

Proverbs 25:2a, Hebrews 13:8,9

Dear Friends in Christ,

William Moulton Marston was a noted psychologist who died in 1947. He once asked three thousand people the question: "What have you to live for?" Here's one insight:

...94 percent were simply enduring the present while waiting for the future. They would describe this as waiting for "something" to happen - waiting for children to grow up and leave home, waiting for next year, waiting for another time to take a long-dreamed-about trip, waiting for tomorrow. They were all waiting without realizing that all anyone ever has is today because yesterday is gone and tomorrow never comes.

The question Marston asked and the responses were pursued prior to 1947 - more than 72 years ago. Isn't it interesting - what doesn't change? Does it strike you that sometimes we spend a lot of time trying to get out of the moment? Maybe that's why the addiction to ...you name it! We like to blame a lot of things for boring us when the blame probably rests in the thought that **we** are just plain boring! And where does Jesus fit: He who says, "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."? (Matt. 6:34) Well. . .

### **IT'S LIKE THIS . . .**

#### **I. We Can't Know It All.**

We can't know it all. The Old Testament lesson is simple and clear: "It is the glory of God to conceal things..." (Prov. 25:2a) In the first chapter of the Book of Acts is the account of Christ's Ascension. The disciples, as well as many others, lived with the thinking that Jesus would establish Israel as the number one world kingdom. We're told, "So when they (the disciples and our resurrected Lord Jesus) had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?'" (Acts 1:6) The Lord's answer was not only definitive for their question, but it is the definitive answer to all our questions about the future. "He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.'"-- the One whose glory it is to conceal things. (Acts 1:7)

The Holy Spirit has the writer of Hebrews state, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." (Heb. 11:1) In Christ, God makes a multitude of promises to us, but not one promise that our walk through this world will be smooth and easy. We must live with the simplicity of David's words: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." (Ps. 23:4a) This is where we live - the valley of the shadow of death. And listen; we have to attach to that God's word that says, "'For I, the Lord your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you 'Fear not, I am the one who helps you.''" (Is. 41:13)

As we well know, the plans we make for the future are always subject to change. What Scriptures say concerning salvation must be applied to those moments when we think God should reason the way we reason: "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! (He's not subject to our scrutiny.) For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" (Rom. 11:33,34) No-one! Ever!

For those moments when we think we control what's to come we hold on to this: "The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps." (Prov. 16:9) And with that these words of David: "The steps of a man are established by the Lord, when he delights in his way; though he fall, he shall not be cast headlong, for the Lord upholds his hand. (Ps. 37:23)

I pray we heard that? “Though he fall, he shall not be cast headlong.” *Though he fall*. You see, life can get rather tough in the valley of the shadow of death. God doesn’t take away what this fallen world is, but He does impress this upon us: “if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith...may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (I Pet. 1:6) Our faith will be tested.

## II. But We Can Count On This.

And here’s the “why?” behind all this (you know the answer): This world isn’t our home. As Peter writes of our often tested faith, “You are obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.” (I Pet. 1:9) We cannot know all the steps through which God is going to take us, but we can know this part of our future: “we are obtaining the outcome of our faith.” Everlasting life!

Our Epistle lesson for this morning is from Hebrews 13. In the eighth verse, the Holy Spirit states, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” God states through the prophet Malachi, “For I the Lord do not change...”. (Mal. 3:6) God used His enemy, Balaam, who confessed, “God is not a man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind.” (Num. 23:19a) He establishes our every step!

We might say, “Well, we know all that!” But for some - maybe for many - there’s that dark moment of the soul when a person looks deep within and wonders, “Can God really go on loving me and forgiving me?” Sometimes it comes down to that, doesn’t it? “Will God go on loving me and forgiving me?”

Hard to fathom, isn’t it? Of the over 6 billion people who walk this planet, God is ready to forgive the sin of every repentant sinner who looks to Jesus for forgiveness. In a multitude of cases, people who have committed the most heinous acts. And to think of the times we find it almost impossible to forgive the sin of one person who sins against us. Can we fathom the magnitude of “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son...”. The Lord puts us in our place when He has Paul cite the Psalms:

“None is righteous, no, not one, no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” (Rom. 3:10-12)

He lifts us out of what we deserve to the promise, “the blood of Jesus...cleanses us from all sin.” (I Jn. 1:7b) Not some. Not most. *All!* And these glorious words remind and heal us: “In this is love, not we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation (the gift to gain His favor) for our sins. (I Jn. 4:10)

The One Who is “the same yesterday, today and forever” - the One Who does not change - the One Who is not a sinful human who lies - has made a promise to us. Because we believe in Christ we will have everlasting life! It’s like this: We can count on that every step of the difficult and sometimes heart ripping journey we must make through this world.

## III. It’s Like This.

Well, it’s like this: Our Epistle lesson from Hebrews goes on to state, “Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefitted those devoted to them.” (Heb. 13:9)

Years ago, Vance Havner wrote about a man named J. B. Gambrell who, as a boy, was a great dog lover. You might remember it. Here’s the account:

He (J. B. Gambrell) once wrote quite a piece about the neighborhood dog that wears no collar, is unattached, doesn't belong to anybody, feels no responsibility to keep stray dog and cats off any place, goes around smiling and wagging his tail, and will bark as much at one house as another. The neighborhood dog, Gambrell wrote, is broad minded, makes up with everybody, gets in no fights, for to him nothing is worth fighting for... Then Gambrell made his application. "The neighborhood dog has a lot of kin who are too broad minded to join any church. They run to all churches, particularly if there is a special service... The man who says one church is as good as another doesn't love any church enough to be of any use to it. There are hoboies in the dog world and deadbeats in the religious world. A thousand of them would never support a church or send a missionary."

We don't want to be like "the neighborhood dog": here and there and mostly no-where in our walk with the Lord. Again, our text says, "Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings...". Our walk with the Lord must always be brought into the light of God's Word, the Scripture. Simple, but too often ignored.

And, again, our text says, "for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefitted those devoted to them." In Christ, we have been forgiven of all sin. In Christ, we have been given the gift of eternal life. In Christ we are fed the food of Word and Sacrament - food for eternal life! It's like this: that's the way it is.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

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***“It’s Like This”***

- I. We Can’t Know It All.
- II. But We Can Count On This.
- III. It’s Like This.

Pilgrim Lutheran Church  
2155 North Oakland Avenue  
Decatur, Illinois 62526