spiritual), yet the psalmist here shows how connection to God’s Word strengthened Him – ***How so?***

Psalm 119:111-112: God’s Word was the joy of the psalmist’s heart

- God’s Word is at root, first in foremost, in his *heart*. ***Why is this significant?***
- He repeats again how he will never forsake (stop reading, learning, obeying, etc.) God’s Word
- “Forever:” despite the danger he experiences, he has confident faith...trusting in God, who lights his step and path, who sustains, strengthens and saves him...***How do you know and experience hope?***

<u>This Week’s Readings</u>					
Psalm 71-76 1 Cor 3	Psalm 77-79 1 Cor. 4-5	Psalm 80-88 1 Cor. 6	Psalm 89-93 1 Cor. 7	Psalm 94-102 1 Cor. 8	Psalm 103-106 1 Cor. 9
Jonah 4:1-11, Psalm 119:105-112, Colossians 3:12-17, Matthew 15:29-39					

Notes & Discussion Questions on Colossians 3:12-17

Paul continues his instructions for Christian living, after detailing how to “put to death” sin and all traces of worldliness, he describes the life of the new man and which attributes to “put on”. Notice each quality presented involves relationships. We are not to run and hide alone like Jonah, but are to fellowship with others. ***Discuss*** the attributes listed.

How does understanding the forgiveness Jesus offers lead us to be more generous and forgiving ourselves?

How is love the summary of all the attributes described here? Why is love the greatest?

How should peace characterize the community of God’s people?

How should the Word of Christ be our foundation?

The new man being described here lives his whole life for Jesus. He works for the Lord. Discuss.

Notes & Discussion Questions on Matthew 15:29-39

Matthew 15:29-39: ***What can we learn about Jesus? What He offers? Who He calls us to be?*** This area was likely predominantly Gentile and He healed them, providing much more than a few crumbs from the table.

They glorified the God of Israel” Jesus drew their attention to God, so they praised Him.

After healing, He had compassion for them and fed them (a different occasion than the feeding of the 5,000).