*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

April 17 - 22

“Seek first God’s Kingdom”

**Monday, April 17 Exodus 16:1-36**

*“I’m going to rain down food from heaven for you”*

  The Israelites have left Egypt, crossed the Red Sea, and are in the desert on their way to the Promised Land. The desert is a difficult time for the Israelites. It is easy to condemn them as faithless, but I wonder whether many of us would have done any better. The desert is not an easy place for them to live, not only because of their harsh surroundings, but also because their only recourse in a barren land is to trust God completely. And if the Bible teaches us anything about human nature, it is that total trust and obedience are rare even in the most godly person.

 What the Bible also teaches is that God is merciful toward us, even when we struggle to put our trust in him. His gracious provision for his people in the wilderness shows that they are safe with him, for he is able to provide for their every need. As he provides for them, he is increasing their faith by having them collect only as much food as they need for each day. Jesus taught us to pray: “Give us this day our daily bread.” As God provides today’s bread we learn to trust him for tomorrow’s.

*You provide for me today, Lord, and I will trust you for tomorrow. Amen.*

**Tuesday, April 18 Psalm 104:10-18**

*“You make . . . You send . . . You fill”*

  The psalm speaks of God’s creation of the world, but it does not picture God as simply setting the world going and then letting it work on its own. Rather, it tells us that God is active in the world now. God makes the springs come out of the earth. God sits in the heavens with his watering can, watering the slopes where trees and crops grow. Plants, trees, animals, and human beings are all part of God’s world, of which God takes ongoing care. The things human beings are able to produce, such as wine, oil, and bread, all originate in his care.

 The psalm reminds us that we have a Father in heaven who sends rain, and sunshine, and fruitful seasons; that he gives us all things richly to enjoy. God is daily involved in our lives, and we should never think it unusual or surprising or extraordinary when God shows up and brings about something good in our lives. If every blade of grass grows by the involvement of God with it, then every healthy breath we draw, every cheerful hour we enjoy, every good thing we are able to do, all come by God’s hand.

*You care for me, Lord, even in the smallest details of my life. Amen.*

**Wednesday, April 19 Luke 8:4-15**

 *“Having heard the word, they keep it and bear fruit”*

 Many things can get in the way of responding to Jesus. Some people never seem interested. Others are initially drawn to God’s Word, but as the difficulty of being a Christian in a world that often does not understand devotion to Christ becomes clear, their interest wanes and they drop out of sight. Still others flirt with a Christian walk, but life is either too tempting or too demanding for them to respond in a way that draws them to Jesus.

 The difference seen in soil four people seems to be the condition of their heart. A healthy heart clings to God’s Word; it beats fast for him and responds to him. A damaged heart has trouble seeing him over the distractions and attraction of other things. It does take constant listening and clinging to the Word to be fruitful. To respond to God is not a matter of spiritual cruise control, where things happen automatically in instinctive response to the things of God. It takes conscious effort on our part to focus on God and his ways so that we become consistently fruitful.

*As your word is spread, Lord, I pray for a fruitful response. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

April 17 - 22

“Seek first God’s Kingdom”

 **Thursday, April 20 Luke 9:1-6**

*“Preach the kingdom and heal the sick”*

  Jesus intends to get the message of the arrival of kingdom hope spread across the nation of Israel. To accomplish this, he commissions the Twelve to minister for him in the towns and villages of the nation. He sends them out with the same authority that he has exercised, including the power to heal and to exorcise. They are to preach the kingdom and heal the sick. This combination reflects Jesus’ ministry of word and deed, linking the proclamation of hope for the promised arrival of God’s rule with the demonstration of compassion.

 The disciples are not to act like other practitioners of religion in their culture, who expected to be paid for their labors and went begging house to house to get provisions. Instead, Jesus calls on them to trust God. Ministry should not burden those who are ministered to; it should serve them physically as well as spiritually. Wherever the disciples are welcome, they should stay and minister; if they are not welcome, they must leave, shaking the dust from their feet to indicate God’s rejection for rejecting his messengers.

*Lord, help us to serve people physically and spiritually. Amen.*

**Friday, April 21 Philippians 4:6-7**

*“Don’t worry about anything; instead pray about everything”*

 Anxiety, in the popular use of the term, is our most common emotional problem in America today. Reasons for anxiety include worry, confusion of mind, pressures of daily life, and uncertainty about the future. In the way Paul is using the term, and the way we most often experience it, anxiety is the futile, frustrating, debilitating attempt to bear the burdens of life and especially of the future, ourselves, alone. The Christian answer to anxiety is confident prayer which results in ”the peace of God which surpasses all understanding.”

 Paul’s offer of prayer is not an easy solution; it’s not a magical formula, or a bedtime or morning quick repetition of words that we have labeled prayer. Paul is talking about the serious business of bringing our lives before God, examining our dependence upon God, placing our lives in God’s hands to be used, remembering and celebrating what God has already done, confessing our needs and dedicating our gifts, and committing ourselves and all that we are to God’s kingdom, not our own kingdom.

*As I bring my life before you in prayer, Lord, give me your peace. Amen.*

**Saturday, April 22 Matthew 6:25-34**

*“Make the kingdom of God your primary concern”*

 Jesus’ call to trust God is an answer to the human tendency to worry. We find it easier to feel secure with things that we can control and, when something is beyond our control, we worry. But, when we have found security in God, we can trust him for our needs. Christ calls us to give up our limited securities in ourselves for the greater security in his grace.

 The basis for our trust is confidence in the King. We believe that God is the primary actor on the stage of history. We trust his sovereign providence, believing that he is holding back the end, the final judgment of history, for the sake of his work of grace. When we are truly kingdom members, having been born into the kingdom by the Spirit, it follows that our highest purpose is “the kingdom of God and his righteousness.” This concentration on doing God’s will is the positive answer to worry, but it is also and primarily a direction for positive action as a lifestyle. Jesus concludes by saying that we are to live one day at a time. The problems of each day are sufficient for the present, and we face them with faith in God.

*Your kingdom is of first priority for me, Lord, and you take care of the rest. Amen.*