

The Cross Reminds Us

Lenten Devotionals - Week 3

Monday, March 1, 2021

Read Isaiah 11:1-10

Banner of Salvation

“In that day the root of Jesse shall stand as an ensign to the peoples.” (Isaiah 11:10a RSV)

An ensign is a badge, symbol, or token. Other translations of this verse read signal or sign. The New Living Translation makes it clear when it says, “In that day, the heir to David’s throne will be a banner of salvation to all the world.” In Scripture “that day” refers to the time when Christ returns and ushers in His eternal reign. Like many prophecies, there are different layers to what is recorded in Isaiah 11, and one of those layers was fulfilled when Jesus came to earth.

How does Jesus stand as a banner of salvation to all the world? Is it by awesome displays of power or demonstrations of His spiritual authority? Not primarily. He stands as an ensign when He is lifted up on the cross. John 3:14-15 explains, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”

The root of Jesse, the King from David’s royal line, the promised Messiah comes to die. He is lifted up as our banner of salvation. In His death we find forgiveness, freedom and peace.

Prayer Focus: Thank you, Jesus, for being lifted up on the cross to save me. May my life lift high the cross and proclaim the love of Christ.

Tuesday, March 2, 2021

Read Matthew 3:13-17

Well Pleased

“And behold, a voice out of the heavens, saying, “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased.” (Matthew 3:17 NASB)

What a thrill to hear those words! The New Living Translation brings a slightly different nuance to the phrase: “This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy.” We can understand how the Father is well pleased, even overjoyed, with Jesus. Can we imagine that these words could be spoken to us? Or is that impossible? Are we too stained by sin, too disobedient, too rebellious?

There is one way we can hear those words. Through the Son. In Christ, the Father is well pleased with us. He sees us washed in the blood of the Lamb, purified and acceptable in His sight. “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.” (Ephesians 5:25b-27 NIV)

What a miracle! The God of all creation is well pleased with us!

Prayer Focus: Ponder this miracle; then thank the Savior for washing away your sin, making you well-pleasing to our Heavenly Father.

Wednesday, March 3, 2021

Read Matthew 2:1-12

It Is Written

“They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it is written by the prophets.’” (Matthew 2:5 NASB)

They should have known. The chief priests and the scribes had studied the prophecies. They had read about where the Messiah would be born and that He would come as the Lamb of God. Yet, absorbed in their religiosity, they found no room in their hearts for the Christ child.

Years later, Jesus spoke of this same problem when He confronted the religious leaders: “You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me! Yet you refuse to come to me to receive this life.” (John 5:39-40 NLT)

This sobering word applies to us as well. We must indeed search the Scriptures. And we must be willing to accept what the Scriptures reveal: that we are sinners, and that Jesus is the Way and the Truth and the Life. It is written. It is trustworthy. May we willingly come to Jesus to receive His gift of forgiveness and eternal life.

Prayer Focus: Lord Jesus, You are the way to the Father. You are the way to heaven. May we come to You daily with humble hearts that believe and receive.

Thursday, March 4, 2021

Read Romans 7:18-25

Good People

“For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.” (Romans 7:18a)

“He’s a good person. She’s a good person.”

I have heard that comment so many times, and it always makes me uncomfortable. It is usually said with the implication that the “good” person is deserving of some reward (such as heaven) and certainly “good enough” to avoid any punishment (such as hell).

But are there really any “good” people? Well, yes and no. Every person is good in the sense of being valuable, unique, created in God’s image and loved by God. But no one is good in terms of being righteous in God’s eyes. When we stand before the holy God and let His light expose who we truly are, we come to only one conclusion: We are sinners through and through.

When we are deeply aware of our sinfulness, we also understand why the cross is so crucial. Someone had to pay the price for our sins, and Jesus did so. The cross reminds us that grace truly is amazing!

Prayer Focus: Ask the Holy Spirit for insight into your true nature and for a fresh appreciation of God’s grace.

Life Out of Death

“Then he asked me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” I answered, “Only you know, Almighty LORD.” (Ezekiel 37:3 GW)

Can these bones live? Can breath return? Can life come out of death? Only God knows.

We can't comprehend life out of death. Nicodemus was puzzled when Jesus told him he had to be born again. He thought that people are born once, die once, and that's it. Death is the end.

But God knows better. The Lord gave Ezekiel an impressive lesson in life out of death. Ezekiel wondered if it were possible for the dead bones to live, yet he stood and watched as the bones came together. He must have been dumfounded as sinew and flesh and skin covered them. Then God spoke another word and breath entered the bones, and they lived!

How did this miracle happen? Only God knows. How can dead bones live? Only God can do it. And He has! That is why, even as we focus on the cross, we look ahead to the resurrection. Life out of death! Sin and Satan defeated! New life to our dead bones.

Prayer Focus: Think about things in your life that seem dead. How might God want to bring life out of death? Talk to Him about that.