*DEVOTIONS*

January 16 - 21

*God blesses those who mourn*

**Monday, January 16 Psalm 51:1-5**

*“I recognize my shameful deeds”*

 In the story of David and Bathsheba, what is most noteworthy is not David’s sinfulness but God’s grace. To be sure, David’s sin had grave consequences; the first child born to Bathsheba died, and David’s family nearly fell apart. Nevertheless, David’s sin was forgiven; and, he was allowed to live and to remain king, despite having broken at least half of the Ten Commandments, including the ones prohibiting adultery and murder.

 Because God’s amazing grace is the most outstanding feature of the story of David and Bathsheba, it is appropriate that the psalm begins with a focus on God. Before any mention of his personal sin, David appeals to God’s character using three Hebrews words that communicate God’s grace. The first is “mercy”, which means not treating someone as they deserve. The second is “steadfast love”, a description of God’s gracious, self-giving character. The third, “compassion”, reveals God’s kindness toward us, much as a mother has compassion for her child in spite of disobedience.

*As I mourn my sin, Lord, I praise you for your grace which forgives me. Amen.*

**Tuesday, January 17 Isaiah 61:1-3**

*“To comfort all who mourn”*

 These words of Isaiah introduce us to the means whereby God’s people will be enabled to live righteous lives. That means is the Anointed One, the Messiah. In the Gospel of Luke, chapter four, Jesus reads these verses from Isaiah and declares that he is their fulfillment, clearly identifying himself as the Messiah. As these verses from Isaiah proclaim, and as Jesus himself affirms throughout the Gospels, living the kind of righteousness that God desires brings the blessing of comfort in times of mourning.

 Jesus is the one who “gives beauty for ashes, joy instead of mourning, praise instead of despair” to those who mourn so that they will be like “strong and graceful oaks for God’s own glory.” This is not something that a human spiritual leader can provide. Nor is it available to those who reject Jesus as the Messiah, nor even to believers who choose to live their own kind of life rather than living Jesus’ kind of life, which he describes as the life of the Kingdom of Heaven. Only Christ can make of us what we cannot make of ourselves.

*Comfort me, Lord, with the comfort that comes from remaining close to you. Amen.*

**Wednesday, January 18 Luke 19:41-44**

*“As Jesus approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it”*

 There is a dramatic view of Jerusalem from the top of the Mount of Olives looking across the Kidron Valley. Jesus, catching sight of the beautiful city, wept because he understood the real tragedy of the moment. He knew that while many were acclaiming him that day as their king, their hero worship would soon fade as they came to realize that he was not there to take political or military control. He had come to offer the way to peace with God through faith in himself and the forgiveness of sin, but most had not believed and the judgment of God was about to come upon the city.

 It must have been incredible to hear Jesus prophesy the fall of Jerusalem, but that is exactly what happened in the years that followed. That great walled city came under siege and was surrounded by a huge earthen ramp. The walls were scaled and those inside were destroyed. Jerusalem is symbolic of all our hometowns and cities. Do we, like Jesus, weep for our friends and neighbors who do not know him as their Lord and Savior?

*May those who do not know you, Lord, respond before it is too late. Amen.*

*DEVOTIONS*

January 16 - 21

*God blesses those who mourn*

**Thursday, January 19 Psalm 23:1-6**

*“Your rod and your staff, they comfort me”*

 The psalm begins with a simple profession. In the ancient world, kings were known as shepherds of their people. Thus to profess “The Lord is my shepherd” is to declare one’s loyalty to God and intention to live under God’s reign. It was the responsibility of kings to provide for and protect the people, and God does what a shepherd is supposed to do: provide life and security for his flock. Consequently, we have everything we need. The rest of the psalm explains how God fulfills the role of a good shepherd.

 Even in the most life-threatening situation - “in the valley of the shadow of death” - God’s provision is sufficient. His “rod” and his “staff” are words that describe a shepherd’s implements, but they are used here to signify royal authority and rule. What is ultimately comforting to us in our time of need is the assurance that God is in control and that God’s powerful presence provides for our lives. Because of his comfort, we are able to live humbly and gratefully as his beloved children.

*You are with me, Lord, to protect and comfort me in times of trouble. Amen.*

**Friday, January 20 2 Corinthians 1:3-7**

*“He is the God who comforts us”*

 Paul is praising God as the One who comforts us. God’s comfort is not merely a subjective feeling of relief or psychological support. Rather, Paul is speaking of a present state of peace in the midst of adversity because of our confidence in God’s willingness and ability to deliver his people. The experience of God’s deliverance in the *past* and the corresponding trust of his deliverance in the *future* is the “comfort” of his people in the *present.* Our comfort comes not from within ourselves, but from God’s commitment to sustain and save his people, no matter what.

 Many seek comfort by escaping through preoccupation with business, entertainment, hobbies, sports – anything that prevents us from facing our problems. We constantly seek fulfillment from that which can never satisfy. But the followers of Christ receive comfort from God’s faithful intervention in their lives. When we sin and own up to our sin, mourning our disobedience before God, we are forgiven and receive the comfort of being at peace with God.

*Mourning my sin, Lord, your forgiveness brings me comfort. Amen.*

**Saturday, January 21 Matthew 5:1-10**

*“Blessed are those who mourn”*

Those who mourn are blessed by God for he will comfort them. To mourn in the way Jesus is speaking about it here is to care profoundly about our disobedience, to know godly sorrow for our sin. It also means to be deeply concerned about evil in the world, and to know the meaning of suffering because of the sin, injustice, and perversion in society. Jesus assures those who mourn of the comfort of God.

 There is a direct relationship between the biblical word for “comfort” and the word describing the Holy Spirit as the Comforter for the believer (John 14:16). As we live with a repentant spirit, mourning our sin, we open ourselves to the Holy Spirit presence of God. The psalmist wrote, “A broken and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Psalm 51:17). As we mourn we draw close to God, and through his Spirit he draws close to us and assures us not only of his presence but his deliverance from the situation that caused our mourning in the first place.

*I pray, Lord, that I may know your Spirit’s comfort in my life. Amen.*