

The Valley of the Shadow of Death: Fear & Inadequacy

Day 1

The Nature of Thorns

In our sermon on Sunday we discussed the presence of thorns and thistles, and I commented that I have come to the conclusion that they have the purpose of bringing us closer to God. This statement could profit by some explanation that could not be given in the sermon due to time constraints. In what way does the presence of thorns and thistles humble us so that we may reach out to God? In the sermon I stated that God is the great, "I Am", and this is something we might find useful to investigate. God is self-existent and therefore is not dependent on anything. We see a glimpse of this in the creation story as God does not form things using pre-existent raw materials in the way we do when we create things. God speaks things into existence, so that his only effort is to say the word, not to wrestle with something so as to turn it into something else. When we are told that God rested on the seventh day, we should not think of it as a necessity to deal with being tired, but as a ceasing of his creative work. This is what it means to be God. On the other hand, when we as humans encounter thorns and thistles, we encounter impediments to our work. Our desires are thwarted, we only feed ourselves by the sweat of our brow. This is a blow to our ego, a reminder that although we were promised we would be like God, we are contingent beings and our power is very limited. Most of us experience frustration when we encounter these thorns in life, and that frustration is the wish to be more than we are, grasping at the power of God without the reach to get hold of it. As we encounter these thorns we have a choice to make. We will either become more and more bitter, frustrated by our lack and angered by the fact that we are not God and the world does not obey us, or we will turn humbly to God in

prayer and ask Him to accomplish all He desires in our life through our encounter with the thorns and thistles of existence. Perhaps prayer is the better course of action. Perhaps we should begin today.

Verses: 1 Peter 5:10, Romans 5:3-5, John 16:33

Prayer Topics: Struggles, Patience, Trust

Day 2

Curses & Purpose

After the fall there is a list of curses handed out to the participants. The serpent, the woman, and the man all have their respective consequences, and we could probably be forgiven for reading them like a type of grounding or timeout from a disappointed parent. Most people look at the list of "rules" given in the ten commandments as somewhat arbitrary, and they see the "punishments" given as a result of breaking them in a similar way. In reality, just like there is a greater meaning to the commandments, there is a greater purpose behind the consequences for breaking them. We have often spoken of the grounding of the ten commandments in the nature and character of God, but we often miss the relational aspect of the commands. When a parent has a relationship with a child, for example, the nature of the relationship is found in the actions that are taken between the two. If the child was telling the parent what to do, we would say that the relationship is dysfunctional, and the resulting consequences would not be arbitrary. When God gives us his commands, they are relational in nature because they are the way we exist in relationship to him, for he is our God and we are his people. We were made to bear his image and likeness, so we should comport ourselves in the world as he would. In this way he fulfills his role as God, and we fulfill our role as his people, and our relationship fulfills the proper exchange between us. The result of this is blessing, that is, the proper, fitting, and logical result from the relationship carrying out its function. When we fail to do this, there is a curse, which is the opposite of blessing, and that curse likewise is proper and fitting to the failure. When Adam is cursed after the fall, that curse is not arbitrary but is the result of the rupture in the relationship with God. Not only is that curse fitting, but because God is love and seeks to restore that relationship, the curse has a job to do in bringing us back to God. We could even say that the curse is redeemed or perhaps even glorified in fulfilling its job of bringing glory to God and playing its part in restoring us to Him. God makes some things for noble use, and some things for ignoble use.

When we face the thorns and thistles of life, those things that frustrate us and cause us fear, pain, and anxiety, let us take those moments to go back to God. Let us use those things as reminders of our dependence on him, our distance from him, and our restoration to him through Christ.

Verses: Galatians 6:7-8, Hebrews 12:11, Jeremiah 17:9-10

Prayer Topics: Repentance, Blessing, Love

Day 3

Gardening

Check out this devotional on thorns and thistles:

<https://www.encouraging.com/home/2018/10/16/thorns-and-thistles>

What does addressing the roots mean? What happens if you leave the roots? What is the benefit we get from gardening? How is Jesus the ultimate gardener? How do we cooperate with him to work the garden of our life?

Verses: 2 Corinthians 9:6, James 1:12, Proverbs 12:11

Prayer Topics: Foundation, Consistency, Motivation

Day 4

Work, Thorns, & Theology

The ground is cursed because of the sin of Adam, and so his relationship to the earth is transformed into something adversarial. This state of affairs, while not ideal, offers something of benefit. Our many frustrations in the world of work are the occasion for a deeper relationship with God. Do not despair over the thorns and thistles, instead be leery of success at too low a cost. Check out this devotional for more:

<https://regehrlein.wordpress.com/2015/09/02/thorns-and-thistles/>

Verses: Colossians 3:23, Ecclesiastes 3:12-13, Ephesians 4:28

Prayer Topics: Effort, Purpose, Community

Day 5

Thanks to Sylvester Warsaw, Jr for our devotional today

The Bible is about God and His faithfulness to Himself and His invitation to man inviting us to participate with Him redeeming man back to Himself. To participate with God in redemption history we must bear His image and likeness which means transformation has to occur even though the invitation is extended to all of humanity because only those bearing His name and image can participate in redemption history. The place of your birth nor the circumstances you live under is important because the earth is the Lord's and He has a calling on life because He's the Author of life, Psalm 24:1. Moses' birth and where he was born was no accident because God told Abram in Genesis 15 what was going to happen to his descendants and His promise of redemption to Abram's descendants and what He was going to do to that nation that enslaved His people. In Hosea 1:1 we read, "When Israel was a child I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son." When Moses was born the king of Egypt instructed the Hebrew midwives to kill all the male children, Exodus 1:16-17. In Matthew 2:16, Herod, who was king, sent men throughout Bethlehem to kill all male children 2 years of age and younger. However, God warned Joseph in a dream to take his family flee to Egypt, Matthews 2:13-15. Because it doesn't matter where we're born the question becomes do we recognize God's voice when He speaks because He's trying to get our attention for a reason. You must understand God is intentional about what He does. Just like God told Moses in Genesis 3:5 to take off your sandals for the ground he was standing on is holy ground He told those same words to Joshua in Joshua 5:15. Although, man is finite created from the dust of the earth we must understand that when God created the earth it was created by and through God's holiness and He saw it was good, Genesis 1:9-10, however, after man rebelled against Him, He, cursed the ground Genesis 3:17-19. Know without a doubt the ground where you hear and answer God's

voice; it's holy ground. God wants to be in an intimate relationship with you and I, however, God will never force Himself upon anyone, we have to make the decision to respond in obedience to His call for He will never take our free will away from us. We will always have free will, however, when we choose to respond in obedience to God's call we give up our will so that His will can be done in and through us here on earth for He alone knows the plans He has for His children who are called by His name. God wants to do great things in and through His children for all to see and experience His grace and mercy. God wants to write His will in and on our hearts in and through the Holy Spirit for all to read therefore seeing the work He's doing in the life of those that bear the image and likeness of His only Begotten Son Jesus who is the Christ the Anointed One! Those called by His name are walking living miracles whose boast is in Christ Jesus because of being in Him and He in us. Great is His faithfulness to Himself and His invitation inviting us to participate in His faithfulness in redemption history.