

Oak Lawn United Reformed Church

Preparatory Devotional

June 2023

Blessing Christ's Way

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Introduction

This is the twelfth Lord's supper preparatory devotional I have been blessed to write for our help and edification. I am so thankful for the opportunity to write these, and for your willingness to use them.

We are using these devotionals as a way that God the Holy Spirit is feeding and nurturing us. That feeding and nurture comes in the way of self-examination. The purpose is to know better who we are and, especially, Who Jesus Christ is, our Savior and Lord. Please make diligent use of this little devotional. If you have family with you, read it together. Pray together. Encourage one another. Ask your own heart the hard, searching questions. We each need to be strengthened in the faith and perhaps a little "help" like this preparatory devotional is just what we need.

The structure of these daily devotionals is simple. Read, reflect, and pray. Joy awaits us as we come to know our God and ourselves better in preparing to come to His table!

In this installment of the preparatory devotional, we learn that true blessing comes by Christ's way.

"Let each one examine his heart to be sure that he trusts in Jesus Christ alone for his salvation, that he believed his sins are forgiven wholly by grace, for the sake of our Lord's sacrifice on the cross."

~Preparatory Exhortation paragraph #3

Monday

“Now when He saw the crowds, He went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to Him, and He began to teach them, saying:”
~~ **Matthew 5.1, 2**

Are you teachable? That’s an important question given the “introduction” to the sermon on the mount. These verses serve as our introduction to Jesus, the great Teacher. But are you one of His students? Look at verse one of our text and notice how with all that happens, Jesus is the leader. He sees the crowd, He went up on a mountainside (sermon on the mount...), He sat down, taking the pose of the teacher in Old Covenant tradition. His disciples, then, came up to Him on the mountain and made themselves available as His students. Are you teachable?

Each Sunday we arrive at His house to sit under His ministry, right? We believe the preaching we hear is only *through* the mouth of an under shepherd. That preaching is **from** the mouth of our great Priest and Prophet and King, Jesus Christ. He is the great Teacher. We come to church as students. We must surely be His students during the week of preparatory.

Preparatory is the time to focus on Jesus Christ, to carefully consider our own sins, and to remember the holiness of God and His wrath against sin. As we examine His Word, our hearts, and pray for the correct response to both, we will be made ready by God the Holy Spirit to a proper approach to His table.

God does not need from us a list of our accomplishments or lots of empty promises. What the Lord God calls us to is a thorough examination, an honest assessment, and then a piercing gaze upon the Lord Jesus Christ, our only hope.

Reflect: Ask yourself if you are teachable under the great Teacher Jesus Christ? If so, you will ask questions about sin and salvation this week.

Pray: Ask the Lord to give you a keen eye for the truth of His Word as you examine your heart this week. Ask God to show you Jesus Christ and His perfect salvation for sinners.

Tuesday

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”

~~ **Matthew 5.3-5**

Read those three verses a second time, and try to come up with one or two words that connect all three of these “blessed are” conditions? Does the word ‘humble’ work for you? How about ‘contrite’? Maybe the word ‘lowly’ gets at it. Maybe we can summarize who the Lord is saying are the blessed ones by saying “it is not the proud, ‘I can do it my way’ people who are in a blessed state. Rather, blessed are the poor, mourning, meek ones. That should define us during the week of preparatory!

Why? Because we are examining our hearts. Have you looked at your heart lately? I saw an MRI of my physical heart recently, but of course that’s not what we mean, is it? Have you evaluated your spiritual vitality, your willing obedience to the commandments of God? Have you tested your delight in coming to church? Do you come willingly and joyfully or out of a sense of duty or because you merely want to see your friends? Are you mourning because you realize you still sin and some (a lot?) of what you do and how you react proves that sin is alive and well in you? Are you poor in spirit?

Answer please the question from yesterday again: Are you teachable? The Lord sat down, the disciples gathered around and as He spoke, they took it all in. Now as you read His Word here about being a poor, mournful, and meek sinner are you nodding your head and saying, “yes, Jesus is right. That’s who I am”? Are you allowing Jesus through His Word to teach you? If you are, you will be ready for the Lord’s supper.

Reflect: Consider how the person who knows they are poor, mournful, and meek is the person rightly prepared to come to the table of our Lord.

Pray: Ask the Lord to break your heart about your sin, to humble you about your disobedience, and show you how great is your need for Christ.

Wednesday

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."

~~**Matthew 5.6**

If we make a connection between the "Beatitudes" and the Lord's supper, surely that connection is usually in these Words. Hunger – bread; thirst – wine. Spiritually, speaking, we "*eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood*" (John 6.53). So, it is natural for us to think of hungering and thirsting for righteousness and being filled as leading to the Lord's supper. The problem with us doing that is it is too limiting.

Ask this question of yourself today: Am I usually spiritually hungry and thirsty? This is an important question because the person who hungers and thirsts regularly is the person regularly looking for food from Jesus Christ. That person regularly examines his or her heart. That person wants to read the Bible, wants to spend time with God in prayer, wants to fight against sins in their life, wants to come to church both morning and evening on the Lord's day. The one who hungers and thirsts is blessed because they will be regularly finding rich food and drink in Jesus Christ!

Those who regularly hunger and thirst spiritually will be very good students. Such people are regularly teachable. That means – if this is you – your heart and mind are teachable at this moment. You are looking forward to the Lord's supper ahead. You are seeing the remnants of gross sins in your life and are busy putting them to death (Romans 8.13), and finding continual forgiveness in the precious blood of Jesus Christ. If you hunger and thirst for righteousness, then you also 'trust in Jesus Christ alone for your salvation.'

Reflect: A life of hunger and thirst is good if what you hunger and thirst for is righteousness. As you come to the Lord's table that hungering and thirsting will again be satisfied by our spiritual bread and drink.

Pray: Ask God to feed you richly at the upcoming meal if you regularly hunger and thirst for righteousness. Ask Him to give you a regular hunger and thirst for spiritual things if you do not have that.

Thursday

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."

~~**Matthew 5.7, 8**

This is the first indication in the sermon on the mount of an outward action to show the inward reality of being right with God. Those who are right with God, the ones who hunger and thirst for righteousness, who are poor, mournful, and meek sinners will show mercy to others. Is that you? Such ones are also, it seems, '...pure in heart.' Again, is that you? Here is where we are again faced with the question we must answer: Am I teachable? In this section of the "beatitudes" being teachable means, I ask my heart if I willingly, readily, and quickly show mercy to others, especially when they sin against me.

Preparatory is the process of examination. In that examination we are to ask questions of our heart. That means our thoughts, actions, and reactions need to be questioned and evaluated. What do we hope to learn? We need to learn whether our sins have been forgiven wholly by grace, for the sake of our Lord's sacrifice on the cross. Which sins? In this case, the sin of not willingly, readily, and quickly showing mercy to others, especially when they sin against us. But to receive that forgiveness we must admit the sin. Is your heart pure on the matter of showing mercy to others?

When we return to the house of the Lord this coming Lord's Day we hope and plan to partake of the Lord's supper after we hear from Him in the preached Word. We will both hear from God and taste of His goodness. As verse 8 of Jesus's teaching puts it, we will "see God." Don't push that "beatific vision" away and think we will only see God in heaven. As His mercy works through us to quickly forgive others, we will come to His house in Christ rejoicing to see God in the Word and supper!

Reflect: Blessed are those who, out of hearts made pure by grace, show mercy to others by quickly forgiving them when they sin against us. Plan to see God in His house through the Word and sacrament this Sunday.

Pray: Ask the Lord to give you a willingness to show mercy to others.

Friday

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God."

~~ **Matthew 5.9**

"Let each one examine his heart to be sure that he trusts in Jesus Christ alone for his salvation and that he believes his sins are forgiven..."

(Preparatory Exhortation)

Are you at peace? Are those nearest to you at peace with you? Do you feel peaceful? These questions flow from this text and toward our observance of the Lord's supper. Are you at peace with God and your neighbor? Being at peace with God comes by and through Jesus Christ, because of His shed blood. Examine your heart and be sure. Is Jesus Christ your **only** reason for your claim that you are at peace with God? Make sure.

Being at peace with your neighbor comes because of being at peace with God through Jesus Christ, but as a fruit of His salvation. Those reconciled to God by Jesus Christ will always seek to reconcile with a neighbor (friend, family, co-worker, etc.) because they must have peace. This is why the preparatory form also warns us: "If anyone of us is living in disobedience to Christ and in enmity with his neighbor, he must repent of his sin *and reconcile himself to his neighbor before he comes to the Lord's table.*" So, be a peacemaker!

But you must also examine your heart to be sure that you feel peaceful. Even though feelings can be a dangerous 'metric', it is still true that being at peace with God and neighbor should leave you feeling peaceful. If not, ask "why not?" Remember this: "...we urge any who lack this confidence (of coming to the table with good conscience) to seek from the minister or any elder such counsel as may quiet his conscience or lead to the conversion of his life." Are you a peacemaker?

Reflect: The Lord gives peace to those who are His. We should be at peace before we come to His table in just two days.

Pray: Ask the Lord to reveal to you His peace through Jesus Christ and ask Him to bring you into peace with those around you.

Saturday

"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

~~ **Matthew 5.10**

On this Saturday before the Lord's Day, the last day of preparatory we might be saying – why do we have to end with the warning about persecution? The Lord says here we are in a blessed state if we are being persecuted for living in a way that glorifies Him. But we might want to live as private Christians. We might want to just keep our faith in Christ to ourselves. And we might even decide to do that – be a closet Christian – because we want to **avoid** persecution. If so, then what? One word: repent!

Why repent? Because if we don't repent of being a private Christian, we will not inherit the kingdom of heaven. Read again the Lord's Word above. It's a pretty clear statement. "Am I a soldier of the cross, a follower of the Lamb, and shall I fear to own His cause, or blush to speak His Name? Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease, while others fought to win the prize and sailed through bloody seas? (Psalter #465). Is that your song?"

What does it mean to be the blessed of the Lord? All that we have covered in this week of preparatory – including being a Christian who is out of the closet, ready to own His Name and His cause. To be persecuted for the Name and honor of Jesus Christ is to be blessed. This truth only makes clearer to us why we need His Word and His supper. And He does not disappoint. He has prepared a Word and a meal that will fill and enable us, spiritually. Truly we are blessed and week by week we realize that all the more. Praise the Lord!

Reflect: To be the blessed of the Lord includes the privilege of suffering for the Name and glory of Jesus. He will strengthen you tomorrow to suffer for His Name.

Pray: Ask our gracious God to make the Lord's day, the Lord's Word, and the Lord's supper our strength to live for the Name of the Lord.