*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

May 8 - 13

“I Never Knew You”

**Monday, May 8 1 Corinthians 13:1-3**

*“. . . but have not love . . .”*

  Paul argues for the absolute necessity of love. In every religious controversy it is love that leaves first. This was certainly true in Corinth where they were fighting over the gift of tongues. Paul tells them that to exercise this gift, and by extension any gift that God gives his people, without love is worthless. He next moves to the gift of prophecy, which Paul considered superior to the gift of tongues. Prophecy, as used here, represents a revelation of God given to build up the church. In our day, preaching would be the equivalent practice. But a prophet (preacher) who does not love will not be used by God for his purposes.

 The Jews prized the giving of alms to the poor as a religious act, and the early Christians picked up the idea. Whether giving one’s body to be burned meant to place oneself into slavery by having oneself branded or actually to sacrifice one’s life in a fire of martyrdom is not certain. Regardless, without love the act of giving is of no benefit to the giver. This had to be a blow to the readers who were all puffed up about their giving, but who did not love one another.

*I will not substitute good deeds for love of you or others, Lord. Amen.*

**Tuesday, May 9 Ezekiel 34:1-10**

*“I am against the shepherds”*

 These verses present a dual revelation of judgment and salvation. It is a revelation of judgment on the shepherds who have oppressed the flock, and of salvation for the flock through the personal intervention of the Lord as their shepherd. Here, the shepherds are the kings of Judah who have failed to fulfill their role of shepherd properly. The proper task of a shepherd is to care for the flock, that is, to protect it from dangers on the outside and dissentions within – gathering those who strayed, leading the flock to good pasture and clean drinking water, and taking special care of the poor and the weak.

 These shepherds, however, have viewed their position as an opportunity for personal gain, ruling harshly and brutally, feeding only themselves, not the flock, and even slaughtering the choicest animals. Because of the shepherds’ sinful self-interest, judgment is coming on them. The Lord will step in and remove the false shepherds from their office so that they can no longer feed themselves at the flock’s expense.

*I praise you, Lord, for you are my shepherd and I have everything I need. Amen.*

**Wednesday, May 10 Exodus 7:8-13**

*“Pharaoh’s heart became hard”*

 Aaron and Moses confront Pharaoh with God’s power when Aaron casts his staff before Pharaoh and it turns into a snake. Pharaoh’s magicians duplicate the feat, but Aaron’s snake swallows those of the magicians. This encounter is like a sparring contest between God and Pharaoh. God shows his power and Pharaoh resists the obvious conclusion that he is no match for the God of Israel. He should concede victory to God. But he does not, which will yield disastrous circumstances in the ten plagues that follow this encounter.

 The significance of Aaron’s staff *swallowing* those of Pharaoh’s magicians is seen when the same word is used later in Exodus where the sea *swallows* up the Egyptian army. The final demise of the Egyptians is already hinted at here. Pharaoh does not heed the warning now. Nor will he heed it later, even though each of the ten plagues to come will offer him a chance to repent of his hardhearted pride and humble himself before God by letting the people of God leave their slavery in Egypt.

*Soften my heart, Lord, that I may humbly obey you in all things. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

May 8 - 13

“I Never Knew You”

**Thursday, May 11 Matthew 24:23-25**

*“False prophets will rise up and perform great miraculous signs”*

  Jesus foretells the increased presence and activity of false messiahs and prophets as the time for his return draws nearer. Claiming to belong to God, they belong to the enemy. The signs and miracles they perform are indications of supernatural activity, but believers must be careful not to be deceived into thinking that God stands behind them. Satan himself and his evil forces are able to manipulate the supernatural, so the spiritually discerning must look for the hand that lies behind the signs and miracles to see whether they truly come from God.

 The study of the future should spur us to godly living in the present. Jesus’ message in the Sermon on the Mount was that personal righteousness may result from entering the kingdom of heaven. Now he prophesies future events so that we will discipline ourselves to maintain and expand personal righteousness in our daily lives regardless of the circumstances. He does not tell us these things so that we will be obsessed with dates, events, and speculations about the smallest details of his prophecy, but to encourage us to godly living.

*Give me insight to know what is from you, Lord, and what is not from you. Amen.*

**Friday, May 12 Matthew 25:1-13**

*“I tell you the truth, I don’t know you”*

 In Jewish marriages the bridegroom went to the home of the bride at night to bring her to his own home in marriage. It was customary for girls to keep the bride company as they waited for the bridegroom. In this parable the ten virgins are described as being of two kinds: five being wise and having oil for their lamps so they can join in the procession of the bride and groom back to his home, and five being foolish and having no oil for their lamps. While they were out looking for oil, the bridegroom came and took his bride home, accompanied by the wise virgins who were prepared for his coming.

 The foolish virgins eventually made their way to the groom’s home but found the door locked. In response to their request that the door be opened for them, they were rejected by the groom: “I do not know you,” a stark, straightforward statement of rejection of a person who does not have a saving relationship with Jesus. The parable distinguishes between those who are prepared with salvation when Jesus returns, and those who are not.

*I am ready for your return, Lord, for you have saved me. Amen.*

**Saturday, May 13 Matthew 7:15-23**

*“I will reply, ‘I never knew you’”*

 An oral confession of Jesus as Lord can mask an unrepentant heart, so Jesus says that entrance to the kingdom of heaven is reserved for those who do “the will of my Father who is in heaven.” This does not mean simply to obey the Old Testament law as God’s will. The will of the Father means faithful obedience to Jesus. Since Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament, he is the ultimate example of the Father’s will obeyed. To follow his example in discipleship and become like him will enable his disciples to do God’s will on a daily basis.

 But, doing God’s will is not simply a matter of performing an outward deed that looks good. Doing the will of God comes from a heart that has surrendered itself to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. While the deeds of a godly heart and a self-centered heart may look similar on the outside, God looks at the heart and only those whose hearts are committed to him are “known” by him. Thus, Jesus will say to those who in the judgment will point to their good deeds as justification for eternal life but whose hearts were never committed to him, “I never knew you.”

*You know me, Lord, for my heart belongs to you. Amen.*