

11/23/08

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY Eternal God, merciful Father, You have appointed Your Son as Judge of the living and the dead. Enable us to wait for the day of His return with our eyes fixed on the kingdom prepared for Your own from the foundation of the world; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

THE OLD TESTAMENT LESSON Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

(As a shepherd seeks out his flock, so the Lord will gather His sheep.)

11 "For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. 12 As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. 13 I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. 14 I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. 15 I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. 16 I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.

20 "Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says to them: See, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. 21 Because you shove with flank and shoulder, butting all the weak sheep with your horns until you have driven them away, 22 I will save my flock, and they will no longer be plundered. I will judge between one sheep and another. 23 I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. 24 I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken.

THE EPISTLE LESSON 1 Corinthians 15:20-28

(For as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive.)

20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. 22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 27 For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ.

28 When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

(Come and inherit the kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world.)

31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For **I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'**

37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

40 "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, **whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'**

41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

44 "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'

45 "He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' 46 "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

INTRO - Maybe you've heard the story of the pastor who one day brought in a friend, an elderly pastor to address his congregation. The elderly pastor told the following story. ...

"A father, his son, and a friend of his son were sailing off the Pacific coast when a fast approaching storm blocked any attempt to get back to the shore. The waves were so high, that even though the father was an experienced sailor, he could not keep the boat upright! The three were swept into the ocean as the boat capsized. Grabbing a rescue line, the father had to make the most excruciating decision of his life: To which boy would he throw the other end of the life line? He only had seconds to make the decision. The father knew that his son was a Christian, and he also knew that his son's friend was not. The agony of his decision was hard upon the father but he had to decide quickly. As the father yelled out, 'I LOVE YOU, SON!' he threw out the lifeline to his son's friend. By the time the father had pulled the friend back to the capsized boat, his son had disappeared beneath the raging swells into the black of the night. His body was never recovered."

The father knew his son would step into eternity with Jesus, and he could not bear the thought of his son's friend stepping into an eternity without Jesus. Therefore, he sacrificed his son to save the son's friend."

The Pastor explained, "How great is the love of God that he should do the same for us! Our heavenly father sacrificed his only begotten son that we could be saved."

With that, the old man turned and sat back down in his chair as silence filled the room. Within minutes after the service had ended two teenagers were at the old man's side. "That was a nice story," politely stated one of the boys, "but I don't think it was very realistic for a father to give up his only son's life in hopes that the other boy would become a Christian."

"Well, you've got a point there," the old man replied, glancing down at his worn bible. "It sure isn't very realistic, is it? But I'm standing here today to tell you that story gives me a glimpse of what it must have been like for God to give up his son for me. You see, I was that father and your pastor was my son's friend."

My Christian friends, has it fully sunk in what it means that God gave His Son for us, for you?

I. We have been listing blessings of God for which we are thankful this month. In the past weeks we've listed people for whom we're thankful, challenges and opportunities for which we are thankful, and material blessings for which we are thankful.

- A. Today we have an opportunity to consider spiritual blessings of God for which we are thankful.
 - 1. We are people who have not lived perfect lives, who have rebelled against our creator and Savior, who are sinners. We deserve eternal punishment.
 - 2. But God has offered us spiritual blessings of forgiveness and eternal life as we believe in His Son.
 - 3. In this world of trouble and pain, the Assurance of God's love gives us hope and peace and joy.
- B. And all this is offered to us because God loved us enough to sacrifice His Son for us, for you, for me.

II. Today that Savior calls us to Ministry. Did you hear his words in Matthew 25?

A. I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' . Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

- 1. God's children are not loved just so they can serve God in the church. God calls us to live and share His love in our lives everyday, outside the walls of this church as well as inside.
- 2. God's children are loved so they can love others.
 - A. That means helping the needy, caring for the ill.
 - B. That also means loving others by telling them about their Savior so they can have the blessings for which you are thankful.
- 3. But, serving God means worshiping Him in the company of God's children, in the Church, and working with other Christians to do the work He has called us to do, that we cannot do by ourselves.
- 4. So God's children do ministry individually, and through the family of God.

B. Today is also Stewardship Sunday and today you will have an opportunity to make an informed planned response to God's love to help your church and His church to do ministry.

- 1. Traditionally people plan to give of their time for the Lord. This does not just mean the church, but in the church it means serving to help God's church organize and do the work He calls us to.
- 2. Traditionally, people plan to give of their talent for the Lord. This means volunteering in and out of the church as well.

3. Traditionally, based on God's Word, people plan to give of their material resources so that God's church can do ministry.

A. God want us to serve Him with all that we are and have.

B. But, God has called his people to support the temple or synagogue in the Old Testament, or the church in New Testament times with offerings that are proportionate, a percentage of income, offerings that are sacrificial, and offerings that are first fruits.

C. Mainly, however, God wants our offerings to be *cheerful*.

III. I had my sermon all written, and then last night I got an e-mail from my wife, quoting a blog from Amanda Miller Schultz. Do you remember Calvin and Carolyn? Amanda is their daughter, and this past year her son William died of cancer. This is what Amanda wrote.

This year, I can't buy presents for what would have been my two-year-old son. I can't go to TJMaxx and buy every Polo thing under \$10. I can't buy him more sign language flash cards. I can't re-decorate his room with "boy stuff", you know because Noah's Ark is so newborn-ish. I won't be able to select books for him, knowing that one day, he would box them up to give to his son. Nope, not happening, and it sucks so much I can't even tell you. I can't go through a store with him, watching him amaze everyone with all the signs he knows.

But, I do have an idea, and this is what I read about on [another] that family's site. After experiencing the same type of "thing" concerning presents, she (the mother) decided to do something. Instead of bypassing all the boy departments in stores, she willingly dived in. Then, she bought something for a boy around what would have been her son's age, and she donated it. Awwwww. So LOVE that idea, and you will too! Once I read that, it was set. Every year, we'll select a gift or two, specifically with a two-year-old in mind, and donate it. Haven't decided where yet to actually donate to, but I prayerfully trust that that will come. So, I've been thinking about this for weeks, literally. Now, I want to pose this idea to you as well. If you are reading this, and you would have normally put our sweet William on your Christmas list, keep him there. Please. But, this year, and for as many years as you like, don't skip the boy stuff. Don't pass over on things that make you think of William. Buy just one thing for a 2-year-old boy, and give it to someone who needs it. Next year, buy something for a 3-year-old, and so on. You know.....even if William isn't on a list, but you want to do something to remember William, and bless another sweet 2-year-old this season, do it. Pray for the child that will receive that blessing.

A. Some of you do understand how hard it is to lose a child.

1. But this is what God did for us so we can have Spiritual Blessings.

2. **For God so LOVED the world that He GAVE HIS ONE AND ONLY SON, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.**

B. Remember the story of the man who sacrificed his son? Could you do that?

1. Can you imagine how difficult it was for the God of perfect love to give His only Son, whom He loved, for us?

2. That is what God has done, so we can have the spiritual blessings of eternity and this world.

3. Jesus tells us, **whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'**

C. When we realize the love of God, and the gift and cost of His Son's life so that we can have eternity, how can we not do His work, His ministry, cheerfully?

1. Hopefully all our gifts of time and talent and treasure are not forced, but a response of Thankfulness.

2. I pray that all our gifts of time and talent and treasure, looking at the love of God, are done cheerfully, because we love the God who loved us.

CONCLUSION - A little girl, on the way home from church, turned to her mother and said, "Mommy, the pastor's sermon this morning confused me." The mother said, "Oh! Why is that?" The girl replied, "Well, he said that God is bigger than we are. Is that true?" "Yes, that's true," the mother replied. "He also said that God lives within us. Is that true, too?" Again the mother replied, "Yes."

"Well," said the girl. "if God is bigger than us and He lives in us, wouldn't He show through?" Today God calls us to let His love show through.

I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' One of the ways we do that is through God's church.

