

St. Paul: On The Same page

08.11.13 Week #259

Day One: Jeremiah 23:16-29

¹⁶Thus says the Lord of hosts: "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord. ¹⁷They say continually to those who despise the word of the Lord, 'It shall be well with you'; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, 'No disaster shall come upon you.'"

For a while my dad was on a kick of talking about a positive-mental-attitude. I'm not sure now if he was serious or if he was only poking fun at Zig Ziglar and Dale Carnegie motivational talks. But at the time there were lots of people who had the idea that you could change your life if you just had the right attitude.

That's actually not a bad thought. (In fact, it's positive!) But our human nature can misuse even the best of things. At heart, we would like to hear only good things – things that make us

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Hebrews 12:3

happy. But what if those are not what we need?

God's prophets spoke wonderful news of God's love and forgiveness. But they were also called to speak words of judgment against sin. And God's people needed to hear both of these truths.

We all crave words of encouragement and forgiveness. But do you also need to listen to less "positive" words? Do you need to hear a reminder of your sins and a call to change?

Which words of God do you find it hard to hear?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, you sent your prophets to speak the truth. Help me to listen to your messengers today, and hear what you desire me to hear. Amen.*

Day Two: Hebrews 11:17-31,
12:1-3

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. ³Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

The writer to the Hebrews names Abraham and Sarah and many other famous Bible characters, but who else is in your “great cloud of witnesses”? Who has been an example of faith under trial among your family or friends?

I remember faithful teachers who endured so much in order to teach me. I remember my great aunt who wept when her husband died, but who, at the same time, expressed confidence in Jesus' resurrection. I remember an elderly friend, bent and twisted by arthritis, who told me, “My Lord suffered for me. It's alright if I share in some of his

suffering.” Since I became a pastor I have been privileged to know hundreds of brave believers who sound like these people in the letter to the Hebrews.

They have endured hostility. They have faced death. They have “shut the mouths of lions.” I know brothers and sisters in Christ facing every kind of enemy, physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental, but who rest in Jesus and rejoice in his victory for them. They are called witnesses because they testify to the reality and power of Jesus' grace, his gift of life for us.

Who are your witnesses? Instead of looking at your own problems today, consider for a moment all those who have persevered through greater problems. What kept them together?

It was the One “who endured from sinners such hostility against himself.”

Prayer: Lord, I have had wonderful examples in my life, fellow believers who have trusted in the face of trouble. But you loved me even when you were abandoned, even when I was your enemy. Lord, help me to hold on. Amen.

Day Three: Luke 12:49-53

“I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled!⁵⁰ I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!⁵¹ Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.⁵² For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three.⁵³ They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

Isn't Jesus the Prince of Peace? What happened to “peace on earth, goodwill to men” as the angels sang when Jesus was born? That's what we would like to see.

Unfortunately, when God comes to establish peace with us there will inevitably be those who reject his terms. God's peace treaty is upon our unconditional surrender, but those who insist on being their own king, will continue to be in rebellion and warfare against God.

At the end of World War II, after the deaths of

millions of people, when the entire world was weary of war and longing for peace, there were still some who tried to fight on. Years after the war ended there could still be found, occasionally, some lone soldier hidden away on a Pacific island, still refusing to surrender. How sad.

Jesus has conquered Death itself. He has overcome sin and destroyed our debt to God. And yet many refuse to surrender. They would still do battle against him, seeking to rule in their own lives.

What should we pray for – that God make an exception and allow a dictator in his place, for the sake of peace? No. We pray that God would be victorious over all those who oppose him, so that all are ruled by the King of Love.

Prayer: O Lord, sometimes we grow tired of the divisions in the world and would almost wish for peace at any price. But you, Lord, paid the greatest price for peace. Send your Spirit to your enemies so that they are conquered by your love. Amen.

Day Four: John 14:6

Jesus said to [Thomas], “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Is “ish” a word? It’s not in the dictionary yet, but I expect it will be soon – at least as a suffix.

We say, “I’ll see you at 7ish.” Or when someone says that they think the tickets will cost \$9, another person might respond, “Ish.” By which they mean “approximately” or “about.”

We live in a society that likes to make things approximate. All those age old certainties like right and wrong, and marriage and family, and guidelines for how we ought to dress and behave, we like to make them all less certain. We like our laws to be legal-ish. We’d like God to in charge... ish. But not really. Not totally.

That’s why we see some new words appearing in our society. An article in the New York Times introduced the term “monogamish.” It means a “marriage” that is “committed” and “monogamous” ...but open to

a little infidelity by agreement. You know – to give us some breathing space.

Another article in the New York Magazine gave us the term “throuple.” That’s a “couple” that is composed of three people in what the author calls a “more or less permanent” arrangement. And a column in the Washington Post suggested we start using the term “wedlease” instead of wedlock. Much more flexible!

But God’s Law is not law-ish. It doesn’t tell us what is right-ish or wrong-ish. God’s Law was very fittingly delivered on stone tablets.

And likewise, God’s Love is not love-ish. It is not eternal-ish. And we are not forgiven... ish.

Jesus’ love is absolute. It is exclusive. It is committed. It is perfect. It is complete.

The world may offer you many things – always reserving the option to take them back. But God has offered you his Son – totally.

Prayer: Dear Savior, forgive me for my hesitation. You didn’t hold back in giving yourself to me. Help me to receive you in the same way, totally, completely, and forever. Amen.