



The E-Newsletter of First Presbyterian Church of Winona, Mississippi

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FRIDAY, SEPT. 6, 2013

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Sept 8, 4 p.m.

An informal Sunday Night Study at the Pastor's home. We will be discussing the book *In Christ Alone* by Sinclair Ferguson.

Sept. 11, 5 p.m.

Prayer meeting and Bible Study resumes at FPCW in the Pastor's Study.

Sept. 21, 4 p.m.

Please join us for a church picnic at the Manse. We will also celebrate Mrs. Barnett's birthday.



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From the Pastor's Pen...

This Lord's Day we will have the joy of singing a hymn that has been sung by the church for more than 3,000 years. That's right, for *three millennia* the church has been singing psalms!

Our Hebrew ancestors praised God using the words of the Psalter and the worship of the apostolic church was likewise heavily dependant on the hymns found in the Psalter.

From the earliest days of Reformed and Presbyterian worship, the vast majority of songs that were sung came from the Psalter. It was only in the late 19th Century that Presbyterians began to depart from the historic practice of including psalm singing in worship.

Singing psalms in worship has many benefits for the church as we gather together. For one, the Psalter is the only divinely-inspired hymnal, and so we can have confidence that

the words and ideas (when faithfully translated) that we sing in the psalms are all true. In the day when so many religious songs do not convey biblical truth accurately, the psalms remain a constant source of faithful praise.

Another benefit of singing the psalms is that music aids memory, and in this case memorizing the Scripture. When I was in college, I knew someone who had memorized the entire book of Psalms because she had sung the Psalter so many times growing up.

As we consider a portion of Psalm 22 in the sermon together, we will also have the added benefit of singing that portion together in preparation.

I pray that the word of Christ will dwell richly within us as we sing to God in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with thankfulness in our hearts for what He has done (Col. 3:16).

Westminster Shorter Catechism Meditation

Last week we considered briefly the Trinity as a doctrine and how God exists forever in three persons. This week the Catechism considers the way in which God acts in history:

Q7. *What are the decrees of God?*

A. The decrees of God are, his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.

This particular truth complements so nicely what we have been considering in our sermon series, doesn't it?

As Christians, we can know that everything that happens and will happen takes place because God has so ordered it. This is both a sobering truth and a comforting promise.

In the hard times of life, we must remember that it is God who has planned and purposed everything to take place in exactly the way it has. **Nothing ever happens by pure accident or chance.** But that is what makes it so hard sometimes, doesn't it?

This truth teaches us that God is working His purpose out in everything, even in the hard things of life.

This also means that it is not possible for God's will *not* to be done. We pray that God's will be done *because* God has promised in His word that His will shall be done.

This truth does not, however, free us from our obligation to obey God. There is a very important distinction between *obeying God's Word* and *doing God's will*. It was the will of God to crush His Son on the Cross (Isa. 53), yet those men who condemned Jesus were nonetheless disobeying God's commands of their own free will, and accountable for their sin.

In the Cross of Christ, as in Ruth, we see how God works out His purpose for the glory of His Name and the growth His Kingdom. We can never be outside of God's plan, and so we can take comfort in our Father's constant control.

Secularism Starts at Home

The world around us is changing very quickly. One of the things we often hear is people concerned because of how “secular” this country has become due to the efforts of the “ACLU” and other such organizations.

Evangelicals frequently lament the removal of the Ten Commandments or Bible teaching or prayer from public schools and other government spaces.

And while perhaps one might blame the ACLU for the decline in civil religion in this nation, I would like to suggest a cause that hits much closer to home.

Should it surprise us that the nation we live in is becoming so secular when the lives of church-goers are nearly as “God-free” as their atheist neighbors?

We can’t blame secularists for the removal of the Ten Commandments from public when so many Christians do not even try to live their own lives by them. It is one thing to want them displayed, another to obey them.

We can’t simply blame other groups for the end of prayer in public schools when - for many Christians - the only time they pray is *perhaps* before a meal or when they see the “blue lights” in the rearview mirror.

We can’t blame atheists for the end of Bible readings in public schools when so many Christians scarcely open their own Bibles through the week.

If we desire to see God glorified by and in this country, it begins in our own homes, with us and the way that we live out this life.

Before blaming others for the decline of civil religion in this land, consider your own spiritual disciplines.

Are you reading God’s word every day? The Bible says that the man of God meditates on God’s word “day and night” (Psa. 1). If you are married, are you having family worship everyday? Are you coming before the Father regularly in prayer? God is the only One who is truly ready and able to help His children.

Christ died so that the saints of God may enjoy these privileges, these tokens of heaven. Do not mourn because the nation has become secularized; mourn because Christians have become secularized.

Pray with me that God would pour out His Spirit such that we in His church would be models of godliness and the pursuit of godliness to our communities.

Sermon Snapshot: “All Things for Good”

By God’s grace we have finished our study of the Book of Ruth. One of the principal teachings of Ruth is how God works “behind the scenes” in everyday life, through everyday choices to bring glory to His Kingdom and do good to His people (Rom. 8:28).

That is the unifying theme of history, and as we saw in our Catechism meditation, there is not one thing that happens on this earth that God has *not* planned to happen that way. Everything that happens in history and in daily life works for the good of God’s people and the glory of God Himself.

We saw in the story of Ruth just how richly God blessed Naomi. ***The more the story went on, however, the more we saw how undeserving Naomi was of God’s great blessings.*** In spite of what Naomi deserved, God chose to bless her.

God blessed Naomi first by giving her a daughter-in-law who loved her. In time, God revealed her own sinful bitterness and attitudes to her. God never stopped caring for and working for Naomi’s good.

God did this because He had set His everlasting love upon Naomi. God had no reason to love Naomi; as we all saw, she was little more than an embittered old woman at the start! Yet God decided to bring glory to Himself by doing good to that old woman and saving her from her sins.



That was the greatest good that God did for Naomi: He saved her from her sins and gave her an everlasting inheritance with Him and with His people. Just as much as He also did for Ruth.

God was at work through the circumstances of Ruth and Naomi, and He is at work in the circumstances of your life. Ruth and Naomi were blessed to see God bring about a great change in their material circumstances as well as their eternal destiny. Yet for many Christians, all of life is filled with poverty and hardship.

When God promises that all things work together for the good of those who love Him, he is not promising that eventually we’ll all have the personal security, prosperity, and position we dreamed of. For many Christians throughout the world, clinging to God’s promises of forgiveness and redemption means giving up everything they once held dear in this life (home, family, job, etc.). And those things will never be restored to them.

God promises Heaven to those who trust in Christ, but He does not promise that your journey there will be an easy one, but rather filled with suffering.

The promise of Romans 8:28 is that even in sufferings, tribulations, hardship, or pain, God is using those things for our good. God uses the trials of life to shape and transform us more and more into the image of Christ.