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

# First Press

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 9 FRIDAY, SEPT. 20, 2013

## UPCOMING EVENTS:

**Sept. 21, 4 p.m.**
Please join us for a church picnic at the Manse. We will also celebrate Mrs. Barnett's birthday. ***Rain Location: FPCW.***

**Oct. 27, 4 p.m.**
Joint Reformation Sunday evening worship at FPCW with the Vaiden congregations. Phil McRae will preach.

**Oct. 30**
The Vaiden churches have invited us to a Reformation cookout. Please RSVP to Ryan.

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## From the Pastor's Pen. . .

In these days it is hard to go a few months without reading or hearing about some horrific crime of mass violence. Whether it is a shooting or a bombing or something else, these crimes cause great sorrow and tears for the victims and their families.

In such times, people often ask "why did God allow this to happen to so many innocent people?" Jesus Christ in his ministry faced these types of questions too.

In Luke 13, Jesus was confronted by a crowd that wanted to know why God allowed Pilate to massacre a number of their countrymen or why God allowed the Tower of Siloam to fall and kill many. After all, God has decreed everything that happens.

Jesus explains that it was not because the people who were killed and maimed in those events were "worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem." ***Instead, those events serve to remind us of our need to repent and warn about the Final Judgment that is coming.***

As Christians, we know that the bad and sorrowful things that happen in this world take place because of sin, because mankind has chosen to rebel against God instead of serve Him. And so tragic events also provide us with an opportunity to share the gospel.

In times of tragedy and hard providence, people ask questions. Jesus teaches us that we ought not respond by saying, "serves them right, they must have been *real bad* sinners!"

Instead, we meet those who are suffering with the gospel, teaching people about our God and Saviour who has suffered in our place so that we might enjoy the New Heavens and the New Earth with Him for eternity.

## Westminster Shorter Catechism Meditation

Last week we looked at how God is active in History. The Catechism said that He is working in and sovereign over both *Creation* and *Providence.* In WSC9, we get to consider the Creation of the Universe.

Q9. *What is the work of creation?*

***A. The work of creation is, God's making all things of nothing, by the word of his power, in the space of six days, and all very good.***

There are a number of things to note in this catechism answer. First is that God made all things *from nothing*. Such a belief sets apart the Genesis account of Creation from all other creation myths and theories, which is another testimony to its divine origin.

Other Ancient and Classical creations stories portrayed the gods making the world from stuff that already existed (e.g. the "remains" of a defeated god, etc.). The Bible teaches that when God started, there was only emptiness, and God filled the emptiness.

Second, WSC9 emphasizes God's power by affirming that God created the world simply by *speaking* it into existence. God commanded that the universe *be* and it *was*.

Third, the Biblical account of creation is unique in recording that it took place in *six days*. Far from scientific speculation that the universe took billions of years to form, God created and ordered the universe in six days.

Some scientists present all manner of evidence that the world was formed through a process of death, mutation, and gradual improvement over millennia. Nothing could be farther from the truth, since God created the world *very good*.

Fourth, the Biblical account of creation teaches that the created order is good. Some people believe that only "spirit" matters, but God created both body and spirit to serve and glorify Him. Christ has redeemed both the body and soul of his people, and will give a new body to all who hope in Him.

# Judgment, Discernment, and Applying God's Word

On Sunday night we had some very good discussion on some of the various components of the Christian life. One of the things that we discussed was "judging."

Sometimes you will hear people say something to the effect of, "It's not for us to say..." Somehow Satan has inserted into Christian circles the idea that Christians are not to "judge." After all, Jesus said, "Judge not, that you be not judged" (Matt. 7:1)? Satan is very skilled at twisting God's word.

When Jesus spoke there (as the context shows), He was condemning people who had added to God's word and pronounced others guilty before God on the basis of something other than God's Law.

While it is true, on the one hand, that Christians are not to "judge" that does not free us from our responsibility to be discerning. **In fact, we do not judge *per se*, God has already judged in His word, and we simply apply His judgments**. God's word is His Law, His commands for how His people are to live.

In fact, Jesus continues in Matt. 7:6 by commanding the saints to judge, discern, and show wisdom in dealing with people. In Matt. 7 the Lord Jesus Christ is commanding believers to be merciful and slow to judge, yet not freeing them from the responsibility to discern someone's character from his life and response to the gospel.

***God has given commands in His word for how His people are to live. If a person refuses to live by God's standards, he is probably not a Christian at all***.

For example, I've mentioned before that I've heard people say, "I'm a Christian and all, but I don't go to church..." In light of God's word, such a statement is quite damning. It's no sin to doubt someone's Christianity when he or she refuses to follow God's commands.

We do not get to decide which of God's commands and God's judgments to follow. We must obey all of them, and continually seek His mercy for when we fail.

In Matthew 7, Jesus is warning His disciples about folks who may give "lip-service" toward spiritual things, but show by their lives that they have no desire for the true things of God, or to repent and serve Christ the King.

As God's people, it is our duty to proclaim God's truth and be discerning as we apply it in all our interactions.

# Sermon Snapshot: "Encircled by Evil"

This past Lord's Day as we considered Psa. 22:9-21 we saw psalmist describe the very pit and depth of his sorrow and agony. We've said a number of times that Christ on the cross meditated on this psalm in particular as he offered Himself up as a sacrifice for sin.

One of the complaints that the psalmist makes is that he is encircled, surrounded, and harassed by a crowd of the wicked and evil-doers. As you read the Gospel narratives of Christ's passion, you see how the "mob" is instigated against the Saviour.

Just like in one of Shakespeare's histories, the mob is riled up against the Righteous Son of Man. The Jerusalem mob was made to hate Christ because of His high claims and His righteous exhortations. To outward appearances, Christ seemed to be a victim of popular outcry.

For us as Christ's people, we should be prepared to suffer at the hands of a hostile population. For generations, Christians in the English-speaking world have largely lived at peace with society or even had a dominant influence in society. But that is all changing.

The Bible does not teach God's people that they are going to have a peaceful coexistence with the world around them. God tells his people to seek to live at peace with their earthly rulers (I Tim 2), but all the while addresses the Church as a band of pilgrims passing through hostile territory (I Cor. 10, Php. 2, Zech. 14).

It is fitting, isn't it, that we who love the Lord Jesus Christ, should be hated by the world? Then why does that surprise us? Christ said the world would hate us, and yet we are so often tempted to love the world and desire to fit in with the people of the world (Matt. 10).

Christ could have avoided the cross easily if He had simply told the Hebrews what they wanted to hear. But alas, Jesus Christ would not - could not - "go along to get along." He remained faithful to His mission, and His faithfulness got Him crucified.

In the coming years and decades, the Church and Christians will be pressured to simply "go along to get along" in society. Some churches have already done so.

God's people must be prepared to stand against the World, to speak God's truth into a rebellious society, and be prepared to suffer the consequences for clinging to God's Word rather than compromising.

As Christ suffered for our sins on the cross, He shows us how we too can endure suffering, even injustice and persecution: by dwelling on God's word. That is why Psalm 22 is so important, because Christ meditated on it as He suffered. And it teaches us the importance of doing likewise in the hard times.

But to meditate on God's word, you first have to *know it,* don't you? I urge you to plan for the future by treasuring, studying, and reading God's word in the present.