



FIRST PRESS

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FRIDAY, NOV. 21, 2014

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Nov. 23, 9 a.m.

Sunday School in the Pastor's Study: Exodus 40, "The Glory of the Lord"

Nov. 23, 10 a.m.

Morning Worship: Isaiah 11, "The Reign of the Prince of Peace"

Nov. 23, 4 p.m.

Sunday Night Study: Psalm 8, "Majestic Name"

Nov. 26, 5:15 pm

No Midweek Bible Study; Thanksgiving Day Eve.



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From the Pastor's Pen...

This Thursday is the Federal holiday known as *Thanksgiving*. How could we forget it? The TV commercials have been reminding us of Thanksgiving's sales for weeks now! It is indeed proper at various times to pause and reflect upon God's providential goodness and generosity to mankind and His grace in redemption to His people.

While the nation may observe a day of national thanksgiving once a year as established by Presidential order in 1863, God's people ought to be giving thanks much more frequently. In fact, in a very real sense every Lord's Day is our Thanksgiving Day.

As we gather to worship God, we praise God not only for the fact that He is God and our Creator, but also for the redemption from our own sinfulness that He has made and the salvation He has won for us in Christ. The day of our worship memorializes that victory: the day Jesus rose from the dead for our justification.

The Old Covenant people well understood

that worship was a time to give thanks. Psalm 100, for example, they titled "A Psalm for Giving Thanks." Most of us know Psalm 100 as it calls "All people that on earth do dwell" to come and worship God, but as the hymn develops it is clearly an explanation of *why* God deserves our *grateful* praise and worship.

The psalm begins by telling us to praise God and *how* we ought to worship God, but ends beautifully reflecting on why God's people come to Him with such thankfulness in their worship: God's steadfast, covenant love and faithfulness.

The psalmist knows that he is a sinner, a failure at life, and entirely undeserving of God's generosity or kindness. In spite of what His people deserve, God has been faithful to save and to bless them because He promised to do so.

We now know that the cost of God's faithfulness to sinners was even the death of His Son in the place of helpless sinners. This indeed is cause for thanksgiving and worship to God!

Westminster Shorter Catechism Meditation

The Second Commandment is one of the longest and concerns the way we worship God.

Q51. What is forbidden in the 2nd commandment?

A51. The second commandment forbiddeth the worshipping of God by images, or any other way not appointed in his Word.

So far we've considered with the Second Commandment that God tells us how He is to be worshiped; we don't get to decide that. It is something that is very offensive in our day, yet the Bible clearly teaches that there is some worship that pleases God and other kinds of worship that is a stench in God's nostril.

In the days of the Old Covenant, sacred images were everywhere. It was common for every household, even every person to have small statues, emblems, or carvings that represented and reminded them of the gods. People believed that if they possessed these images, the gods were pleased and would bless and protect them.

God's people were not to do that.

In fact, the worship of God was the very opposite of anything the Hebrews of old had encountered in their "worship experiences;" even the direction they faced when assembled for worship was the opposite of what the nations around them did.

The true worship of God is contrary to the world. Many today think that we should look to the world and try to incorporate things popular or current in the world and adapt them to the worship that we give to God on the Lord's Day. But that is to ignore this command: God tells us what he wants to have in worship in His word.

Instead of looking to the world to teach us how to worship or worship on the world's schedule, at First Presbyterian Church, we let God's word dictate how we worship, what we sing, and what we talk about in worship. **Worship is not about our preferences; worship is designed to please our audience, an Audience of One: God Himself.**

The Message of Christ: Faith and Repentance

This week in Wednesday Night Bible Study we considered Chapter 15 of the Westminster Confession of Faith: **Repentance unto Life**. Repentance is integral to the Christian life; Martin Luther wrote in 1517, “**When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said ‘Repent,’ He called for the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.**”

In fact, *repentance* was at the heart of the message Christ proclaimed on earth. The very first words that Jesus speaks in the Gospel of Mark concern the necessity of both repentance and faith (1.14-15): “**Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’**”

In spite of its central place in the teaching and proclamation of Jesus, many who claim to follow Jesus give little thought to the idea of repentance. Truly, repentance is not only one of the most neglected spiritual disciplines in our day, it also one of the most unpopular truths of the gospel.

Repentance, in short, means “turning” and particularly a **turning from sin and to God for grace and mercy as he offers it in Christ**. Sin, as you know, doesn’t just include murder, adultery, burglary, and sodomy, but also very much includes gossip, laziness, selfishness, arrogance, pride, bitterness, lust, gluttony, and a host of other socially acceptable thoughts, attitudes, and activities.

Repentance is not simply expressing *regret* for some action you may have done and/or been caught doing. **Anyone, even a sociopath, can express regret!** Repentance means actually **turning away from sin** because of a **new love and affection: Christ in the gospel**.

When a person is brought to repentance, he or she, because of the New Birth and the working of the Holy Spirit, has gained a real **hatred for sin** and so he or she actually is able to **sincerely strive for new obedience** to God’s Law.

It is important to recognize that, just like faith, **repentance is a gift from God**. Because of our own sin, we can’t just decide or resolve to stop sinning and start loving God. The Bible describes us as being “in bondage to sin” (Rom. 6) and “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2). **As with every other grace, we are entirely dependant on God to grant the grace of repentance**. Do you pray regularly for the grace of repentance? As with faith, even though it is a gift of God, repentance is something that we do actually do and is truly ours.

Faith *in* and Repentance *toward* God are inseparable. A person that has true saving faith will indeed live a life of repentance. **Faith and repentance defined Jesus’ own preaching and He commanded both be preached to every nation for the salvation of sinners** (Luke 24.47-48).

Is your own repentance visible for all to see in your life?



Sermon Snapshot: a Child is Born, a Son is Given

This past Lord’s Day we were in Isaiah 9:1-7. Even those who are unfamiliar with Baroque music probably recognized some of the words as quoted in Handel’s *Messiah*. This passage is one of the most familiar and wonderful prophecies of Christ! In fact, Isaiah is full of prophecies and promises of the coming Messiah. Isaiah ministered during a period of rampant unbelief and wickedness by Judah’s king and people on the one hand and the rise of a wicked and brutal empire, Assyria, on the other hand. A few chapters earlier, in Isaiah 7, King Ahaz in Jerusalem is trying to stave off disaster at the hands of the Syrians. Isaiah comes to him with a prophecy that the **Assyrians** (confusing, no?) will soon put an end to Syria and her allies who threatened Judah and calls the people to put their faith in God alone.

As a sign of this prophecy’s truthfulness, God tells Isaiah and King Ahaz, “**behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.**”

The name *Immanuel* means “God with us.” The child’s birth and name pledge first that God is still with His people; even though their enemies are mighty fierce, yet God is more powerful still. Second, that birth pointed forward to another birth, the birth of a child who would actually fulfill the promise of *God with us*.

In Isaiah 9, we see more clearly how God is going to do this. He is not only going to personally remove the gloom and oppression from His people, He is going to do it through the birth of a Child.

Isaiah 9 tells us of a Child to be born who is also the “Mighty God” and “Prince of Peace.” The coming-Child’s birth is so significant that His mere birth brings about a grand reversal for the people of God. Long before Christ actually appeared, God prepared His people to receive their King, by giving signs and prophecies of how he would come and what He would do: Save His people from their sins and bring them to God.

