



DEVOTIONAL TIME

05-25-2015 @ 0900

"Remember the One who Remembers You!"

Isaiah 63:7-9

THE HEART OF WORSHIP

When the music fades, all is stripped away, and I simply come,
Longing just to bring something that's of worth, that will bless Your Heart!
I'll bring You more than a song, for a song in itself is not what You have required;
You search much deeper within, through the way things appear; You're looking into my heart.
I'm coming back to the "heart of worship", and it's all about You...all about You, Jesus!
I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing I've made it, when it's all about You...all about You, Jesus!

Isaiah 63:7-9

"I will tell of the LORD's unfailing Love! I will praise Him for all He has done for us! He has richly blessed the people of Israel because of His mercy and constant Love." The LORD said, "They are My People...." And so He saved them from all their suffering. It was not an angel, but the LORD Himself who saved them. In His Love and Compassion, He rescued them. He had always taken care of them..."

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Can you think of moments you experienced God's "unfailing Love"? What happened? How did you then praise and thank Him for the "Grace" and "Favor" you received?
- How have you experienced God's "Favor" and "Blessing" in the heroes who served when duty called? What do you want to do to "remember them" today?
- Will you ask God's Guiding Grace and Sustaining Favor on those who guard us today? How will you let them know that they, too, are "remembered"?

Gratitude speaks, but Memory *sings*! Through the Prophet Isaiah, God promises to care for those He loves! The Lord remembers us; are we ready to awaken "memory" of our own? Literature often uses "failing memory" or "amnesia" to good effect in drama and tragedy. We have all experienced lapses in memory in our own lives, and usually in the most inconvenient and embarrassing moments. So the gift of memory is not to be taken for granted. It keeps us from taking the various "blessings", "favors", and "graces" of the Lord for granted either. If we stop to reflect on the people, places, things, and times that made our lives "memorable", we can begin to see where God has been at work on our behalf. If we pause to "look within", and consider "consciousness", "awareness", and "mindfulness", we may detect some of the way in which God is working in and through *us* as well. We, too, are meant to make a difference. We are divinely designed to build on what we have received from our forebears, and leave a lasting legacy of light and hope for all who follow us. The God who has been so faithful to us also asks that we keep faith with one another. Remembering what we have gotten from them by virtue of their sacrifice and service is a key link in the living "chain of liberation" that stretches back across centuries, even millennia! Isaiah invites us to notice that the Lord Himself is our Deliverer, even when He chooses to work through very human agents and agencies. We must be sure to thank God first, but remember to appreciate the "living images" of Divine Concern who embraced all that "holy duty" and "sacred honor" demanded of them. God, grant us the Grace of Grateful Memory! Empower us to appreciate the heroic patriots and faithful believers You sent to establish and protect the Republic in which we live and work, love and play, dream and grow. We still have much work to do in perfecting what they have begun, but let us remember them with gladness, and rededicate ourselves to fulfilling the Promise for which they sacrificed so much.



DEVOTIONAL TIME

05-26-2015 @ 0900

"Is Our 'Piety' Just An Act?"

Isaiah 1:15-20

THE HEART OF WORSHIP

When the music fades, all is stripped away, and I simply come,
Longing just to bring something that's of worth, that will bless Your Heart!
I'll bring You more than a song, for a song in itself is not what You have required;
You search much deeper within, through the way things appear; You're looking into my heart.
I'm coming back to the "heart of worship", and it's all about You...all about You, Jesus!
I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing I've made it, when it's all about You...all about You, Jesus!

Isaiah 1:15-20

"When you lift your hands in prayer, I will not look at you. No matter how much you pray, I will not listen, for your hands are covered with blood. Wash yourselves clean! Stop all this evil that I see you doing. Yes, stop doing evil and learn to do right. See that justice is done – help those who are oppressed, give orphans their rights, and defend widows." The Lord says, "Now, let's settle the matter. You are stained red with sin, but I will wash you as clean as snow. Although your stains are deep red, you will be as white as wool. If you will only obey Me, you will eat the good things the land produces. But if you defy Me, you are doomed to die. I, the Lord, have spoken!"

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Have you ever expected God to always "be there", answering every prayer for you just the way you wanted, whether you were living as a "friend of God" or not?
- Even when willing to admit your "Life of Faith" was a "less than stellar" testimony to God's Love, did you *still* figure that "a little prayer should do the trick" when crisis loomed large?
- On the other hand, have you noticed that "people of integrity" seem to pray with good effect on many occasions that look "hopeless" and/or "impossible"?

When God speaks, the wise listen! But such wisdom seems rare in a sin-sick world. Now, as in the days of Isaiah, self-centered and foolish people can come up with an excuse for just about any sin and failure to deliver on a contract, bond, or promise. "I didn't get it done on time because...", "The dog ate my homework, and I didn't have time to redo it....", "I would have been there to help as I said I would, but...", "It wasn't my fault that...", "I will pray more – read more Scripture, love my neighbor, honor God more when...", and the list goes on and on. In a society where minimum effort for maximum "pay-off" is the new standard of excellence, and "close" is good enough, there's a tendency to take this attitude into our "walk with God". God uses Isaiah to announce this attitude simply will not "cut it", and He will not tolerate it. In fact, God says He will not even look at us when we play these "games". If our "faith life" suddenly gets more "earnest" in the midst of crisis, we have a problem. Our "testimony" is supposed to become more consistent every day. But when things are "going well", superficial disciples tend to relax in their devotion to God, and minimize their care for others. Then when "life happens", they suddenly find all kinds of time to pray, ponder Scripture, and do community service. The Lord says "Stop all this evil that I see you doing. Yes, stop doing evil, and learn to do right." Notice: it is not enough to stop our evil acts; we must "learn to do right"! Who is the Teacher in *that* classroom? What does He say about spirituality and morality? What does He expect of Godly love and forgiveness? What's His "take" on "Truth"? God, grant us the Grace of True Piety. Make us a People who take Your Word seriously, and seek You devoutly. Teach us to live justly in Your sight as we build each other up in the Grace and Peace You gladly share. Empower us to seek every opportunity to care for the brothers and sisters who need special assistance. As You have gone "all-out" to offer us Life and Salvation, enable us to go "all-in" to do Your Will faithfully and gladly!



DEVOTIONAL TIME

05-27-2015 @ 0900

"When a City Falls From Grace"

Isaiah 1:21-23

THE HEART OF WORSHIP

When the music fades, all is stripped away, and I simply come,
Longing just to bring something that's of worth, that will bless Your Heart!
I'll bring You more than a song, for a song in itself is not what You have required;
You search much deeper within, through the way things appear; You're looking into my heart.
I'm coming back to the "heart of worship", and it's all about You...all about You, Jesus!
I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing I've made it, when it's all about You...all about You, Jesus!

Isaiah 1:21-23

"The city that once was faithful is behaving like a whore! At one time it was filled with righteous people, but now only murderers remain! Jerusalem, you were once like silver, but now you are worthless, you were like good wine, but now you are only water. Your leaders are rebels and friends of thieves; they are always accepting gifts and bribes. They never defend orphans in court, or listen when widows present their case."

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Have you ever watched a respected citizen who ran for office become "somebody else" after winning election? What do you think happened to them?
- Have you noticed a change in the values of your city over the past several years especially in the aspect of Christian character and ethics? Why have they declined in value?
- In the middle of that decline, can you still think of "children of God" who continue to seek Him and serve others in His Name? Where do you think they get their "strength" and "wisdom"?

Faith is a Gift! But to be "faith-full", we must be ready constantly to put God's Gift to work. It will die in those who fail to employ it regularly. Personal ruin and social decline soon follow. Like Jerusalem of old, modern cities are in crisis! Streets that used to be safe are "combat zones". Schools that were established as "temples of learning" and "shrines of scholarship" concentrate more on just keeping good order and discipline. Where students used to settle for firing "spit balls" with drinking straws, the modern "scholars" menace classmates and teachers with much more deadly implements. When John Q. Public runs for office, or Susie B. Good wins appointment to a responsible position on an important committee, having made solemn assurances to "clean out corruption" or "streamline the process", accumulate power, wealth, and success...while the conditions they vowed to address have only grown worse, one may "raise an eyebrow" in wonder and dismay. The Lord states it this way in Isaiah: "The city that once was faithful is behaving like a whore!" Any city that begins to lose its spiritual center and moral compass is a city doomed to ruin. Any nation that does so is likewise doomed to fall into decay. The earliest casualties in this war on worthiness are the weak and the defenseless. The greedy get greedier, the powerful seek even more power, and life becomes less and less valuable. God affirms, "Where once righteous people lived, now only murderers remain!" As a nation, we once prided ourselves on our system of laws and justice, and became the envy of the world. But since then, we have placed more emphasis on "self-esteem" and "individuality", reset our moral compass on appeasement, and welcomed every "new" and "different" idea/belief as inherently "better". That's not necessarily so; "Sin" wears a thousand disguises, and will poison all that is "good" and "right". Once "believers" open the door to compromising God-revealed values, ethics, and morals, they start down the "road to ruin". "Compromising" and "appeasing" sound like "good social skills" at first, but it doesn't take long to see the disastrous effects. God, grant us the Grace of Wisdom. Make us see clearly the crucial difference between healthy flexibility and sin-driven compromise. Where we can accommodate cultural variation, let do so, but always with basic loyalty to Your Word in Faith!



DEVOTIONAL TIME

05-28-2015 @ 0900

“Peace in the Light God Gives”

Isaiah 2:1-5

THE HEART OF WORSHIP

When the music fades, all is stripped away, and I simply come,
Longing just to bring something that's of worth, that will bless Your Heart!
I'll bring You more than a song, for a song in itself is not what You have required;
You search much deeper within, through the way things appear; You're looking into my heart.
I'm coming back to the “heart of worship”, and it's all about You...all about You, Jesus!
I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing I've made it, when it's all about You...all about You, Jesus!

Isaiah 2:1-5

“Here is the Message which God gave to Isaiah, son of Amoz, about Judah and Jerusalem: ‘In days to come, the mountain where the Temple stands will be the highest one of all, towering above all the hills. Many nations will come streaming to it, and their people will say, “Let us go up the Hill of the Lord, to the Temple of Israel’s God. He will teach us what He wants us to do; we will walk in the paths He has chosen. For the Lord’s Teaching comes from Jerusalem; from Zion He speaks to His people.” He will settle disputes among great nations. They will hammer their swords into plows, and their spears into pruning knives. Nations will never again go to war, never prepare for battle again! Now, descendants of Jacob, let us walk in the light which the Lord gives us!”

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Have you ever wondered why all our “peace talks” fail to accomplish any lasting effects? What is it about the “search for peace” that always “comes up short”?
- Do you often ask yourself, “Why do people generally have such a major problem getting along with one another? Can’t we all find a common ground?”
- Can you think of people who “walk peaceably” through the world, as if they know a “secret” that the rest of the planetary population has somehow missed?

If you watch much news at all, you must be fairly convinced that the entire world is starting to unravel. If it isn't dire conflict in some far-away land, it is riotous unrest within in our own cities, or a smaller-scale domestic dispute turned violent. Do these events make it difficult for you to believe that such a day of which Isaiah speaks could ever come about? Can you imagine a day in which no one would even talk about going to war... ever again? How could this ever be possible? “Walk in the light which the Lord gives us.” Sounds simple doesn't it? Yet, this is the most difficult thing we ever try to do, because we all struggle with a basic selfishness. If someone “wrongs you”, what is your most likely first response? Do you desire to “make the wrong right”? Do you “demand justice” for yourself? Herein lies our problem. We think about ourselves first, and get around to God “eventually”. To “walk in the Light”, we'd need to ask, “How would God desire we settle the issue? Might the Lord desire we forgive the person, let it go, and move on down the road, never looking back?” God has come to give us light, yet the majority of the time we would rather not walk in it because it “cramps our style”, and “gets in the way” of our designs and agendas. We say we don't like war, yet how often are we all “prepped and ready” to go to war over the slightest issue or perceived insult? What is our usual reaction when “Someone takes ‘our’ parking place... someone cuts in front of us in line... someone ‘steps on our toes’”? The reasons can go on and on. Is it any wonder, then, that wars break out on the “grand scale”? God, grant us the Grace of “Inner Peace”! When we walk in the Light You give us we look at issues differently. We see people differently. We view ourselves very differently, allowing You to “take the lead”, and do what You do the way You do it best. The peace we would all enjoy in our world today can only come from You, Lord. May we hear Your Word, O Lord, and walk willingly in the Light You give us! Free us from selfishness, so we grow closer to You, God, day by day.



DEVOTIONAL TIME

05-29-2015 @ 0900

“When Human Pride Gets in the Way”

Isaiah 2:11-18

THE HEART OF WORSHIP

When the music fades, all is stripped away, and I simply come,
Longing just to bring something that's of worth, that will bless Your Heart!
I'll bring You more than a song, for a song in itself is not what You have required;
You search much deeper within, through the way things appear; You're looking into my heart.
I'm coming back to the “heart of worship”, and it's all about You...all about You, Jesus!
I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing I've made it, when it's all about You...all about You, Jesus!

Isaiah 2:11-18

“A Day is coming when human pride will be ended, and human arrogance destroyed! Then the LORD alone will be exalted! On that Day, the LORD Almighty will humble everyone who is powerful, everyone who is proud and conceited. He will destroy the tall cedars of Lebanon, and all the oaks in the land of Bashan. He will level the high mountains and hills, every high tower, and the walls of every fortress. He will sink even the largest and most beautiful ships. Human pride will be ended, and human arrogance will be destroyed. Idols will completely disappear, and the LORD alone will be exalted on that Day!”

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Do you know people who routinely trip over their own egos? Are you often faced with those so convinced they are always right that working with them is nearly impossible?
- Have *you* ever been confronted about your own arrogance, pride, or inflated ego? Were you offended at the time, only to realize later those observations were right on target?
- Can you think of others who may be truly gifted, but go out of their way to glorify God with their gifts, and share them humbly and unselfishly “for the good of the team”?

In any “Story of Glory” the Bible may hold, GOD gets the “Gold”! From the mightiest kings to the lowest of scoundrels, those who refuse to glorify the Lord, or obey His Word, seal their fate. From the first Age of Eden to our very own day, misplaced pride has gotten us human beings in a world of hurt! If we don't boast of our own achievements, do we fall back on the “greatness” of our families, friends, or ethnic heritage(s)? It's one thing to keep pictures of children and grandchildren in wallets, tablets, or smart phones to share with others, and quite another to downgrade or belittle those of “other” areas, nations, clans, tribes, or traditions. But “twisted pride” can wear many faces: “My way to God is better than yours. In fact, my way is right, and yours is *wrong!*” “My church is better than yours!” “I would be so ashamed if I had to admit *that* was my pastor.” “That poor pastor's wife has no sense of style whatsoever.” “If that was our praise band, I would find another church... quick, fast, and in a warp-drive hurry.” (How many times have we heard comments like these, or even allowed some to erupt from our own mouths?) Our self-centered pride is one of the last things we ever surrender to God, mainly because we love how it “validates” us, at least in our own minds. We enjoy being a part of the “best”, the “biggest”, the most “forward-thinking”, the “in-crowd”, and the list keeps on growing. But this pride is arrogant, belligerent, and “un-Godly”. By contrast, a “Godly” pride seeks relentlessly to glorify God, proclaim His Goodness, share His Gifts, and build up His People with every kind of encouragement and service. “Godly” pride will not settle for “half-hearted” praise, “soulless” devotion, or “second-rate” service to others in God's Name. God, grant us the Grace of Purified Pride! Teach us to boast constantly of Your Goodness and Love for us all. Make us eager to proclaim in word and deed the countless ways Your Wisdom awakens our wonder, and spurs us to love You more, and to serve You cheerfully as often as we're able! Empower us to announce to all who will listen the Divine Design revealed in Your amazing “Ministry of Miracles” that draws us all to “Life-in-Joy”!

