*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

March 13 - 18

“Obedience from the heart”

**Monday, March 13 Romans 3:19-24**

*“God in his gracious kindness declares us not guilty”*

  Paul shows that it is impossible for people to be saved by perfectly obeying God’s law for the obvious reason that all have failed in this regard. “All have sinned” makes it clear that all of us have disobeyed at one time or another. Paul then points out that the law serves as a means of showing us the reality of our sin. If it were not for God telling us through his commandments what he desires from us, how would any of us know when we had disobeyed? But, we do know what God wants and we also know that we have not obeyed his will. So far, it’s all bad news. Then Paul writes one very important word: “But!”

But God, Paul says, has shown us a different way of being saved. Not through perfect obedience to the law (at which we have already failed) but through faith in his Son, Jesus Christ. While our sin declared us “guilty,” God in his grace now declares us “not guilty” when we believe that Jesus’ death on the cross has taken away the guilt of our sin. Were we “guilty?” Absolutely! But, by faith, we are now “not guilty.”

*Your grace saved me, Father, when because of my sin I couldn’t save myself. Amen.*

**Tuesday, March 14 Romans 10:1-4**

*“They won’t go along with God’s way”*

  The task of the pastor is not only to point out to people the right way to go but also to explain when they are heading the wrong way. Most people don’t like being told they are wrong, and Paul takes great care when pointing out their error. First, he is deeply concerned about the people themselves. Second, he doesn’t point to himself as having a superior faith but declares his humble reliance upon God to whom he prays for them. Third, he speaks from his own experience for he was once as they still are, fervently believing that salvation comes by trying to keep God’s law.

The Jewish people are in error, Paul says, despite the fact that they are enthusiastic. They are deeply sincere but deeply wrong. Their zeal for God has the momentum of a freight train, but because it is “misdirected” it is the momentum of a freight train that has come off the tracks. They refuse to acknowledge that Jesus was the Messiah who taught them that the way to be right with God is by faith, not by good works.

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*I trust what your Son taught us, Father: it is by faith that I have been saved. Amen.*

**Wednesday, March 15 Psalm 51:16-19**

*“The sacrifice you desire is a repentant heart”*

Offering gifts to God was not going to get David anywhere after he had committed adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband put to death, for expressing praise and commitment to God is nonsense when your relationship with God has broken down. When your wife has caught you being unfaithful, a gift of flowers is not going to get you anywhere. It’s the same with God. All you can do when you have committed serious sin is cast yourself on God’s grace as someone who is crushed and broken by the price you are paying for your wrongdoing. Then when God answers your prayer and forgives you, you can resume your regular life of worship, expressing praise and commitment.

In the psalm, David casts himself on God’s mercy and compassion. He recognizes how sin has been a part of his life from his earliest beginning, and acknowledges that he can’t get away with saying one thing in public and doing something different in private. God answered David’s prayer of repentance and forgave him.

*I repent of my sin, Father, and gratefully accept your forgiveness. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

March 13 - 18

“Obedience from the heart”

**Thursday, March 16 Mark 7:1-8**

*“Their heart is far from me”*

  The ancient rite of hand-washing began with God’s instruction that priests were to wash their hands and feet before entering the tabernacle. By doing so, they were outwardly representing an inwardly pure heart without which no one may enter the presence of God. Over time, this meaningful symbol of outward washing to indicate inward cleanliness was extended to all the people of Israel and practiced generally.

Up to this point, the intentions of symbolic washing are good. It is valuable to have an outward symbol as a sign of inward obedience to God, for the priests as well as for the people. The problem, as Jesus is pointing out, comes when the rite itself is substituted for the spiritual truth it originally represented. The legalistic Pharisees accuse Jesus’ disciples of being inwardly unclean (i.e., sinful) simply because they have not performed the outward symbolic washing. Jesus calls them hypocrites for while they scrupulously follow the outward cleanliness rules, their hearts are anything but pure.

*May my outward obedience, Lord, reflect an inwardly clean heart. Amen.*

**Friday, March 17 Matthew 23:27-28**

*“Looking good on the outside – full of wickedness on the inside”*

It was the custom in Jesus’ day to mark tombs in burial grounds with whitewash to make them conspicuous so that passersby unfamiliar with the terrain would not come in contact with a tomb and so be rendered unclean for seven days. Jesus makes his point plain: These religious leaders give the appearance of having avoided unrighteousness by their attention to their many legal requirements, but inwardly they are unrighteous for they have not attended to the transformation of the heart that can only come by responding to Jesus.

The religious leaders have bought into the saying that “image is everything.” Create a beautiful exterior, whitewash old faults, and people will never know what you are really like. How a leader postures himself or herself gets results, which sadly underscores that the depth of one’s character is often a matter of general indifference. Jesus, however, calls us to develop godly character from the inside out. Instead of a superficial, external personal identity that is man-made, we must start with a deep, inner, new identity in Christ that is God-made.

*Remake me from the inside out, Lord, for then I will be clean all over. Amen.*

**Saturday, March 18 Matthew 5:17-20**

*“Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees”*

Throughout Israel’s history the assumption seemed to be that if one worked hard enough to clean up the outside, then the inside was automatically clean. This is what the Pharisees were claiming, but Jesus says they are wrong. Entrance into the kingdom of heaven is not gained by external acts of righteousness. Jesus tells his listeners that they must seek a different kind of righteousness – an inner righteousness that begins with one’s heart confessing sin and accepting the forgiving grace of God.

Having become a part of the kingdom of heaven through confession and grace, God begins to spiritually transform our heart. It is this inner transformation that will ultimately produce transformation in the external ethical life. Following Jesus does not mean setting aside or abolishing God’s law. Rather, it means that for the first time we will really be able to obey it. Not through attempts to be good in order to be saved, but having been saved we now have God’s power changing our heart so it desires to obey him.

*Change my heart, O God, so that it wants more than anything to obey you. Amen.*