*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

September 27 – October 2

*The Fruit of the Spirit: Goodness*

**Monday, September 27 Matthew 19:16-26**

“Only God is good”

The encounter of the rich young man with Jesus appears in three of the gospels (our passage, Mark 10:17-22, and Luke 18:23). Addressing Jesus with a title of respect (“teacher”) that acknowledges the help he can receive from Jesus’ learning and mastery of Scripture, the young man evidently has experienced a need in his life to perform some kind of righteous deed that will assure him of having eternal life. Jesus gets the young man to focus on God alone as the Good to whom he must come to gain eternal life. “Only God is good.”

Jesus is not denying he is good or that he is equal with God, but he is trying to get the rich young man to see that only in understanding God as good can he discover that good deeds in and of themselves will not make him (or, anyone) “good enough” for God.

Therefore, the only way we can inherit eternal life is to give up all other ways of trying to earn salvation through good works and put our faith in a good God who responds to our trust in him by saving us through his Son, Jesus.

*To the only One who is Good I pray and ask that you receive my offering of faith in you. Help me to see that all my earnest efforts at being good are valuable only when attempted in response to the goodness you have already shown me. Amen.*

**Tuesday, September 28 Romans 7:18-25**

“I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out”

How does the battle we all face between a desire to obey God and the reality that often we fail to do so, affect the state of our relationship with God? On the one hand, we know that we are saved by grace and not by trying to obey God’s law. On the other hand, we know that grace does not mean that we can just disregard God’s law. The dilemma is resolved when we remember that God’s law reflects the purity of his character and outlines the standards of behavior that he expects of those who are his children. Having become his children by grace, we live as his children in obedience to the will of our Father.

In the passage, Paul moves from the anguish of not being able to obey the law (in order to be saved) to gratitude that, in Christ, he is saved apart from carrying out the demands of the law. Goodness (law obedience) is no longer required to be saved. Now, goodness is possible, with the Spirit of God’s help, because we are saved.

*Heavenly Father. Thank you for saving me when I was still a sinner. Amen.*

**Wednesday, September 29 Ephesians 5:10-16**

“Make the most of every opportunity for doing good”

The main statement in this passage is verse 15: “Be careful how you live . . . as those who are wise.” To be wise is to understand the Lord’s will, which is not so much a call for intellectual understanding as for moral discernment and a practical skill in making decisions which reflect the will of a good God.

In contrast to the worthless deeds of evil discussed earlier, verse 16 encourages us to take advantage of the time we are given on this earth to do good deeds. Evil is certainly hard at work in the world producing dark deeds, and the only way that the light of goodness will have a chance to shine is for those who follow a good God to do the good works that he has given us to do.

*Dear Lord. I sometimes despair of the apparent success of evil in the world. Help me to be confident in my heart that goodness is stronger than evil, and to use that confidence to put goodness into practice in my daily life. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

September 27 – October 2

*The Fruit of the Spirit: Goodness*

**Thursday, September 30 Matthew 12:33-37**

“A good person produces good works from a good heart“

Jesus’ ministry has been growing and is now beginning to experience opposition from the religious establishment, especially from the teachers of the law and the Pharisees. In this chapter they accuse him of violating God’s law with respect to the Sabbath (vv. 1-14) and then turn to accuse him of being in league with Satan (vv. 22-37).

In the verses of our devotional passage, Jesus is pointing out that their charges against him come from their evil nature, and he challenges them to examine the fruit of their lives: good trees bear good fruit and bad trees bear bad fruit, because of the nature of the tree.

The expression “brood of vipers” refers to the dozen or more small, dangerous snakes that can emerge at birth from a mother snake. Vipers are proverbial for their subtle approach and attack. Jesus is accusing the Pharisees of deception by hiding the wickedness of their attack behind their religious facades. But, their evil hearts are revealed by the evil of the accusations they are using to go after Jesus.

*Lord, I know there is evil in my heart. Change my heart, O God. Cleanse it of evil so that the goodness of my heart may consistently produce good work. Amen.*

**Friday, October 1 Psalm 23:1-6**

“Surely goodness and mercy will follow me”

Psalm 23 expresses the goodness of God as experienced in the protective care of God, upon which David expresses absolute dependence. The psalmist paints a scene of abundant life in three descriptive statements. The shepherd causes the sheep to lie down, makes them approach quiet waters carefully, and leads them faithfully on the correct paths. All three images emphasize the shepherd’s role as provider of good things.

From a life of abundant ease, David moves to a description of fearful threat. The flock must pass at times into and through the deep, rugged wadis – dry steam beds cut through the hills by the seasonal torrents of rain. In the wadis there is no grass or water, and the heat can be oppressive. Despite the oppressive setting, the psalmist is assured that the rod and the staff of the good shepherd will guide and protect.

The image shifts from God as shepherd to God as host, inviting us to partake of the good things available at the table he has prepared for us. God’s ultimate act of goodness is to bring us into eternal security through our relationship with him.

*Dear God, by your Holy Spirit living in me, you give me a foretaste of what life with you will be like. Amen.*

**Saturday, October 2 Ephesians 2:8-10**

“Do the good things he planned for us long ago”

The emphasis here is on the activity of God. Our salvation, indeed our very existence, is the result of his work. We are recipients of God’s grace. The purpose of God’s creative activity is not merely to have a people, as if he were constructing a work of art. Rather, this new creation is to be active and, like its creator, do good work.

Salvation is not from works, but it surely is for works, that is, living obediently and productively. God planned and acted not only to save us, but also to mark out the way we should live. As British theologian John Stott put it: “Good works are indispensable to salvation - not as its ground or means . . . but as its consequence and evidence.”

*Creator God. You gave me the gift of natural life and you gave me the gift of eternal life. In gratitude, I commit myself to doing your good work. Amen.*