TikTok Devotional Series Transcript:

March 2024

March 1, 2024 - Deliverances Delayed

Immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. (Acts 16:26)

In this age, God rescues his people from some harm. Not all harm. That's comforting to know, because otherwise we might conclude from our harm that he has forgotten us or rejected us. So be encouraged by the simple reminder that in Acts 16:19–24, Paul and Silas were not delivered, but in verses 25–26, they were.

First, no deliverance:

- *"They seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace." (verse 19)*
- *"The magistrates tore the garments off them." (verse 22)*
- *They "inflicted many blows upon them." (verse 23)*
- *The jailer "fastened their feet in the stocks." (verse 24)*

But then, deliverance:

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God . . . and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. (verses 25–26) God could have stepped in sooner. He didn't. He has his reasons. He loves Paul and Silas.

Both no deliverance and deliverance are God's stages of care for you. He has not left you or forsaken you (Hebrews 13:5). If you are in the fettered stage, don't despair. Sing. Freedom is on the way. It is only a matter of time. Even if it comes through death. "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

March 2, 2024 - Every Work of Faith

To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thessalonians 1:11–12)

It is very good news that God designs his glory to be magnified through the exercise of his grace. God is glorified through the power of his wrath (Romans 9:22), but repeatedly the New Testament (and the Old Testament, for example, Isaiah 30:18) says that we should experience God's grace so that God gets glory.

Ponder how this works in the prayer of 2 Thessalonians 1:11–12. Paul prays that God would fulfill our good resolves. How? He prays that they would be done "by [God's] power." That is, that they would be "[works] of faith." Why? So that Jesus would be glorified in us.

That means the giver gets the glory. God gave the power. God gets the glory. We have faith; he gives power. We get the help; he gets the glory. That's the deal that keeps us humble and happy, and keeps him supreme and glorious.

Then Paul says that this glorification of Christ is "according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus." God's answer to Paul's prayer that we rely on God's power to do good works is grace. That's the way it

works in the New Testament over and over. Trust God for gracious enabling, as we engage with every work of faith.

March 3, 2024 - He Knows Your Need

"Do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all." (Matthew 6:31–32)

Jesus wants his followers to be free from worry. In Matthew 6:25–34, he gives at least seven arguments designed to take away our anxiety. One of them lists food and drink and clothing. Jesus must mean that God's knowing is accompanied by his desiring to meet our need. He is emphasizing we have a Father. And this Father is better than any earthly father.

I can't be for my children a very strong reason not to worry. There are things that may be happening to them now, or may happen tomorrow, that I do not even know about. But it is totally different with Our Father in heaven! He knows everything about us, where we are, now and tomorrow, inside and out. He sees every need.

Add to that, his huge eagerness to meet our needs. Remember the "much more" of Matthew 6:30, "If God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you?"

Add to that his complete ability to do what he is eager to do (he feeds billions of birds hourly, around the world, Matthew 6:26). So join me in trusting the promise of Jesus to meet our needs. That's what Jesus is calling for when he says, "Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all."

March 4, 2024 - Cause us to Return

Cause us to return, O Lord, that we may return! (Lamentations 5:21)

There is no hope for God's people unless God causes them to return from their sliding and leaping into sin and unbelief. The book of Lamentations is the bleakest book in the Bible. God himself had decimated the apple of his eye: Jerusalem.

- *The Lord gave full vent to his wrath; he poured out his hot anger, and he kindled a fire in Zion that consumed its foundations. (Lamentations 4:11)*
- *He has killed all who were delightful in our eyes. (Lamentations 2:4)*
- *The Lord has afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions. (Lamentations 1:5)*

So how does the book end? It ends with the only hope there is: God causing his people to return. That is our only hope!

Jesus said to Peter, *"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:31–32).*

Not if you return. But when you return. I have prayed for you! You will return. And when you do, it will be my sovereign grace that brought you back from the precipice of apostasy.

Christian, this is true for you. This is your only hope of perseverance in faith. Glory in it. Christ Jesus is the one who . . . is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. (Romans 8:34) He will cause us to return.

March 5, 20224- Restore Comfort

"I have seen his ways, but I will heal him; I will lead him and restore comfort to him and his mourners." (Isaiah 57:18)

Learn your doctrine from biblical texts. It stands up better that way, and feeds the soul. For example, learn the doctrine of irresistible grace from texts. In this way, you will see that it does not mean grace cannot be resisted; it means that when God chooses, he can and will overcome that resistance.

In Isaiah 57:17–19, for instance, God chastises his rebellious people by striking them and hiding his face: *"Because of the iniquity of his unjust gain I was angry, I struck him; I hid my face and was angry" (verse 17).*

But they did not respond with repentance. Rather, they kept backsliding. They resisted: *"But he went on backsliding in the way of his own heart" (verse 17). So grace can be resisted. In fact, Stephen said to the Jewish leaders, "You always resist the Holy Spirit" (Acts 7:51).*

What then does God do? Is he powerless to bring those who resist to repentance and wholeness? No. He is not powerless. The next verse says, *"I have seen his ways, but I will heal him; I will lead him and restore comfort to him and his mourners" (Isaiah 57:18).*

March 6, 2024 - Loved by God

"There I will make a horn to sprout for David; I have prepared a lamp for my anointed. His enemies I will clothe with shame, but on him his crown will shine." (Psalm 132:17–18)

Who will benefit from the promises God made to David? Isaiah 55:1, 3, *"Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! . . . And I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David."*

From this side of the cross, here's how I would paraphrase that promise: Whoever comes to God through Jesus Christ, his Son, thirsting for what God is for us in Christ, rather than depending on who we are or what we do, God will make with that one a covenant.

Remember how the Bible comes to an end in Revelation 22:17? *"Let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price." This is not just the Jews of Isaiah's day. This is anyone who comes to Christ to satisfy the thirst of his soul. "I will make with [that one] an everlasting covenant!"*

What covenant? A covenant defined and secured by God's *"sure love for David." Isaiah 55:3, "I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David."*

It is an astonishing thing that we will benefit from the promises made to David. God means for us to be astonished. He means for us to leave our devotions astonished at the power and authority and surety with which we are loved by God.

March 7, 2024 - Forgive us our Sins

"And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation." (Luke 11:4)

Who forgives whom first? When Jesus teaches us to pray that God would forgive us, "*for we ourselves forgive,"* he is not saying that the first move in forgiveness was our move. Rather, it goes like this: God forgave us when we believed in Christ (Acts 10:43). Then, from this broken, joyful, grateful, hopeful experience of being forgiven, we offer forgiveness to others.

This forgiving spirit signifies that we have been savingly forgiven. That is, our forgiving others shows that we have faith; we are united to Christ; we are indwelt by the gracious, humbling Holy Spirit.

May you know God's forgiveness afresh today, and may that grace overflow in your heart in forgiveness toward others. And may that sweet experience of grace in your life give you added assurance that, when you go to God to experience fresh, blood-bought forgiveness, you will know that he sees you as his forgiven and forgiving child.

March 8, 2024 - Importance of Fathers

A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families, he leads out the prisoners with singing; but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land. Psalm 68:5-6

Social science data routinely confirms how important dads are for the health and well-being of children. Children who grow up without a dad at home are three times more likely to engage in criminal activity, more likely to engage in sexual activity earlier, less likely to go to college, more likely to have emotional and behavioural problems, more likely to struggle academically, and are twice as likely to commit suicide. As author and Professor Nancy Pearcey recently wrote, the best predictor that a child will hold on to their Christian faith into adulthood is if their dad held on to his faith and nurtured a close bond with his kids.

None of this means, of course, that children who grow up with an absent father are doomed to failure, or that children who grow up with faithful, attentive fathers are guaranteed success. However, if we do know instinctively and empirically how important fathers are, shouldn't we hope for more good fathers to be modelled in the media and elsewhere, rather than fewer?

March 9, 2024 - Wonderfully Made

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. Psalm 139:14

According to a report by the Human Rights Campaign, perhaps the most aggressive promoter of gender ideology and so-called "gender transitions," adults who identify as transgender are overrepresented in almost every category of disability.

Another study on the prevalence of neurodevelopmental conditions in adults who identify as transgender confirmed that, compared to the general population, adults with OCD, autism, or bipolar disorder were over five times more likely to identify as transgender. Those with ADHD were six to seven times more likely to identify as transgender. Those with depression or learning disorders were over three times more likely to claim a transgender identity. And, shockingly, those with schizophrenia were over 28 times more likely to identify as transgender.

Young people who identify as transgender have also exhibited similarly high rates of cognitive ailments. According to one study, almost 70% of youth identifying as transgender had clinically significant anxiety. Over 55% reported clinically significant depression or self-harm, and 46% met screening criteria for PTSD.

The church's opportunity to step into this gap for families of children with disabilities is greater than ever. Christians believe every person is *"fearfully and wonderfully made" by God (Psalm 139:14).*

March 10, 2024 - His Name's Sake

I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake. (1 John 2:12)

Why should we emphasize that God loves, forgives, and saves "for his name's sake" — for his own glory? Here are two reasons (among many).

> *1) We should emphasize that God loves and forgives for his own glory because the Bible does.*
>
> *I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins. (Isaiah 43:25)*
>
> *For your name's sake, O Lord, pardon my guilt, for it is great. (Psalm 25:11)*
>
> *Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of your name; deliver us, and atone for our sins, for your name's sake! (Psalm 79:9)*
>
> *Though our iniquities testify against us, act, O Lord, for your name's sake. (Jeremiah 14:7)*
>
> *2) We should emphasize that God loves and forgives for his own glory because it makes clear that God loves us with the greatest love.*

Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory. (John 17:24) God loves us not in a way that makes us supreme, but makes himself supreme. Heaven will not be a hall of mirrors, but an increasing vision of infinite greatness. Getting to heaven and finding that we are supreme would be the ultimate letdown.

The greatest love makes sure that God does everything in such a way as to uphold and magnify his own supremacy so that, when we get to heaven, we have something to increase our joy forever: God's glory.

March 11, 2024 - I went Astray

Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word. (Psalm 119:67)

This verse shows that God sends affliction to help us learn his word. How does that work? How does affliction help us learn and obey the word of God?

There are innumerable answers, as there are innumerable experiences of this great mercy. But here are five:

Affliction takes away the glibness of life and makes us more serious, so that our mindset is more in tune with the seriousness of God's word. And mark this: There is not a single glib page in the Bible.

Affliction knocks worldly props out from under us and forces us to rely more on God, which brings us more in tune with the aim of the word. For the aim of the word is that we hope in God and trust him.

Affliction makes us search the Scriptures with greater desperation for help, rather than treating it as marginal to life. *"You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13).*

Affliction brings us into the partnership of Christ's sufferings, so that we fellowship more closely with him and see the world more readily through his eyes. Paul's great heart longing was *"that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death" (Philippians 3:10).*

Affliction mortifies deceitful and distracting fleshly desires, and so brings us into a more spiritual frame and makes us receptive to the spiritual word of God.

May the Holy Spirit give us grace to not begrudge the teaching of God through pain.

March 12, 2024 - Those who have Faith

We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls. (Hebrews 10:39)

Don't look at the temporary cost of love, and shrink back from confidence in God's infinitely superior promises. If you shrink back, not only will you lose out on the promises; you will be destroyed.

Hell is at stake in whether we shrink back or persevere. It's not just the loss of a few extra rewards that hangs in the balance. Hebrews 10:39 says, "We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed." That is eternal judgment.

So, we warn each other: Don't drift away. Don't love the world. Don't start thinking nothing huge is at stake. Fear the terrible prospect of not cherishing the promises of God above the promises of sin. As Hebrews 3:13–14 says, *"Exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end."*

But mainly we must focus on the preciousness of the promises and help each other value above all things how great the reward is that Christ has purchased for us. We must say to each other what Hebrews 10:35 says: *"Do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward."* And then we must help those who have faith see the greatness of the reward.

March 13, 2024 - Give to the Lord Strength

Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength! (Psalm 96:7)

Here's at least part of the experience that the psalmist is referring to when he says, "Give to the Lord strength." What are we doing when we "Ascribe to the Lord strength"?

First, by God's grace, we give attention to God and see that he is strong. We give heed to his strength. Then we give our approval to the greatness of his strength. We give due regard to its worth. We find his strength to be wonderful. But what makes this wonder that we experience a "giving" kind of wonder, is that we are especially glad that the greatness of the strength is his and not ours.

We feel a profound fitness in the fact that he is infinitely strong, and we are not. We love the fact that this is so. We do not envy God for his strength. We are not covetous of his power. We are full of joy that all strength is his. Everything in us rejoices to go out of ourselves and behold this power — as if we had arrived at the celebration of the victory of a distance runner who had beaten us in the race, and we found our greatest joy in admiring his strength, rather than resenting our loss.

We find the deepest meaning in life when our hearts freely go out of ourselves to admire God's power, rather than turning inward to boast in our own — or even think about our own. We discover something overwhelming: It is profoundly satisfying not to be God, but to give up all thoughts or desires to be God and admire his strength.

March 14, 2024 - The earth is the Lord's

The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof; the world and they that dwell therein. Psalm 24:1

It has been said that "Christianity is more than a relationship with Jesus." It isn't less than that, to be sure. One of the most amazing things about God's posture toward us is that He not only reveals His will, but He reveals Himself, especially in Christ Jesus. And He relates with us personally: loving, forgiving, and leading us.

While Christianity is personal, it is not private. It makes claims about all of reality, most notably that Christ is Lord of all. Christianity cannot be reduced to some therapeutic or pragmatic formula. It is to be lived publicly too, which is another way of saying that followers of Christ embrace that He is Lord over all of reality.

Christians should cultivate a robust, comprehensive Christian worldview so that the challenges of this cultural moment can be understood and engaged from the bigger story of reality described in Holy Scripture. We should learn to take our place in this story through biblically grounded cultural analysis, discerning how to live with Christian wisdom and courageous faith, and effectively advancing the Kingdom in our communities while recognising that the earth is the Lord's.

March 15, 2024 - True Saving Faith

If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. (Hebrews 11:15–16)

Faith sees the promised future that God offers and "desires" it. Dwell on this for a moment. There are many people who water down what saving faith is by making it a mere decision with no change of what one desires and seeks. But the point of this text in the great faith chapter in the Bible — Hebrews 11 — is that living and dying by faith means having new desires and seeking new satisfactions.

Verse 14 says that the saints of old (who are being commended for their faith here in Hebrews 11) were seeking a different kind of country than this world offered. And verse 16 says they were desiring something better than what a present earthly existence could offer.

They had been so gripped by God that nothing short of being with God would satisfy. This is true saving faith: seeing the promises of God from afar and experiencing a change of values so that you desire and seek after and trust in the promises of God above what the world has to offer.

March 16, 2024 - Prepared a City

He has prepared for them a city. (Hebrews 11:16)

No pollution, no graffiti, no trash, no peeling paint or rotting garages, no dead grass or broken bottles, no harsh street talk, no in-your-face confrontations, no domestic strife or violence, no dangers in the night, no arson or lying or stealing or killing, no vandalism, and no ugliness.

The city of God will be perfect, because God will be in it. He will walk in it and talk in it and manifest himself in every part of it. All that is good and beautiful and holy and peaceful and true and happy will be there, because God will be there.

Perfect justice will be there and recompense a thousandfold for every pain suffered in obedience to Christ in this world. And it will never deteriorate. In fact, it will shine brighter and brighter as eternity stretches out into unending ages of increasing joy.

When you desire this city above everything else on the earth, then you honour God, who, according to Hebrews 11:10, is the designer and builder of the city. And when God is honoured, he is pleased and not ashamed to be called your God.

March 17, 2024 - God's Purpose

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

Why did God create the universe? And why is he governing it the way he is? What is God achieving? Is Jesus Christ a means to this achievement or the end of the achievement? Jesus Christ is the supreme revelation of God. He is God in human form. As such, he is the end, not a means.

The manifestation of the glory of God is the meaning of the universe. This is what God is achieving. The heavens, and the history of the world, are "telling the glory of God."

But Jesus Christ was sent to accomplish something that needed doing. He came to remedy the fall. He came to rescue sinners from inevitable destruction because of their sin. These rescued ones will see and savour and display the glory of God with everlasting joy.

Others will continue to heap scorn on the glory of God. So, Jesus Christ is the means to what God meant to achieve in the manifestation of his glory for the enjoyment of his people. No one would see and savour and celebrate the glory of God apart from the saving work of Christ. The aim of the universe would abort. Christ crucified is therefore both the means and the end of God's purpose in the universe.

March 18, 2024 - The Love of Christ

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us. (1 John 3:16)

The love of Christ for us in his dying was as conscious as his suffering was intentional. If he was intentional in laying down his life, it was for us. It was love. "When Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (John 13:1). Every step on the Calvary road meant, "I love you."

Therefore, to feel the love of Christ in the laying down of his life, it helps to see how utterly intentional it was. Look at what Jesus said just after that violent moment when Peter tried to cleave the skull of the servant, but only cut off his ear.

Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?" (Matthew 26:52–54)

It is one thing to say that the details of Jesus's death were predicted in the Old Testament. But it is much more to say that Jesus himself was making his choices precisely to see to it that the Scriptures would be fulfilled and that we may know the love of Christ.

March 19, 2024 - Sovereignty of Christ

He set me apart before I was born, and called me by his grace. (Galatians 1:15)

Ponder the conversion of Paul, and the sovereignty of Christ. Between Paul's birth and his call on the Damascus road he was an already-chosen, but not-yet-called, instrument of God (Acts 9:15; 22:14). This means that Paul was beating and imprisoning and murdering Christians as a God-chosen, soon-to-be-made-Christian missionary.

There was no denying or escaping it. God had chosen him for this before he was born. And now he would take him. The word of Christ was sovereign. There was no negotiating. Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do. (Acts 22:10)

Damascus was not Paul's final, free will yielding to Christ after decades of futile divine effort to save him. No. God had a time for choosing him (before he was born) and a time for calling him (on the Damascus road). God called, and the call produced the yielding. How sweet are the designs of God in the sovereign salvation of hardened, hopeless sinners!

March 20, 2024 - The Political Delusion

But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. 1 Timothy 5:8

In all the words flying around online during the current political season, very little is being said about the importance of marriage and family as the key factor of societal health. This is a particularly glaring omission.

One thing strangely absent is any conversation about how to help bolster marriage and family, economically, socially, etc. It's a huge issue and there was almost zero conversation about it from political candidates. This is a huge, missed opportunity.

To talk about social stresses such as crime, identity confusion, mental and emotional distress, the addiction crisis, and other things while not addressing the importance of the family is to mistake fruits and the root.

To think these issues can be addressed with money or lawmaking is a form of the political illusion that all problems are political and have political solutions. In fact, the best way to address most political problems is upstream from politics particularly improving the God given family.

March 21, 2024 - Stir up Your Mind

This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder. (2 Peter 3:1)

As Easter approaches, let's stir up our thankfulness and joy and admiration and amazement at what the resurrection of Jesus means for us. The curse of our fallen nature is that what once thrilled us becomes ordinary. The reality hasn't changed. We have changed.

This is why the Bible exists. Peter says of his two letters that they are written to "stir up" or "arouse" by means of "reminder." So, let's stir up our sincere minds by way of reminder. What has God done in raising Jesus from the dead? Here are a few biblical answers.

Because of the resurrection of Jesus, we are born again to a living hope.

Because of Jesus's resurrection, he now has the glory for which we were made. Our ultimate destiny is to see him as he is.

May the risen Lord Jesus himself awaken and arouse your sincere mind to new depths of worship and allegiance and joy.

March 22, 2024 - Omnipotent Service

"The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45)

Not only was he the servant of his people while he lived on earth, but he will also be our servant when he comes again. "Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them" (Luke 12:37). Jesus gave that as a picture of what he will do at his return.

Not only that, he is our servant now. "'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' So we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?'" (Hebrews 13:5–6).

Does this belittle the risen Christ — to say that he was and is and will ever be the servant of his people? It would, if "servant" meant "one who takes orders," or if we thought we were his masters. Yes, that would dishonour him. But it does not dishonour him to say that we are weak and need his help. It does not dishonour him to say that he is the only one who can service us with what we need most.

It does not dishonour him to say that he is an inexhaustible spring of love, and that the more he helps us and the more we depend on his service, the more amazing his resources appear. He is alive to save. He is alive to give. And he is thrilled to be this way. He is not burdened down with your cares. He thrives on burden-bearing. Jesus Christ is exuberant with omnipotent service for the sake of all who trust him.

March 23, 2024 - Grace from His Fullness

From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. (John 1:16)

How does this fullness have such an impact on us? In part because . . .

- . . . the one from whose fullness we are being drenched with grace is the Word that was with God and was God (John 1:1–2), so that his fullness is the fullness of God — a divine fullness, an infinite fullness;
- . . . this Word became flesh, and so was one of us, and was pursuing us with his fullness — it is an accessible fullness;
- . . . when this Word appeared in human form, his glory was seen — his is a glorious fullness;
- . . . this Word was "the only Son from the Father" (John 1:14) so that the divine fullness was being mediated to us not just from God, but through God — God did not send an angel but his only Son to deliver his fullness;
- . . . the fullness of the Son is a fullness of grace — We will not drown in this fullness but be blessed in every way by this fullness;

- . . . this fullness is not only a fullness of grace but of truth — We are not being graced with truth-ignoring flattery; this grace is rooted in rock-solid reality.

Is it any wonder, then, that we would feel astonished and full of joy at the fullness of Christ!

March 24, 2024 - A Worshiper of God

One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. (Acts 16:14)

Everywhere Paul preached some believed and some did not. How are we to understand why some of those who are dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1, 5) believed and some did not? The answer why some did not believe is that they "thrust it aside" (Acts 13:46) because the message of the gospel was "folly to [them], and [they were] not able to understand" (1 Corinthians 2:14). The mind of the flesh "is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot" (Romans 8:7).

Everyone who hears and rejects the gospel "hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed" (John 3:20). They remain "darkened in their understanding . . . because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart" (Ephesians 4:18). It is a guilty ignorance. The truth is available. But "by their unrighteousness [they] suppress the truth" (Romans 1:18).

When the saints in Jerusalem heard that Gentiles, and not just Jews, were responding to the gospel, they said, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life" (Acts 11:18). If you are a believer in Jesus, all of these happened to you: You were appointed to believe; you were granted to repent; and the Lord opened your heart. The rest of your life you should be overflowing with amazed thankfulness at the miracle that you are a believer and worshiper of God.

March 25, 2024 - Greatly Loved

We all once lived among [the sons of disobedience] in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ — by grace you have been saved. (Ephesians 2:3–5)

Would you not love to hear the angel Gabriel say to you, "You are greatly loved"?

Three times this happened to Daniel.

- "At the beginning of your pleas for mercy a word went out, and I have come to tell it to you, for you are greatly loved." (Daniel 9:23)
- "O Daniel, man greatly loved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for now I have been sent to you." (Daniel 10:11)
- And he said, "O man greatly loved, fear not, peace be with you; be strong and of good courage." (Daniel 10:19)

We do hear this, If you have faith in Jesus, God himself says to you in his word — which is more sure than an angel of God speaking — "You are greatly loved."

This is the only place where Paul uses this wonderful phrase "great love." And it is better than an angel's voice. If you have seen Jesus as true and received him as your supreme treasure, that is, if you are "alive," you are greatly loved. Greatly loved by the Creator of the universe. Just think of it! Greatly loved!

March 26, 2024 - The Fifth Column

Do not I hate those who hate you, O LORD, and abhor those who rise up against you? I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies. Psalm 139:21–22

Do you think it's right for us to use those words today? Those words were spoken by David, but I want to remind you of what he said next because there's a tremendous lesson there. He goes on, "Search me, O God, and know my heart. See if there is any offensive way in me." You see, the enemies of God that will do us the greatest harm are not those that attack us from without, but those that are within.

In 1936 there was a civil war in Spain and out of that war emerged the phrase, "the fifth column." This was the origin of it. One Spanish general was attacking a city and another general asked him, "What is your plan to take that city?" He replied, "I've got four columns against the city – one from the north, one from the south, one from the east, one from the west." He paused and then he added, "But it's my fifth column that I'm expecting to take the city for me."

"Where is that fifth column?" the second general asked. The first general replied, "My fifth column is inside the city." And that's the only way that Christians can ever be defeated. We are never defeated from without, but if there's a fifth column of God's enemies in our heart then that spells defeat. So we are to hate God's enemies but the enemies that we need to hate most are those that may be within our own hearts and lives. We must turn out the fifth column regardless of the cost.

March 27, 2024 - Wedded Bliss Is True

He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favour from the LORD. Proverbs 18:22

Yet another study has suggested that we are less satisfied with our personal lives, with one exception: married couples. According to a recent study published by Gallup, while less than half (47%) of us in general were satisfied with our personal lives, over half (57%) of married couples reported feeling very satisfied. That's nearly 20 percentage points higher than their non-married counterparts.

Of course, this report does not mean that marriage is the only way to be happy and satisfied, or that a single life cannot be beautiful, meaningful, and happy. It often is. Still, the truth about marriage should be told, given the popular narrative that marriage leads to misery, the record low number of young adults getting married, and the current push to mainstream "nonmonogamy" as good and healthy.

Not every institution should be revised for our modern ideas. The people most satisfied with their lives are those old-fashioned married couples, because this is as God intended it. May God bless those who are married with wedded bliss as they seek to honour him.

March 28, 2024 - Hearing God

God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" Philippians 4:19

One of the distressing things about much modern spirituality is the great emphasis on getting things from God. Some people think that the mark of a "higher life" is the ability to coax gifts out of the Lord. In some circles, all too much stress is given to getting things from God through prayer. Now, there is no question that we are told to submit our needs, not our hunger for luxuries, to God. However, this is never made central to our faith.

On the contrary, the saints of old, instead of stressing what they could get from God, asked instead, as did Paul, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6). Even the child Samuel answered God, saying, "Speak; for thy servant heareth" (1 Sam. 3:10). The true emphasis is more on hearing God than being heard by Him. I recently saw a child refuse to hear a single word spoken by his mother. Instead, he screamed and carried on, demanding that she hear him, thereby embarrassing his mother greatly. All too many people pray like that; they will not hear God, but they demand that He hear them. In their praying, they act like a spoiled and selfish child.

Are you ready to hear God? Are your prayers only for yourself and your loved ones? Have you remembered the persecuted Christians around the world? Are you mindful of the whole body of Christ in your prayers? If we refuse to hear God, how long will He hear us?

March 29, 2024 - Effects of the Resurrection

If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. (1 Corinthians 15:19)

Paul concludes from his hourly danger, and his daily dying, and his fighting with wild beasts, that the life he has chosen in following Jesus is foolish and pitiable if he will not be raised from the dead. If death were the end of the matter, he says, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (1 Corinthians 15:32). He means: If there is no resurrection, what makes sense is middle-class moderation to maximize earthly pleasures.

But that is not what Paul chooses. He chooses suffering, because he chooses obedience. Ananias came to Paul after his encounter with Christ on the Damascus road, with the words from the Lord Jesus, "I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name" (Acts 9:16). Paul accepted this suffering as part of his calling.

How could Paul do it? What was the source of this radical and painful obedience? The hope of the resurrection radically changed the way Paul lived. It freed him from materialism and consumerism. It gave him the power to go without comforts and pleasures that many people feel they must have in this life.

Jesus said the hope of the resurrection is supposed to change our behaviour. For example, he told us to invite to our homes people who cannot pay us back in this life. How are we to be motivated to do this? "You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just" (Luke 14:14). May God help us to rededicate ourselves for a lifetime of letting the resurrection have its radical effects.

March 30, 2024 - True Freedom

Whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think on these things. Philippians 4:8

In 2016, Massachusetts voters legalised recreational marijuana. Roughly seven years later, doctors at Boston Children's Hospital say a full third of adolescents who come in for routine check-ups report using marijuana, and a third of those kids are likely to develop hallucinations or paranoia, according to new research.

Nationwide, since 2019, the number of children diagnosed with cannabis-induced mental disorders, including schizophrenia and psychotic episodes, has increased by 50%. Research continues to reveal, in fact, that the marijuana on the market today, including the product that's "government regulated," is more potent and dangerous than the weed of decades past. There's just too much data now to ignore the correlations between marijuana use and mental health disorders.

Also obvious is that the arguments used for the legalisation of marijuana were bogus. The freedom to choose self-harm and addiction is no freedom at all. The children now suffering from schizophrenia,

depression, and paranoia are reasons enough to have this stopped. We should encourage children to think on good things that will give them true freedom.

March 31, 2024 - The Power of His Resurrection

Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. Mark 16:6

The fact that Jesus Christ rose again from the dead tells us something very important: our God is in the resurrection business. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is declared by St. Paul to be the assurance of our own resurrection on God's appointed day (1 Cor. 15:12–20).

The goal of our lives therefore should be to know Christ and "the power of his resurrection" (Phil 3:10). This means that we cannot lead defeated lives, nor can we evade our responsibilities under God to bring every area of life and thought into captivity to Jesus Christ.

The power of His resurrection begins here and now in our lives, in our regeneration, and in our service to Him. It means that we have a duty to exercise godly dominion in the Lord's name. Jesus Christ, in His Great Commission, orders us to disciple all nations, teaching them His total Word and bringing men and nations under His dominion. Christ is to be thought of as a very present king, for Paul says He "is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords" (1 Tim. 6:15).

The King's Word must have priority in our lives, and we must work to advance His realm and rule. We are too much impressed and governed by the powers of this world. Things will change rapidly when we begin to act in terms of the power of His resurrection.