

Bible study for this week 8/17/09~8/23/09

***August 17(Monday),2009**{[Ephesians 3:1-9](#)}Key: This grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. (Ephesians 3:8)“**Whose Prisoner?**”Bible In One Year: [Psalms 97-99; Romans 16](#)

A story is told of Scottish minister Alexander Whyte, who was able to look at the bleakest situation and yet find something to be thankful for. On a dark Sunday morning when the weather was freezing, wet, and stormy, one of his deacons whispered, “I am sure the preacher won’t be able to thank God for anything on a day like this. It’s absolutely horrible outside!” The pastor began the service by praying, “We thank Thee, O God, that the weather is not always like this.”

The apostle Paul also saw the best in every situation. Consider his circumstances as he wrote to the church in Ephesus while he awaited trial before the Roman emperor Nero. Most people would have concluded that he was a prisoner of Rome. But Paul saw himself as a prisoner of Christ. He thought of his hardship as an opportunity to bring the gospel to the Gentiles.

These words of Paul should challenge us: “To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Ephesians 3:8). Paul, a prisoner of Christ, saw himself as being given the privilege to serve God and present the “riches of Christ” to many.

Whose prisoner are we?

Meditate: Afflictions may test me, They cannot destroy; One glimpse of Thy love. Turns them all into joy.

Aphorism: The trials that imprison you need not limit God’s work in you.

***August 18(Tuesday),2009**{[Psalm 73:25-28](#)}Key: It is good for me to draw near to God. (Psalm 73:28)“**Pressing On**”Bible In One Year: [Psalms 100-102; 1 Corinthians 1](#)

The psalmist kept things simple: “There is none upon earth that I desire besides You” (Psalm 73:25). All progress in the spiritual life is marked by our movement toward that conclusion, the conviction that only one thing is necessary: God Himself.

All progress in the spiritual life is progress toward knowing God and loving Him—moving toward the point at which we say with Israel’s poet: “God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (v.26).

That perspective changes the way we look at everything. Suffering and adversity become the means by which we’re made hungry and thirsty for God. Disappointments become the tools that wean us away from earthly occupations and move us toward a preoccupation with God alone. Even sin, when repented of, becomes a mechanism to push us closer to Him so that we can experience His love and forgiveness. All things become useful when viewed as the means to the highest good—drawing near to God.

Like Paul, we may say, “I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me” (Philippians 3:12). How do we press on? With a humble and grateful response to His love. But it all begins with God. He seeks us so that we may seek Him alone.

*Meditate:*I'm pressing on the upward way,New heights I'm gaining every day—Still praying as I'm onward bound,“Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.”

*Aphorism:*God loves us too much to let us stay as we are.

***August 19(Wednesday),2009**{[Romans 3:21-28](#)}Key: The righteousness of God . . . is revealed . . . through faith in Jesus Christ. (Romans 3:21-22)“**Cricket And Christianity**”Bible In One Year: [Psalms 103-104; 1 Corinthians 2](#)

A friend remembers :While visiting Jamaica on a missions trip with high school students, I discovered how much the people there love the game of cricket.

So I asked a Jamaican teenager to explain it to me. We sat on the ground, and he used rocks and sand drawings to help me understand it. Later, as our group was enjoying delicious jerk chicken, some of us watched a televised cricket match while a coach pointed out what was happening. Yet, after 11 days with Jamaicans, I still didn't understand their favorite game.

I'm sure some Jamaicans feel that way about American football. And millions of people worldwide consider baseball a mystery. One reason we may not like one another's sports is that we don't understand them.

Could that be true of the way you view Christianity? Could it be that you dislike it because it seems too complicated? Maybe it seems to you to be about rules and a big thick book with words you don't understand.

Actually, Christianity is simple: We can be made right with a holy God through faith in Jesus' death and resurrection. Our sins can be forgiven forever (see Romans 3:24,28; 10:9-10). Check it out. You'll discover why believers love Jesus, and you'll learn to love Him too.

*Meditate:*If you have questions about what it means to believe in Jesus.

*Aphorism:*Faith is the hand that simply receives God's gift of salvation.

***August 20(Thursday),2009**{[James 2:14-20](#)}Key: They desired only that we should remember the poor. (Galatians 2:10)“**A Heart For The Homeless**”Bible In One Year: [Psalms 105-106; 1 Corinthians 3](#)

Members of the First Presbyterian Church in Snohomish, Washington, had a large supply of leftovers from the celebration of their 125th anniversary. They decided to give the food to the women and children in a nearby homeless shelter. As a chilling rain poured down outside, volunteers unloaded containers, one of which included a large cake. Someone remarked, “I hope today is somebody's birthday.” A homeless woman replied, “Every day inside is a holiday.”

Jesus knew the experience of homelessness. He said, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head” (Matthew 8:20). Yet no one had more compassion for the poor.

James emphasized the need for believers to help each other materially. He wrote, “If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?” (2:15-16).

We must help the spiritually destitute find a heavenly home by sharing the gospel with them, but we must never neglect those who are poor in this world's goods. A heart for God will also be a heart for the homeless.

Meditate: More like the Master I would live and grow, More of His love to others I would show; More self-denial, like His in Galilee, More like the Master I long to ever be.

Aphorism: Compassion is love in action.

***August 21 (Friday), 2009** { [2 Corinthians 12:7-10](#) } Key: My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness. (2 Corinthians 12:9) "**Tensile Strength**" Bible In One Year: [Psalms 107-109; 1 Corinthians 4](#)

When a new highway loop was being completed in West Michigan, a real danger was discovered. The bridges had been designed to bear their own weight—but not the traffic they were intended to carry. Before the highway could be opened, several bridges had to be re-engineered and rebuilt.

Engineers have to be especially concerned with the tensile strength of the material in their construction plans for structures that are required to bear large amounts of stress due to weight. Tensile strength is the maximum amount of stretching a material can withstand before it tears. If the engineer miscalculates, the structure may collapse under the pressure.

When we are under the weight of stress and hardship, we may wonder whether our Lord, who engineered us, has miscalculated our personal "tensile strength." We are certain that we are going to collapse under the weight of the trials, but our Designer knows exactly what we can handle by His grace. He knows our limits and will never permit more than we can bear. As Bible teacher Ron Hutchcraft said, "God may send a load, but He never sends an overload!"

Reinforced by the steel of God's provision, our tensile strength won't fail.

Meditate: Wait on the Lord from day to day, Strength He provides in His own way; There's no need for worry, no need to fear, He is our God who is always near.

Aphorism: Your problems can never exhaust God's provisions.

***August 22 (Saturday), 2009** { [1 John 3:10-24](#) } Key: Let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. (1 John 3:18) "**Laundry Love**" Bible In One Year: [Psalms 110-112; 1 Corinthians 5](#)

When James Cates was a university student, he worked the night shift as a houseparent in a residential treatment center. One of his responsibilities was the sometimes overwhelming task of doing the laundry for 23 teenage boys.

The laundering process was hard on the clothes, so when a troubled young resident named Jake was given a new shirt from his mother, James offered to wash it separately. Soon other boys began asking him to include a favorite article of clothing in his "special" load. It was a small act of kindness, but it meant a lot to the boys.

Twenty years later, after establishing a successful practice as a therapist, teaching at a university, and being published in scholarly journals, Cates wrote: "With time to look back and reflect, no client I have ever known and no service I have ever performed means more to me than Jake and his shirt, and those special loads of clothes."

A simple act of caring is a powerful expression of God's compassion in our troubled world. The apostle John wrote, "My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18). Is there some "washing" you can do today?

Meditate: When your heart's with compassion filled, And you God's Word would heed, Why not in love give help to one. Who has a special need?

Aphorism: A little kindness can make a big difference.

***August 23(Sunday),2009**{[Joel 2:12-17](#)}Key: Who knows if He will turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind Him? (Joel 2:14)"**God Fights Against Us**"Bible In One Year: [Psalms 113-115](#); [1 Corinthians 6](#)

In Joel's book of prophecy, God declared: "I am in the midst of Israel . . . My people shall never be put to shame" (2:27). But earlier in the chapter God promised to fight *against* His people. A plague of locusts would descend like a ravenous army on the nation (vv.2-11).

It's hard to fathom that the Lord would fight against His chosen people. But Israel had given their affections to other gods.

In fact, God had fought against them before. "Wherever they went out, the hand of the Lord was against them for calamity" (Judges 2:15).

I have learned that if my own heart wanders away from God, I can count on Him to fight to bring me back. If I become proud and self-assured, if reading God's Word and spending time in prayer seem like a waste of time, God will step in and deal with me.

God will fight against us *for our good*. He permits us to experience defeat so that we will listen to Him when He says, "Rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness" (Joel 2:13).

Don't wait for God to fight against you before you seek His face. Return to Him today.

Meditate: Because our Father's heart is grieved. Each time we go astray, He lifts His chastening hand in love. To help us find His way.

Aphorism: God's hand of discipline is a hand of love.