

Good News Daily

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Sunday, July 23

Matthew 25:14-30 *To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability.* (v.15a NIV)

A woman once laughingly said to me, “I’m not good for anything except yelling at the children.” Yet that woman became the president of our altar guild, and had eleven other women harmoniously and happily working under her direction.

We may think we have no talent and refuse to do anything. Because we can’t sing like Pavarotti, we don’t open our mouth during the hymns. Because we can’t preach like Billy Graham, we don’t mention Jesus to our friends or acquaintances. Because we haven’t got a million dollars, we don’t send a ten-spot to a mission agency.

But God says, as He said to Moses, “What is that in your hand?” (Exodus 4:2). It may be just an old wooden rod, or a handful of meal in a barrel (1 Kings 17:12), or five barley loaves and two small fishes (John 6:9), or a creaky car, or a rusty voice, or the ability to tell jokes, or the time to visit someone in the hospital, or a telephone or a pen. But if we give any of these things to God, He will use it and multiply it in His work.

Every one of us has something of ourselves that we can give to God today.

1 Samuel 23:7-18; Psalms 63, 98; Romans 11:33—12:2

Monday, July 24

Acts 13:44-52 *Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: “We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles.”* (v.46)

Hold it! Aren’t we all unworthy of eternal life? Aren’t we all so deeply sinful that we don’t deserve heaven? And isn’t it only the free grace of God that saves us? So what are Paul and Barnabas getting at here?

They’re not referring to the nature of these people, which is sinful—like that of all of us. They are referring to their choice, which is willful. These people are shutting off the tap of God’s grace, putting their foot on the hose that could supply them with life-giving oxygen. They’re their own worst enemies.

God wants to do everything He can to save us. But we can “trample underfoot the Son of God” and “insult the Spirit of grace” (Hebrews 10:29). And for that we have only ourselves to blame!

When we talk about judgment, it’s not so much that God judges us, but rather that we judge ourselves! What an awesome responsibility!

1 Samuel 24:1-22; Psalms 41, 52; Mark 4:1-20

Tuesday, July 25

Acts 14:1-18 *Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them.* (v.18)

When Paul and Barnabas arrived at Lystra, they were idolized and blown up like balloons. Their audience called them gods and wanted to worship them.

What a temptation for them—and for Christian leaders through the centuries—especially after having been abused and almost stoned to death during their previous stopover (v.5). Ah, the devil is sly. If he can’t wreck us in the valley, he’ll try to topple us on the mountain. Many of us who have stood firm under suffering and hardship have toppled under adulation and flattery. We couldn’t take praise. It went to our heads and we thought we were little (or big) gods.

But Paul and Barnabas took definite steps to halt this idolatry: “They tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: ‘Friends, why are you doing this? We too are only human, like you’”

(vv.14-15). We Christians constantly need to admit our humanness and show our need of forgiveness, guidance, and help. Someone remarked, “A halo which slips twelve inches becomes a noose!”

1 Samuel 25:1-22; Psalm 45; Mark 4:21-34

Wednesday, July 26

Acts 14:19-28 “*We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,*” they said. (v.22b)

Shortly after being idolized in Lystra, Paul was stoned almost the death (v.19). What a roller coaster he was on! It reminds us of our Lord being praised on Palm Sunday and crucified five days later on Good Friday. How fickle are we humans!

Was Paul disturbed? Did he quit his job? No. Still nursing his cuts and bruises—which were no doubt visible to his audience—he told them to take heart and press on. In the gospel reading today, the disciples had a similar experience to Paul’s. They were tossed about roughly in a frightening storm on the lake with Jesus. But they came out of it with a deeper faith in him. God doesn’t promise us a pleasant journey, but a safe arrival!

Notice how Paul and Barnabas close their account. Does it say, “They reported all that *they* had done?” No. It says, “All that *God* had done *through* them” (v.27). They gave all the glory to God.

Can we say with Paul, “I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:12-13)?

1 Samuel 25:23-44; Psalm 119:49-72; Mark 4:35-41

Thursday, July 27

Acts 15:1-11 *Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.”* (v.1)

Paul and Barnabas now encounter another problem. Certain men want the Gentile believers to be circumcised: thus imposing this Old Covenant ritual upon the people of the New Covenant.

I was teaching some youngsters their Confirmation lessons recently in the rectory. One lad sat chewing gum, blowing big bubbles and bursting them. I was brought up with the rule that you don’t chew gum in school. What should I do? I decided not to make an issue of it but to keep on teaching. I’m glad he didn’t swig from a bottle of pop and wear his cap backward! I didn’t wish to make cultural differences into obstacles for the gospel. Paul affirmed this position when he wrote to the Galatians: “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love” (Galatians 5:6).

In what ways are we putting up barriers to the gospel? Do our culture or our traditions stand in the way of people hearing about Jesus?

Lord, make me a light without any shutters!

1 Samuel 28:3-20; Psalm 50; Mark 5:1-20

Friday, July 28

Acts 15:12-21 *Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood.* (v.20)

What! Is the chairman of this meeting, James, backtracking? Having agreed that nothing should stand in the way of people hearing the gospel and believing in Jesus (v.11), is he now saying that some other duties need to be fulfilled? No. He is not adding to the gospel; he is simply affirming that some bad practices need to be abandoned. Put simply, these bad practices are superstition, lust, and violence. It would be like me telling my young people’s Confirmation class that they must stop consulting horoscopes, looking at pornography, and fighting each other. I would be appealing to common moral principles which, when practiced, would allow the gospel to be heard more freely.

These rules would also help the Jewish and Gentile believers to live sensitively to each other’s cultures. As Paul later realized, “Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall” (1 Corinthians 8:13).

As we asked yesterday, what are the basic minimums needed in order to hear the gospel? How much of our private principles and tastes are we willing to abandon in order to make the gospel known?

1 Samuel 31:1-13; Psalms 40, 54; Mark 5:21-43

Saturday, July 29

Acts 15:22-35 *So the men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. (v.30)*

This week we've seen that a disagreement arose among the early disciples. What did they do? Separate from each other and start new churches? No, they took the disagreement to their elders, and listened to their counsel (vv.2,6).

That's good advice for us, too. It's important to have someone or some group to which we are responsible and to whom we should report. Putting ourselves under authority will save us from self-centered vision and harmful mistakes.

See what followed. After having a full and frank discussion about it, they made their decision. Then they communicated that decision to everyone concerned. How? First, by a letter: everything was put in writing. Second, by a visit: delegates went personally to see these people. Writing alone can be misinterpreted, so some leaders accompanied the letters to explain it in person—thus showing their interest by their presence. Third, by exhorting and confirming each other, they made sure each one not only understood the decision but also approved and supported it. In fact, Silas stayed on (v.34) to pick up any loose ends and to provide encouragement.

“Blessed are the peacemakers” (Matthew 5:9). O Lord, make me one of them.

2 Samuel 1:1-16; Psalm 55; Mark 6:1-13

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