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01 Oct 08 Morning

READ : Ezekiel 36

LESSON : A renewed heart

VERSE 26 : A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.

Israel had forfeited all claims to Divine pity and promised blessings. They had broken every clause in their part of the covenant and incurred Divine wrath and promised curses. Sin is not only degradation to man but an injustice and injury towards God. God must vindicate His divine honour. This vindication is partially seen in the punishment but is to be more fully displayed in the restoration and prosperity of His people.

There is no possibility of a better future unless the heart is cleansed from sin. Man is powerless to do this. It must be an act of God. Man can mould the intellect and modify the dispositions but only God can change and renew the heart. God executes this plan through the workings of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God indwells the man and makes obedience to God's law not only possible but also cheerful, consistent and acceptable. This makes a man a new creature in Christ, a spiritual rebirth.

Are you aware of this thorough and self-conscious change that is evidenced by an outward and practical obedience to the Divine law that puts me in a true relationship to God?

Prayer : Search me, O God and know my heart today.

Evening

READ : Psalms 83–84

LESSON : Grace leading to glory

Psalm 84:11 : For the Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly.

Our pilgrim journey in this world is often a difficult one. Along the way, our loving Heavenly Father grants us the strength to persevere. Therefore, Psalm 84:11 is a great verse to claim for our pilgrim journey.

Our spiritual journey commences with God's grace. We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. It was amazing grace that saved a wretch like me. And it continues by grace. The journey on earth is not smooth sailing. We are bound to encounter obstacles along the way. However, God's grace is sufficient for us [2 Corinthians 12:9]. God will strengthen us [1 Peter 5:10]. Our final destination will be one of glory with our Lord.

How do you make the journey between grace and glory? [Psalm 84:11]. The Lord God is our Sun and Shield. You are assured of provision and sufficiency, protection and security. God will not withhold any good thing from you when you walk in His way. He will provide the means for you to walk uprightly for His glory.

Accept Christ as your Lord and Saviour in order to qualify yourself for this provision. You can depend on the Lord despite life's disappointment.

Question : Are you determined to walk uprightly by obeying God's Word, loving and trusting in Him?

02 Oct 08 Morning

READ : Ezekiel 37

LESSON : The valley of dry bones

VERSE 3 : And He said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, Thou knowest.

When Israel departed from God, she died. Hence it was depicted as a valley with a multitude of dry bones. The skeletons were dislocated and scattered. The bones were dry and crumbling to dust. The evidence of death was complete. The nation was lifeless and hopeless. The Jews who were in exile considered themselves like dead men.

In these grim and ghastly skeletons, a dole picture of death was spread out before the prophet Ezekiel. By the command of God, he prophesied to the bones and there was a noise, followed by a general shaking during which the bones became arranged and united. Flesh and skin came upon the dry bones. The spirit or soul came into them and what was once a pile of bones stood on their feet, an exceeding great army.

The means used for bringing these dead, dry and dispersed bones to life was God's prophet, prophecy and his prayers. God still uses these same appointed means to revive His dying Church and save a lost humanity that is dead in trespasses and sins.

Let us labour according to His will and we will be honoured in seeing the fruit of our labours.

Thought God's work must be done in God's way.

Evening

READ : Psalm 85

LESSON : God's revived people

VERSE 6 : Wilt Thou not revive us again: that Thy people may rejoice in Thee?

The Lord had delivered His people from captivity in Babylon. God's wrath had ended and their sins had been forgiven. When the refugees returned to their land, life was really difficult. They were ready to give up.

The Psalmist was praying for a revival. They wanted new life from the Lord so they could rejoice in Him. So they cried out to the Lord for a new life. God's people need to be revived. The former greatness of Israel needs to be restored, too. God can revive churches and individuals.

Many of us have experienced the abundant life. Unfortunately, some of us have turned cold to the Lord and lost that spiritual vibrancy.

You cannot lose your salvation but you can lose the joy of your salvation. God's power is not seen in your life and His overflowing blessings to others are restrained. God wants to revive you. He wants you to be a channel of blessing to others.

Does your life still sparkle as it did when you first came to know Jesus as your Saviour? Ask God to fill you with His love and kindness. Then share this blessing with others.

Prayer Dear Lord, touch my life with your love and kindness. Use my testimony as a blessing to others.

03 Oct 08 Morning

READ : Ezekiel 38

LESSON : Adversaries and adversities of the Church

VERSE 16 : And thou shalt come up against my people of Israel, as a cloud to cover the land; it shall be in the latter days, and I will bring thee against my land, that the heathen may know me, when I shall be sanctified in thee, O Gog, before their eyes.

This chapter gives an account of the powerful enemy of Israel, Gog and Magog—his coming up to invade the land, the number of his confederates, his warlike military equipment, his wicked designs and intentions to spoil and plunder the people of God. Yet in all these, we see God’s hand and design in the defeat that would be given to those enemies by the immediate hand of God.

All the enemies of Israel, in all quarters, both open and secret enemies, and the anti-Christian forces and combinations are what the prophet foretells. The Lord at His pleasure can bring enemies and armies upon His own people. The Lord can easily bring men to do His work and service. They may do it in proud contempt of God and His people, but God does it to glorify His own name and to vindicate His people.

People who design and attempt mischief against God’s people shall know that God is their Protector and Revenger of their wrongs. Let us trust in the Lord Who determines all things according to His divine counsel and wait upon Him Who shall bring all things to pass.

Thought : If God is for us, who can be against us?

Evening

READ : Psalm 86

LESSON : An illumined mind, heart and will

VERSE 11 : Teach me Thy way, O Lord; I will walk in Thy truth: unite my heart to fear Thy name.

David wrapped his whole self up in prayer. He saw himself in trouble again and asked God for divine help. He was confident that his needs could be met because the Lord was merciful. He wanted God alone to be glorified in the victory.

When you are at your wit’s end, you can turn to God for help. All God wants to hear from you is, “Lord, I am open to Your truth, I want You to show me Your way and Word and I will obey it.”

God’s children should go to Him with a single heart to fear Him. Learn from His instructions, obey and praise Him. The more you know God, the more you will draw near to Him with confidence.

If you want to enjoy God’s blessings, follow the example of this prayer. Dedicate your mind, heart and will to the Lord wholeheartedly. Remember Matthew 6:24. You cannot serve God and mammon. It is dangerous when your heart is divided. The Apostle James also reminds us not to be double-minded in our ways [James 1:8]. Let us honour and appreciate God in all areas of our lives.

Thought : Fix your heart upon the Lord.

04 Oct 08 Morning

READ : Ezekiel 39

LESSON : The final triumph

VERSE 7 : So will I make My holy name known in the midst of My people Israel; and I will not let them pollute. My holy name any more: and the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, the Holy One in Israel.

We have here a prophetic description of the ultimate fate of Gog, the ideal impersonation of the power of evil, and the utter destruction of his vast armies more largely described; the glorious triumph of God and His people. Israel hereafter shall, by the special grace of God, be kept from dishonouring God's holy name by their sins and the consequent judgements that made the heathen think that Jehovah was unwilling or unable to save them.

How joyful is the prospect to the people of God that the time is ere long coming when they shall be placed under the blessed necessity of uninterrupted obedience to God's will! Temptations from the flesh, the world and Satan, which now harass them, shall come to an end. Sin, which is now our greatest sorrow because it most dishonours the name of our Lord, shall be no more. The Lord shall make known His holy name with such attractive power that He will not let us pollute it anymore.

Oh, how sweet to love Him with an unsinning heart. Let us exercise ourselves to always have a conscience void of offence towards God and man, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Thought : Know Christ and the power of His resurrection.

Evening

READ : Psalms 87–88

LESSON : Earthly or heavenly citizen?

Psalm 87:2 : The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob.

Most of us have special places in this world that we love. It may be our home, our school or our church building where we meet with God.

God also has a place He loves, the gates of Zion. The earthly Mount Zion is a figure of the heavenly Zion, the city of God and God's redeemed people. Zion is an important place for the Christians. Our citizenship is in the heavenly Zion [Philippians 3:20]. It is our Lord's prepared place for His redeemed [John 14:2–3]. All believers have the privilege to walk the golden streets one day.

In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit came upon the Jewish believers in the temple in Jerusalem. They built an unshaking foundation in obedience to the Lord.

Check your spiritual life as you read this Psalm. On whose foundation are you building? All who trust in the Lord Jesus as their Saviour are born spiritually and are assured of citizenship in heaven. We will live with Him forever and enjoy His glory. Every child of God is privileged because God the Holy Spirit dwells in Him. Which citizenship do you treasure more, earthly or heavenly?

Thought : Have you considered being a citizen of God's city?

05 Oct 08 Morning

READ : Ezekiel 40

LESSON : A prophetic parable

VERSE 4 : And the man said unto me, Son of man, behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears, and set thine heart upon all that I shall shew thee; for to the intent that I might shew them unto thee art thou brought hither: declare all that thou seest to the house of Israel.

The vision beginning here and continuing to the end of the book is that of a city and temple described herein. "It was intended to comfort the disconsolate Jews, and to light up the gloom of their captivity with the well-founded hope of a brighter and better day. A fairer and loftier Jerusalem and Temple awaits them, which the prophet represents entirely by figures taken from the old land, the old royal seat and the old Temple" (Preachers' Homiletic).

The prophet Ezekiel saw a model of a temple as vast as a city—a city for men to dwell in and a temple for God to dwell in. The highest conception to Ezekiel of the future glory of Israel was a great temple with a perfect form of worship. The loftiest vision of the New Testament apostle, John, is that of a city in which there is no temple but God Himself is the temple.

Both pre- and post-exilic temples have perished but the Church of God remains more firmly established than ever. The Church is the body of believers that shines more and more unto the perfect day. Are you a member of Christ's body?

Thought We are of His flesh, and of His bones.

Evening

READ : Psalm 89

LESSON : Walking with joy

VERSE 15 : Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance.

The call of the trumpets would gather the people of Israel for a feast to remind them of God's goodness and faithfulness. Throughout the year they heard these joyful sounds.

In church, you hear the joyful sounds of the organ and the piano, gathering the people to meet the Lord in worship. Every day should be a joyful experience of excitement and enrichment for God's children. As God's redeemed people, we should walk with joy.

We walk in the light because God is light. In Him there is no darkness. You don't stumble or cause someone to fall. We are reminded to be sure that our actions flow out of justice, righteousness, mercy and truth. Any unfair, unloving or dishonest action cannot come from God. If we walk in faith, we will also experience victory and blessing.

Do people know that you are a Christian by your life? If you walk with joy and in the light, you will be a blessing to others. This glorifies God. Enjoy Him to the fullest and let others see Jesus in you. When you walk close to the Lord, you will be walking with joy.

Hymn : I want to live above the world, Though Satan's darts at me are hurled; For faith has caught the joyful sound, The song of saints on higher ground.

06 Oct 08 Morning

READ : Ezekiel 41

LESSON : The Christian Church

VERSE 1 : Afterward he brought me to the temple, and measured the posts, six cubits broad on the one side, and six cubits broad on the other side, which was the breadth of the tabernacle.

The temple is constructed with well-known laws, and a combination of strength and beauty. It is symmetrical, with strong and massive walls that are exact in measurement, every detail minutely developed, and the whole edifice constructed according to the laws of proportion. The indestructible stability of the structure is assured. Everything about the building is in perfect harmony.

To one not skilled in mathematics, the mathematical description of such a structure would be unintelligible but to a common carpenter or mason among the Jews, all this—in the literal sense—becomes plain. God was introducing Ezekiel into this prophetic, evangelical and celestial temple, and employing him to transmit a description of it to the church. When our Lord Jesus spoke of destroying the temple, his hearers understood it to be the temple of Jerusalem but he was speaking of the temple of his body [John 2:19, 21]. The Church— called the house of God—is the mystical body of Christ [1 Timothy 3:15].

Believers, as lively stones, build up a spiritual house. They are a holy priesthood, and offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

Thought God's temple is holy, which temple ye are.

Evening

READ : Psalm 90

LESSON : Stewardship of your time

VERSE 12 : So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

Time is a precious commodity. It is a non-renewable gift from God. Sometimes, we treat our time on earth as if it is not a gift at all. Moses' words summarise what we need to know if we want to make our lives count.

People usually number years and not days. God has ordained that the whole universe functions one day at a time. It is better that we number our days because we live one day at a time.

King Solomon warns us in Proverbs 4:23 that we need to take care of the heart. What is in your heart will direct your life. Let us live by God's wisdom. You will learn to discern when you know His wisdom so that you will not invest your life in trivial pursuits and petty diversions.

Knowing God's wisdom will help you to apply His truth from His Word at the right time, in the right way with the right motive.

Each new day is a special treasure to be savoured and celebrated. May we never fail to praise our Creator by rejoicing in this glorious day and spending each day wisely for Him to work out His will in us.

Thought Every square inch and every split second is claimed by God but counter-claimed by Satan.

07 Oct 08 Morning

READ : Ezekiel 42

LESSON : Private devotion and public worship

VERSE 13 : Then said he unto me, The north chambers and the south chambers, which are before the separate place, they be holy chambers, where the priests that approach unto the Lord shall eat the most holy things: there shall they lay the most holy things, and the meat offering, and the sin offering, and the trespass offering; for the place is holy.

The chambers, though near the Temple, were separate from it and strictly placed in the midst of stillness, ideal for meditation and prayer. God is known in the greatness and glory of His character, not in the midst of noise and uproar but in quietness and solitude. While there, the thinker must isolate himself from all distraction and quietly and prayerfully wait on the Lord. On the quiet slopes of Midian, Moses, in stillness and awe, witnessed the splendours of divine revelation. His life henceforth was a continuous scene of tireless and prodigious activity. On Mount Horeb, Elijah was favoured with a fuller revelation of the divine character, not in the roaring tempest, the crashing earthquake or the devouring fire but in the subduing whisper of the still small voice. He rose up to do the will of God with a tenderer and nobler spirit than he had known before.

So our secret communion with God is meant to prepare us for public devotions in the sanctuary and enable us to derive all the benefits from them whom God has designed. There can be no real worship in public if there is no worship in private.

Thought Private worship prepares us for public worship.

Evening

READ : Psalm 91

LESSON : Faith in God guarantees protection

VERSE 4 : He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust: His truth shall be thy shield and buckler.

The writer warns about hidden traps, deadly plagues, terror at night and arrows by day, stumbling over rocks and facing lions and snakes. In our day, suicide bombers, reckless drivers and new strains of viruses and diseases are as dangerous as those in this psalm.

God preserves those who abide in Him and love Him. The promises in verses 1 and 9 are for people who dwell in His presence, not for those people who run to Him only when there is danger. The abiding life in Christ [v. 1–4] produces fearlessness [v. 5–13]. A life without fear will lead to victory and peace in Christ. Therefore, the safest place to live in this world is in the shadow of the Almighty. Have you found the safest place to live? If you have not, God invites you to come and have fellowship with Him.

You and I are privileged to come right into His presence, dwell in the secret place, under His wings and at His mercy seat. You can meet Him there and He will guide and show His will to you. God protects the person who cleaves to Him. What a wonderful and assuring protection!

Prayer Dear Lord, thank You for being my fortress and refuge when I am in trouble.

08 Oct 08 Morning

READ : Ezekiel 43

LESSON : The glory of God in the light of the Gospel

VERSE 2 : And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and His voice was like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with His glory.

In these chapters, the prophet describes the worship that should be performed, but under the type of the Old-Testament services or expressed in the language of the Old Testament. An account is given of the glory of the Lord returning to the house and filling it.

“This glory of the Lord seems to have been intended as an emblem of the light of the Gospel, which is the glory of Christ, spreading from the eastern part of the world into the western; powerful and mighty in operation in saving mankind and enlightening the earth with abundance of knowledge, holiness, and comfort” (Preachers’ homiletic). How can it be otherwise when the Sun of Righteousness arises and irradiates the earth? The wise men told King Herod, “We have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him.”

Before the coming of Christ, the world was in darkness and Canaan was full of types, ceremonies and shadows. When Christ came, the oracles of the heathen dimmed, the Jewish shadows vanished and the earth shone with the glory of the Gospel.

Let us shine as little stars, beaming radiance from the Sun of Righteousness, radiating it near and far.

Thought Behold, the dayspring from on high hath visited us.

Evening

READ : Psalms 92–93

LESSON : God’s flourishing people

Psalm 92:12 : The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon.

There are three stages of life: childhood, adolescence and finally adulthood. We cannot stop the ageing process. However, no matter how old we grow, we must continue to grow spiritually in God’s grace.

In the East, the stately palm is admired highly for its fruits and the cedar for its wood. Both can survive for many years and are appreciated for their beauty. They are known for long life. To flourish like the palm trees means to stand tall and live long. These trees are solid, strong and unmovable.

God wants us to be like palm trees. We must keep growing and producing fruit in our lives. Studying and building up in God’s holy Word will help you to be rooted, built up and established in your faith. God desires His children to grow spiritually and draw rich nourishment from Him. Are you afraid of growing old and dread the inevitable wrinkles, aches and pains? This is the cursed end of the physical birth. Thank God that we will never grow old spiritually. Today, ask the Lord to sustain you and keep you growing in Him. As His children, let us be fruit-bearing Christians for Him.

Question Are you a growing Christian?

09 Oct 08 Morning

READ : Ezekiel 44

LESSON : The door of Heaven

VERSE 2 : Then said the Lord unto me: This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter in by it; because the Lord, the God of Israel, hath entered in by it, therefore it shall be shut.

The prophet is brought a third time to the east gate and finds it shut, which intimates that the rest of the gates were open at all times to the worshippers. “The difference between this and the other gates, that this was shut when the others were open, was intended both to perpetuate the remembrance of the solemn entrance of the glory of the Lord into the house and also to possess the minds of people with a reverence for the Divine Majesty, and with very awful thoughts of His transcendent glory” (Matthew Henry).

The spiritual truth to be learnt here is that our Messiah enters heaven—the true Sanctuary—by a way that no one could because of His own perfect holiness [Romans 1:4]. All of us enter as sinners clothed in His righteousness. He is the Door and only through Him can we enter heaven. Alas! The door of heaven can be shut. This door is shut to the unbelieving, rebellious and unrepentant.

Our hearts, too, should be shut to the world and the devil when the holy God has entered into it and His glory has swallowed up our sin and misery.

Thought “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock.” – Revelation 3:20a

Evening

READ : Psalm 94

LESSON : Seek comfort in God

VERSE 19 : In the multitude of my thoughts within me Thy comforts delight my soul.

It is common to worry from time to time when you have obligations and responsibilities. Some people worry about health, finances or safety while others are concerned about being unfairly treated.

The Psalmist saw evil people prospering in his society. They oppressed the poor. The government was corrupt and innocent people were condemned. There was injustice everywhere. The Psalmist tells us that God has a plan. He knew exactly what was going on and understood their discouragement.

There are times when we pray and wait on the Lord for help. There are also times when we must act. We who are the light of the world must stand up and shine for Jesus. God will give us the strength from His Word to stand up against sin.

Are you laden with some worries or problems? Lay hold of His promises in Scripture and rest in His care. He will act for you at the right time. Do not trust in your own human wisdom for a solution. Pray to God and wait patiently for His answer. Do not rush ahead of Him and solve your own problem yourself.

Thought Give your cares to Him Who cares for the flowers of the field. – Spurgeon

10 Oct 08 Morning

READ : Ezekiel 45

LESSON : Christ our life

VERSE 3 : And of this measure shalt thou measure the length of five and twenty thousand, and the breadth of ten thousand: and in it shall be the sanctuary and the most holy place.

In this chapter, the prophet's vision is represented in the division of the holy land—for the Temple, the priests, the Levites, the city, the prince and the residue to the people. The ordinances of justice were given, as were the oblations they had to offer and the prince's part in those oblations. The portion of land was assigned to the sanctuary, where the temple was to be built in the midst with all its courts and purlieus. The rest round about it was for the priests.

The whole design is to set forth the amplitude of the church of Christ under the gospel, which, both for large extent and purity, should far exceed that of the Old Testament. The sanctuary was situated in the centre, so the Christian faith should be the central point of life and Christ the centre of true religion.

Christian faith ought not, either in the life of nations or of individuals, be placed in a corner merely as a tolerated piece of antiquity. The Spirit of Christ must fill us, pervading every area of our lives with its holy influence and sanctifying grace, making us a sweet savour unto God and an epistle of Christ read of all men.

Thought The fullness of Him that filleth all in all. – Ephesians 1:23b

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READ : Psalms 95–96

LESSON : A hardened heart

Psalm 95:8 : Harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness.

The opposite of a worshipful heart that pleases God is a hardened heart that grieves the Lord. The Israelites had seen the wonders of God's power but were unwilling to submit gladly to Him. They were not allowed to enter the Promised Land and died in the wilderness.

A hardened heart is as useless as a hardened lump of clay. Nothing can restore it and make it useful. God cannot use or mould you when you are stubbornly set in your old ways. Learn to be a contented Christian. Count your blessings.

How do you protect yourself against a hardened heart? God wants you to repent from your sin. Always listen when God is speaking and respond to Him willingly. Enjoy your life of faith and learn to praise Him continually. Keep your heart tender for God's truth and use.

Do you remember what happened to Pharaoh? He was severely judged for his sin of disobedience. Be warned that God cannot use a believer whose heart is hardened. Yield yourself to Him daily in obedience to His Word. Pray for a tender heart of love for others.

Thought A grateful and worshipful heart is a thankful heart.

11 Oct 08 Morning

READ : Ezekiel 46

LESSON : Foretaste of eternal rest

VERSE 1 : Thus saith the Lord God; The gate of the inner court that looketh toward the east shall be shut the six working days; but on the sabbath it shall be opened, and in the day of the new moon it shall be opened.

In this chapter, we see the eastern gate of the inner court shut on working days, and open on the Sabbath and new moons for the prince and people to worship. This gate was shut on the six working days that man may labour, doing the business of their callings, providing for themselves and families, and to give to the poor.

On the Sabbath it would be open so that man could abstain from all civil, corporeal, and servile works, and from dead works or sin, except in carrying out religious duties, particularly in attendance of public worship. Sabbath here is the Lord's Day.

The new moon is an emblem of increased new light in the Gospel dispensation. Examples of some particular seasons are the coming of Christ into the world and the morning star of the reformation.

These six working days are like this life, which is the time of working after which is eternal Sabbath or rest. For now, let us live and walk by faith and not by sight. Divine and heavenly things may be out of sight but soon it will be a new moon, as well as Sabbath, and all things will be seen clearly.

Thought Sabbaths and new moons are heaven on earth.

Evening

READ : Psalms 97–98

LESSON : A singing faith

Psalm 98:4 : Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise.

The Christian faith is a singing faith. Christians ought to be a singing people. We are encouraged in the Word of God to sing to the Lord.

Why should we praise the Lord? The Lord has redeemed and saved us from our sins [Psalm 98:1]. We should proclaim the message of salvation to those who are strangers of His saving grace. We praise God for the revelation of His righteousness [Psalm 98:2]. We sing about His mercies and faithfulness that endures to all generations.

We must not take all these blessings for granted. It is our responsibility to share with our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren that God is faithful, good and merciful. Who should praise the Lord? The hills rejoice before the Lord [Psalm 98:8–9] for He is coming to judge the earth. Everyone in the world who has breath should praise the Lord.

Do you sing joyfully from your heart each Lord's Day when you worship God? Enjoy singing the praises of God in your life. Do friends single you out as a singing Christian? We can testify for our Lord both in word and in song. Hymns of praise honour the Lord.

Chorus I'm singing for my Lord everywhere I go.

12 Oct 08 Morning

READ : Ezekiel 47

LESSON : The healing waters

VERSE 8 : Then said He unto me, These waters issue out toward the east country, and go down into the desert, and go into the sea: which being brought forth into the sea, the waters shall be healed.

In this chapter we have the vision of the holy waters issuing from under the threshold of the Temple. The prophet saw them first reaching to the ankles, then the knees, then the loins, and then they became a river too deep to be forded, or swim in. They flowed gradually and constantly in the ever-deepening stream, spreading far and wide, producing healing effects wherever it flows.

In the Kingdom of God, growth proceeds from little to great. It began in Jerusalem and spread to the uttermost part of the world. The deepening of the waters shows the continual deepening of spiritual life and multiplication of spiritual blessings in the growth of the Kingdom of God.

The world without the Gospel is like the Dead Sea. The Gospel of Christ, which is the River of the Water of Life, flows into every part of the world, bringing life, health, beauty and fruitfulness. Dead souls are quickened into life, diseased souls healed, feeble souls strengthened, and the spiritual life of believers is made more intense and fruitful.

Only those who keep away from this gracious stream of divine love shall not be healed. Let us grow from grace to grace.

Thought Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! – Romans 11:33a

Evening

READ : Psalms 99–101

LESSON : Home is where the heart is

Psalm 101:2 : I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when wilt Thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.

The most important part of the home is the hearts of the people who live there. Your heart affects the home. Both need to be dedicated to the Lord. David wrote this psalm during his reign.

Heknew that he needed God's help in order to walk the blameless path. Therefore, he set these standards as guidelines.

Integrity means to be blameless. If you walk this blameless path, you will avoid evil associates, slander and pride. When David dedicated his house to the Lord, he asked God to give him a wholesome heart.

Our homes can be a difficult place in which to behave wisely. Often we take our family members for granted, a case of "Familiarity breeds contempt". There is no respect in the home. We tend to show more kindness to outsiders than to our own loved ones. Do not allow unacceptable attitudes and behaviour to wreck your home.

Follow the Lord's example and live a Christ-like life. Let the Lord reign supreme in your heart and home. Trust Him to be the Keeper of your home. Share your mutual woes and joys with Him.

Hymn O Lord, our God, our homes are Thine forever! We trust to Thee their problems,
toil, and care; Their bonds of love no enemy can sever If Thou art always Lord and Master there:
Be Thou the centre of our least endeavour – Be Thou our guest, our hearts and homes to share.

13 Oct 08 Morning

READ : Ezekiel 48

LESSON : The city of God

VERSE 35 : It was round about eighteen thousand measures: and the name of the city from that day shall be, The Lord is there.

The closing chapter of Ezekiel is a condensed summary of the magnificent vision described in previous chapters. It is a new order of things and its ideal character is evinced by exact and equal measurements. From north to south, seven tribes succeeded each other, each occupying the full breadth of the land. Then a portion was separated as an offering to the Lord, a northern portion for the Levites, a central portion for the priests and Temple, and a southern portion for the city and those who serve it. Then five portions were given to the five remaining tribes, similar to those assigned to the seven.

This plan summed up well in the closing of the name of the city, "The Lord is there". The prophetic description suggests the earthly Canaan as a type of heaven. The glory and joy of heaven shall not be so much the absence of all present woes and the presence of all good things. The Lord Himself shall be there as the everlasting portion, joy and light of His people. If God is not my delight on earth, how shall He be in heaven?

Thought A city whose builder and maker is God.

Evening

READ : Psalm 102

LESSON : Seeking hope in times of trouble

VERSE 17 : He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer.

Psalm 102 may have been written during the Jewish exile in Babylon. It reflects both personal and national suffering. This is one of the individual laments, also called a "penitential" psalm. In this type of psalm, suffering is the occasion for searching one's heart before God. The afflicted Psalmist was overwhelmed and poured out his complaint before God. Added to his illness and isolation was the ridicule of his enemies. The Psalmist considered his suffering to be a punishment from God [v. 10–11].

The Psalmist not only prayed for himself but also for the nation. He asked God to have "mercy on Zion" and restore her. He was confident that the Lord would answer his prayer, and declared that "the people which shall be created [future generations] shall praise the Lord" [v. 18b]. Generations of Jews have blessed the Lord for answering this prayer in gratitude for His deliverance.

The Psalmist also saw his transient suffering in the light of God's eternity: "Thou art the same, and Thy years shall have no end" [v. 27].

How do you handle trials in your life? Do you grumble or trust in God for His deliverance?

Thought For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. – Romans 8:18

14 Oct 08 Morning

READ : Daniel 1

LESSON : The purposeful heart

VERSE 8 : But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.

The book of Daniel covers the period of the Babylonian exile. This is also known as the times of the Gentiles (Luke 21:24). The book demonstrates God's sovereignty over His people and all nations. The Almighty God is in control of history and He "worketh all things after the counsel of His own will" [Ephesians 1:11].

Babylon invaded Judah three times, each resulting in a deportation. Daniel was in the first batch of Jews to be deported by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon. He and others were chosen because the Babylonians had a policy of enlisting the best young minds for their service.

Daniel and his three friends stood out as the most promising, and they received the best. "But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself" [v. 8] with the king's privileges. Babylon's accoutrements did not detract Daniel's heart. He remained steadfast in his commitment to God.

The world today also wants our best Christian young people, our best efforts and our best attention. And it is also willing to offer its best for our devotion. But like Daniel, our hearts must be determined and our lives fully dedicated to God.

Thought Do not be a conformer to the world, but be transformed. – Romans 12:1–2

Evening

READ : Psalm 103

LESSON : Personal praise for God's blessings

VERSE 1 : Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name.

In this psalm, the word "bless" or "praise" occurs six times. This hymn of praise by David has been the inspiration of many Christian hymns, including "Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven". The Psalmist called upon his soul to praise the Lord. By "soul" he meant his whole being—intellect, emotions and spirit.

David noted several of God's benefits and His actions on our behalf, one of which is renewing our youth like the eagles [v. 2–5]. The Psalmist's reference here is to youthful strength and renewal.

The Psalmist also praised God for His blessings on the nation. God provides justice for the oppressed. He is also compassionate and merciful, slow to anger, and will not always chide or keep His anger forever. Although God punishes His people when they sin, His punishment is tempered with mercy. He will not mete out what we fully deserve. His love for us is limitless—our sins have been removed as far as the east is from the west. He knows our frailty and is like a father unto his children, tender and understanding. He rewards those who "keep His covenant and commandment to do them".

Question What tribute have we brought to Jesus' feet?

15 Oct 08 Morning

READ : Daniel 2

LESSON : The God Who changestimes

VERSE 21 : And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding.

King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had a disturbing dream. The nature of the dream was ominous enough to put the king in fear but he had forgotten the details of the dream. The pagan astrologers were unable to help him without the contents of his dream. Their lives were spared because Daniel, by the grace of God, gave the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. As it turned out, the dream of the great statue was the history of the world through four successive Gentile empires culminating in the eternal kingdom of God.

Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream was preceded by one of the most beautiful prayers of praise in the Bible [v. 20–23]. “Blessed be the name of God ... And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings” [v. 20–21].

But is not God immutable? The prophet says that God does not change [Malachi 3:6]. Verse 21 (God “changeth the times and the seasons”) simply means that God is in control. We often hear that prayer changes things but that is the human perspective. The truth is not that our prayers bend God's will to suit ours, but that they bring our will in line with God's.

Prayer Praise God for His perfect wisdom and sovereignty over our lives.

Evening

READ : Psalm 104

LESSON : The greatness of God

VERSE 13 : I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live: I will singpraise to my God while I have my being.

This psalm of praise is one of sheer grandeur and was the inspiration for the hymn “O Worship the King”. Both Psalms 103 and 104 end with praise, “Bless the Lord, O my soul”, depicting God in His majesty and glory.

The earth was created at God's command and it is subject to His sovereign control. Every living thing is dependent on God and He provides for His creation. Streams and rain provide essential water for vegetation and animal life. Grass and crops provide food for people and animals.

Olives and grapes—the principal crops of Palestine—made glad the hearts of its people.

The last section of this psalm [v. 31–35] is a doxology of praise. The Psalmist declared that he would sing unto the Lord as long as he has breath. There is a saying that every Christian should be a singing Christian. Those who refuse to sing dishonour God and show forth their ingratitude for all His blessings. The Apostle Paul exhorts us to give thanks always for all things unto God with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in our hearts to the Lord [Ephesians 5:19–20].

Praise I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever, I will sing!

16 Oct 08 Morning

READ : Daniel 3

LESSON : But if not ...

VERSE 17 : If it be so, our God Whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king.

Nebuchadnezzar had a statue erected outside the city. At its dedication, a decree was given that when the trumpet was sounded, people were to bow and worship the golden statue. News came to Nebuchadnezzar that Daniel's three friends—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—refused to bow to the statue.

The three Jews were given an ultimatum: bow to the statue or burn in the furnace. They could see Nebuchadnezzar's fury as well as God's glory. Their reply: "If it be so, our God ... is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace ... But if not ... we will not serve thy gods" [v. 17–18]. God has a way of bringing us right into the heart of the fire as He did with Job in his loss and suffering. These times of testing are also times when God moves us to confirm our devotion and faith in Him. "If it be so, praise God ... But if not ... praise Him still."

The grace to make such a stand does not come at the spur of the moment. It is the grace that is cultivated through daily devotion.

Thought God will give us a way of escape for our trials [1 Corinthians 10:13] but we must first believe that "God is faithful".

Evening

READ : Psalm 105

LESSON : The Lord of history and salvation

VERSE 42 : For he remembered His holy promise, and Abraham His servant.

Psalm 105 is called "The National Hymn of the Promised Land". It gives an account of God's mighty acts in the history of the Israelites from the time of Abraham to their settling in the Promised Land. The Psalmist's purpose is to show how God fulfilled His promise to Abraham and his descendants. We who read it are exhorted to speak and make known His wondrous works and show forth His salvation. We who are Abraham's seed and the "chosen ones" are to remember the marvellous works that God has done.

The Psalmist recounted God's dealings during the earliest times of Israel's history. God made an everlasting covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He promised them the land of Canaan for an inheritance. God providentially sent Joseph into Egypt ahead of his family before the great famine. The Israelites came to Egypt and God was preparing His people for the Exodus. Moses and Aaron were used mightily to deliver the Hebrews from their bondage.

The reason for Israel's deliverance out of slavery was that they "might observe His statutes and keep His laws" [v. 45]. Have you been set free from the bondage of sin?

Question Are you observing and keeping God's laws since you have been delivered?

17 Oct 08 Morning

READ : Daniel 4

LESSON : The “I” problem

VERSE 30 : The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?

By now, Nebuchadnezzar’s reign was firmly settled. There was peace and prosperity. But Nebuchadnezzar had another disturbing dream. He dreamt about an enormous tree that provided shade and food but an angel from heaven commanded it to be cut down, leaving only its stump. The tree was Nebuchadnezzar’s empire and the dream was a warning to Nebuchadnezzar’s pride. Daniel also counselled the king to repent and confess God’s sovereignty. However, Daniel’s warnings fell on deaf ears. A year later, Nebuchadnezzar, who had forgotten about the dream, declared in an outburst of pride, “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built ... by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?” [v. 30]. Then came God’s judgement and the mighty king was reduced to living and behaving like an animal.

The Bible warns, “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall” [Proverbs 16:18]. The problem with pride is that it afflicts all people, not just the successful and powerful. The weak and poor can be just as proud. Pride is simply a person putting himself at the centre of life. Everything is about him. God hates pride, but He “giveth grace unto the humble” [James 4:6].

Question Can a man be proud of his humility?

Evening

READ : Psalm 106

LESSON : Sin infects

VERSE 6 : We have sinned with our fathers, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly.

This psalm may have been written during or after the Babylonian exile. Parts of this psalm may have been written during the time of David. While Psalm 105 emphasises God’s faithfulness, this psalm recounts His people’s unfaithfulness to God.

It begins with a call to praise God for His faithfulness and mighty acts [v. 1–5]. The Psalmist pronounces a blessing on those who are obedient to His divine will. He then prayed that God might remember him in the day of deliverance.

The Psalmist then recounted the sins of Israel [v. 6a]. He acknowledged the iniquity and wickedness of his forefathers and of his own generation. This showed mature understanding. He did not try to shift blame onto others. It would be well with us if we do likewise. Note the long suffering and mercy of God in not totally destroying His people.

The psalm closes with a plea to God to save them and ends with a doxology. It blesses the Lord and calls for the people’s response to praise God and say “Amen”. Let us be shining testimonies for our Lord so as not to cause others to stumble.

Thought Sin does not only infect the sinner, but may also infect the lives of others as well.

18 Oct 08 Morning

READ : Daniel 5

LESSON : Not heavy enough!

VERSE 27 : TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.

By this time, Nebuchadnezzar had retired from the scene. Belshazzar, the crown prince, was running the empire. While Nebuchadnezzar is called Belshazzar's father [v. 2, 11], it is most likely that Nebuchadnezzar was Belshazzar's grandfather.

Belshazzar failed to learn from his grandfather about the sovereignty of Israel's God. In this chapter, we see the Babylonian king hosting a great feast and committing sacrilege by drinking from the golden vessels of the temple. As soon as the blasphemy was committed, the finger of a man's hand wrote a message on the wall, spelling out his downfall. The message on the wall revealed that Belshazzar's days were numbered. His life was found to be deficient when measured against God's standard of righteousness. That very night, the city fell to the Medo-Persians.

This thought ought to cause us to examine our lives and our faith in the light of God's Word. "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes" [Proverbs 12:15a]. In the end, it does not matter what positions we hold in society, how much possessions we have amassed, or how much power we wield. What matters is our standing before God.

Question If you are weighed, would you be found wanting?

Evening

READ : Psalm 107

LESSON : Mankind's troubles and God's unfailing love

VERSE 8 : Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!

This psalm is closely linked to the previous psalm and may be regarded as a contraction of the series. It points to the time of the return from the Babylonian captivity. It is a call to thanksgiving to those who have experienced God's deliverance. Today's key verse is a refrain repeated in verses 15, 21 and 31.

The Psalmist pictures man as an aimless pilgrim with no place to call home. He is enslaved in the prison house of sin and near the gates of death. He is also like a sailor tossed about in a storm, whose courage is melted and at his wit's end. In his desperation, he cried out to the Lord, and He delivered him out of all his troubles. He led the wandering pilgrim to a city, freed and pardoned the sinner, healed the afflicted and calmed the raging storm, as Jesus did.

Our God is Lord over nature and nations. He controls man's habitations and affairs, provides for the needy and delivers them out of their troubles.

The Psalmist ends with a wonderful truth. He who is wise observes these things and understands the loving kindness of the Lord [v. 43].

Thanks Thank You, Lord, for saving my soul. Thank you, Lord, for making me whole.

19 Oct 08 Morning

READ : Daniel 6

LESSON : Found innocent

VERSE 22 : My God hath sent His angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: for as much as before Him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt.

In this chapter, Daniel faced three problems. First, Daniel's promotion in the court of the king brought envy and resentment from the other members of the ruling council. Their envy led to a murderous scheme to trap Daniel. They persuaded the king to enact a law that banned any form of praying for 30 days. If he continued his usual practice of prayer, he would be breaking the king's law and risked the death penalty. However, the threat of death was of no concern to Daniel. Daniel's third problem came in the form of a few hungry lions.

The Lord delivered Daniel. The mouths of the lions were shut by an angel. Daniel was delivered because he believed in his God

[v. 23] and he was innocent [v. 22]. This implies that the law that charged Daniel was an unjust one.

God's people must be law-abiding citizens. However, in cases of unjust laws, we ought to obey God more than men [Acts 5:29]. There is a price for civil disobedience, and the Christian who chooses to go against an unjust law must also be prepared to face unjust treatment.

Prayer Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord; and the people whom He hath chosen for His own inheritance[Psalm 33:12]. Pray for our country and government.

Evening

READ : Psalms 108–109

LESSON : A plea for help and a prayer of praise

Psalm 108:1 : O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise, even with my glory.

Psalm 108 is a composite psalm, a combination of materials from Psalms 57 and 60. The first five verses are quoted from Psalm 57:7–11 and verses 6–13, from Psalm 60:5–12.

Psalm 108:1–5 shows David's faith in the midst of fear. In verse 1, he sang of his steadfast faith despite the danger confronting him. His unshaken faith called for nature to awake and rejoice with him. He even went out to awaken the dawn. His joy was so complete that he could not wait till daylight to share it. His thanksgiving overflowed to the people around him and to all the nations.

In the next four verses [Psalm 108:6–9], it is God Who spoke. This oracle is a promise of God to restore the nation and to subdue their rebellious neighbouring lands. He is like a great warrior Who will extend His control over countries on both sides of the Jordan River.

The last three verses [Psalm 108:11–13] is a prayer for God's help. It is only through divine help that they can defeat their enemies, for the help of man is vain [Psalm 108:12]. Let us learn from David to trust in God and not in man.

Thought There is no king saved by the multitude of an host: a mighty man is not delivered by much strength – Psalm 33:16

20 Oct 08 Morning

READ : Daniel 7

LESSON : The Ancient of days

VERSE 9 : I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head like the pure wool: His throne was like the fiery flame, and His wheels as burning fire.

The events in Daniel 7–8 precede that of Daniel 5–6. In the seventh chapter, Daniel received visions of the four beasts. This vision parallels that of Nebuchadnezzar in the second chapter. In Daniel’s vision, he was given an overview of world history. He saw four earthly kingdoms [v. 17], one kingdom ruled by Satan [v. 8, 11–12, 21–26] and the last was the kingdom of God [v. 9–14, 27–28].

The four earthly kingdoms are Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. The satanic kingdom is represented by the little horn [v. 8], which “made war with the saints” [v. 21]. The kingdom of Christ is described as having universal and “everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away ... which shall not be destroyed” [v. 14].

God, who sits on the throne of heaven, is described as “the Ancient of days” [v. 9, 13, 22]. This is a reference to His eternality. God is also said to be clothed in garment “white as snow”, with hair like pure wool. His throne is like a fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire [v. 9]. Don’t take these descriptions literally because God is a Spirit. They depict the absolute holiness, justice and sovereignty of God.

Thought When the news in the world is bad, look to God for the Good News.

Evening

READ : Psalms 110–111

LESSON : The ultimate Priest-King, the Messiah

Psalm 110:1 : The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at My right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.

Psalm 110 was an early royal psalm used in worship at the coronation of Davidic kings. It typologically portrays the glory of the Son of David, the Messiah.

Note the difference in Psalm 110:1 when the first Lord (Jehovah) is rendered in capital letters, and the second is in small letters. The early church saw the references in this psalm as clearly being messianic. This psalm is pure gospel concerning Christ the promised Messiah. The Jews of old understood it. That is why when Jesus posed a question to the Pharisees, quoting verse 1, they did not answer Him. If they did, they would be yielding to a plain truth [Matthew Henry].

Jesus is Lord over all. He is Lord above even His father David! He is also a priest, though not from the tribe of Levi. He is also victor over all His enemies. Soon He will judge the nations in “the day of His wrath” [Psalm 110:5].

This psalm is also most often quoted in the New Testament. Jesus quoted it [Matthew 22:44], as did Luke, Peter, Paul and the author of Hebrews. Jesus is both our Priest and King—David’s true descendant.

Thought Christ, Who is seated at the right hand of God, even maketh intercession for us.

21 Oct 08 Morning

READ : Daniel 8

LESSON : Self-magnification

VERSE 11 : Yea, he magnified himself even to the prince of the host, and by him the daily sacrifice was taken away, and the place of his sanctuary was cast down.

In this chapter, the spotlight focuses on one of the four empires mentioned earlier: Greece. Daniel's prophecies concerning Greece were revealed some 400 years before their fulfilment. In Daniel 8, the Medo-Persians were depicted as a ram pushing westward, northward and southward [v. 4], and they ended the Babylonian supremacy. Cyrus, the Medo-Persian king, was called God's shepherd [Isaiah 44:28]. It was Cyrus who signed the decree that allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem.

The Greek empire led by Alexander the Great was pictured as a goat [v. 5]. But Alexander died at 33 and his empire, which stretched as far as modern-day India, was divided into four parts, symbolised by the four horns [v. 8].

The horn that dominated is known in history as Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the ruler of Syria, which included Israel. Antiochus named himself "Epiphanes", which means "illustrious" or "manifestation". A cruel ruler, he persecuted the Jews and eradicated temple worship [v. 11]. In his crowning act of desecration, Antiochus offered a pig on the altar. He even "magnified himself even to the prince of the host" [v. 11]. But Antiochus, as all who defy God, would be broken.

Thought God will reign. Is He now King of your life?

Evening

READ : Psalms 112–113

LESSON : God's formula for success and prosperity

Psalm 112:1 : Praise ye the Lord. Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in His commandments.

This psalm is similar to Psalm 1, where the writer contrasts the fate of the righteous man with that of the wicked. It is in the form of an acrostic. Each of the 10 verses begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

It begins with a beatitude, promising blessing on the one who fears the Lord. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Such a person holds God in reverence and delights to obey His commandments. The godly person will be blessed in his posterity and his children will be mighty and influential in the land [Psalm 112:2].

The godly person also enjoys prosperity [Psalm 112:3]. When Joshua was on the threshold of the Promised Land, God gave him a similar formula for prosperity and success. "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success" [Joshua 1:8].

Many, including Christians, look for success and prosperity in all the wrong places. It can only be found in obeying God's Word.

Prayer Lord, help me to delight in Thy commandments and to obey them.

22 Oct 08 Morning

READ : Daniel 9

LESSON : Daniel's Bible

VERSE 2 : In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.

Daniel 9 contains the prophet's prayer and God's vision confirming what Daniel had read in the book of Jeremiah. Daniel received his vision in the first year of Darius' reign. Daniel's ministry stretched over two empires—Babylon and Medo-Persia. The fall of Babylon came as no surprise to Daniel because he had read about it in the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah.

Daniel was reading Jeremiah [v. 2] and praying when the angel Gabriel received what is known as the "Seventy Weeks' Prophecy". From Jeremiah, Daniel would know about the reason for and the duration of the exile. He would also have known that God would restore Israel. For this reason Daniel referred to Jeremiah's scroll as the word of the Lord (Jehovah). This is the first time—and only in this chapter—that the covenant name of God is used.

Daniel's reading of Jeremiah tells us that the Word of God is eminently relevant to all ages, it is true in all matters of life and faith. That Daniel could read Jeremiah's scroll proves that God preserves His Word. His Word is forever settled in heaven [Psalm 119:89]. Jeremiah said and believed it. The same should be enough for us.

Thought Thy word is very pure: therefore Thy servant loveth it. – Psalm 119:140

Evening

READ : Psalms 114–115

LESSON : Contrast between man-made gods and the living God

Psalm 115:4 : Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands.

Israel's neighbouring nations looked at their misfortune and began to mock God. The Psalmist answered with humour and ridicule. In contrast, the idols of their pagan neighbours, which were man-made gods, were helpless. Their eyes could not see and their mouths could not speak.

Neither could they hear, smell nor help. The Psalmist ridiculed them by saying that they who made and trusted in idols were just like the idols—helpless!

However, our God is the true and living God. He is the Sovereign One Who dwells in the heavens and does whatsoever He pleases. The Psalmist opened his hymn by ascribing glory to Him. We are not the ones who deserve glory. It should be given only to God for He alone is faithful, trustworthy and dependable. He then called upon three groups of people to trust in the Lord: the nation of Israel, the priests and "ye that fear Him" [Psalm 115:11].

Thank God that He has called us out of darkness into His marvellous light. Once we were blind but now we see! The amazing grace of God upon the slave-trader John Newton is still available to all. Have you received this marvellous grace of God?

Thought Do not ridicule, but pray for idol worshippers.

23 Oct 08 Morning

READ : Daniel 10

LESSON : The opponent

VERSE 13 : But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia.

Daniel had been fasting for three weeks when he saw his last vision. It came to him by way of a man clothed in white linen with a girdle of gold. Daniel described the body and countenance of this angelic person in terms of light. Some believe the messenger was another angel, possibly Gabriel. I believe that it was a christophany, a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ.

In the vision, we learn of an invisible war between God and Satan. Daniel had been fasting and praying for three weeks, and he was told that the answer was delayed because “the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood [the angel] one and twenty days” [v. 13].

This hindrance does not mean that God was weak. The delay was part of His perfect plan. This spiritual war continues [v. 20], “for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but ... against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” [Ephesians 6:12]. Today, Satan continues to war against God and His people. Whenever the Word of God is preached, there will be opposition. So “put on the whole armour of God” [Ephesians 6:11].

Thought Our Lord Jesus told the disciples, “This kind [of ministry] can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting” [Mark 9:29].

Evening

READ : Psalm 116

LESSON : Personal thanks giving to God

VERSE 12 : What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?

Psalm 116 is an individual song of thanksgiving and a hallelujah hymn. It is a personal testimony of a person who was seriously ill and almost died. In his distress and agony, he prayed that his life might be spared. The Lord heard his prayer and delivered him.

The Psalmist began by professing his love for the Lord Who answered his prayers and delivered him from death, Who also wiped away his tears and kept his feet from falling [v. 8]. He asked a rhetorical question in verse 12, our key verse in today’s reading. He declared that he would lift up the cup of salvation—a public acknowledgement of what God had done in his life. He would also bring a thanksgiving offering, call upon the Lord’s name in worship and express his thanks to the Lord by keeping his promises.

In times of sorrow, sickness and even at the point of death, do not call upon men but look to the Lord for consolation, comfort and deliverance, as Jonah did from the fish’s belly—for salvation is of the Lord.

Thought Count your many blessings, name them one by one.

24 Oct 08 Morning

READ : Daniel 11

LESSON : Fulfilled prophecies

VERSE 2 : And now will I shew thee the truth. Behold, there shall stand up yet three kings in Persia; and the fourth shall be far richer than they all: and by his strength through his riches he shall stir up all against the realm of Grecia.

The last two chapters tell us more about Daniel's prophecies of world history—of Persia [v. 1–2], of Greece [v. 3–4], of Egypt and Syria [v. 5–20], of Antiochus IV [v. 21–35], and of “the time of the end” [v. 36]. The prophecies concerning Persia came to pass in Daniel's day. The rest of the prophecies were fulfilled so close to the letter that liberal scholars say that the last two chapters were written centuries after the events. In other words, they claim that Daniel 11 and 12 are history and not prophecy.

However, it is the fulfilment of prophecy that proves the divine inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. Only the sovereign and omniscient God could direct and know the events and their outcomes, and cause His servants to record them.

The fulfilment of prophecy also affirms the veracity and authority of God's Word. The Bible is a record of God's faithfulness. If all that He had said concerning the kingdoms of Persia, Greece, Egypt and Syria came to pass, then we can safely say that all that He has said concerning the “the time of the end” will also come to pass. Jesus says, “I will come again” [John 14:3]. Believe it!

Thought God is faithful in His Word. Let us be faithful to His Word.

Evening

READ : Psalms 117–118

LESSON : A song of national thanksgiving

Psalm 118:1 : O give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good: because His mercy endureth for ever.

Psalms 113–118 were sung by the Jews at the Passover celebrations and were probably sung by Jesus before He went to the garden of Gethsemane to pray. Psalm 118 was also probably sung by the king in a procession of worshippers going up to the temple to worship during the Feast of Tabernacles, which was celebrated in thanksgiving for Israel's deliverance from Egypt.

The Gospel writers also quote this psalm. Two significant quotations are: “Blessed be He that cometh in the name of the Lord” [Psalm 118:26], quoted in Mark 11:9 when the people chanted and welcomed Jesus to Jerusalem at the beginning of Holy Week, and “The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner” [Psalm 118:22]. Jesus attributed the cornerstone to Himself [Mark 12:10–11].

As in Psalm 115:11, the Psalmist called upon three groups of worshippers to respond in the praise of God: Israel [Psalm 118:1], the house of Aaron (the priests) and “those that fear the Lord” [Psalm 118:4]. The Davidic king declared that God had heard his distress and answered him. He declared that with God on their side, there was nothing to fear [Psalm 118:5–6].

Hymn Meditate on the words on the the hymn “Great is Thy Faithfulness”.

25 Oct 08 Morning

READ : Daniel 12

LESSON : Be a star

VERSE 3 : And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever.

Strictly speaking, the “people” [v. 1] refers to God’s chosen nation, Israel. However, the church can be alluded to here in antitype. Peter calls the church “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people” [1 Peter 2:9]. Believers can be assured that we, too, “shall be delivered” (v. 1) for in Christ, there is “no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” [Romans 8:1].

Daniel 12:2 has the most explicit reference to the doctrine of resurrection in the Old Testament. The righteous will be raised to everlasting life; sinners to everlasting condemnation [v. 2; John 5:29].

In verse 3, there is also an implied contrast between the believer and the unbeliever; the latter is the fool who says that “in his heart, there is no God” [Psalm 14:1]. The former is the wise, who “shall shine as the brightness of the firmament.”

We must live wisely in accordance to God’s Word by doing what He has plainly commanded. Turn many to righteousness [v. 3], which is the Great Commission. That which God has hidden, don’t speculate [v. 8–9]. In all things, be faithful to God to the very end [v. 13].

Thought The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us ... that we may do all the words of this law. – Deuteronomy 29:29

Evening

READ : Psalm 119:1–24

LESSON : Seek God with your whole heart

VERSE 2 : Blessed are they that keep His testimonies, and that seek Him with the whole heart.

The theme of Psalm 119 is the Word of God. It uses many different terms to describe God’s Word: law, saying, statutes, ways, commandments, path, testimonies, precepts and judgements. Each word indicates what the Word of God is, and what it can do in your life. The writer had a great love for God’s Word. He was persecuted because he obeyed God.

Most of the verses in this psalm are either prayers for God’s help or affirmations of the Psalmist’s faith in His Word during difficult times. Our approach to this psalm is to emphasise in each section a special ministry of God’s Word. Knowing and obeying God’s Word brings blessings to your life.

Blessed are they that keep His testimonies [God’s Word]. If you want God to bless you, you must sincerely seek Him by studying His Word and obeying Him. You are to seek Him with your whole heart.

In the Bible, “heart” refers to the inner person. That includes the mind and the will. When you put your whole heart to study and obey God’s Word, He will bring blessings to your life. Experience this truth for yourself by reading His Word faithfully.

Question

Are you studying God's Word?

26 Oct 08 Morning

READ : Hosea 1

LESSON : A pictorial illustration of love

VERSE 7 : But I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by the Lord their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen.

It is a very strange commandment that Hosea received from the Lord. Go marry a harlot. Without any question and in complete obedience, Hosea married Gomer, though it may seem very hard to do or may sound unreasonable.

The marriage was as an object lesson on the relationship between God and Israel. Hosea is pictured as God while Gomer, Israel. After marriage, Gomer bore three children and named them Jezreel (God sows), Loruhamah (not loved) and Loammi (not my people). Hosea loved his wife even though she was unfaithful to him. When she ran away Hosea found her and took her back to the family.

The love of God is intense, and He is more forgiving than Hosea. The Israelites had been unfaithful to God. They worshipped other gods and idols. They broke the laws of God. Yet, in love, God brought them back to His fold. It was a one-sided love affair. God was merciful and gracious towards His people even then. He is still the same merciful and gracious God. We may have sinned and turned away from Him but He has been calling and waiting patiently for us to repent.

Thought And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. – Mark 12:30

Evening

READ : Psalm 119:25–48

LESSON : Down but not out

VERSE 28 : My soul melteth for heaviness: strengthen Thou me according unto Thy Word.

The Christian life has its ups and downs. The moods of our lives as Christians can change rapidly. This is one of the reasons why many Christians love the book of Psalms. We find a wide range of Christian experiences, from the joyous season high up on the mountains, near to God and communing with Him, to the season in the dark and deep valleys, when we cry out to God. The Psalmist focused on his problems and difficulties. He prayed for strength and comfort from God's Word. He said, "My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken Thou me according to Thy Word" [v. 25]. His situation was desperate, almost bringing him to the grave. Why was he in such a condition?

Here are a few reasons: depression; an acute sense of his sinfulness leading to a sense of humiliation in God's presence; affections that pressed heavily upon him; imminent peril of death; sickness of heart. However, he did not focus on his problems for long. He cried to God for help [v. 25b, 28].

In times of trouble, we can call upon God to help us. His Word can revive and comfort us when we are depressed.

Prayer Lord Jesus, help me to look up to You for help whenever I feel depressed.

27 Oct 08 Morning

READ : Hosea 2

LESSON : Be grateful to God our creator and provider

VERSE 23 : And I will show her unto Me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not My people, Thou art My people; and they shall say, Thou art my God.

God was very displeased with the ingratitude of the Israelites. They went after other gods. This is spiritual prostitution. God is faithful and He expects us to be also because He commands it. The Israelites did not acknowledge that their food and blessings came from God. What a shame that they perceived that their worldly providence was from the idols and the false gods that they worshipped [v. 5]. In their folly, they forgot about God and did not pledge their love to Him. God warned them that He would strip them naked in punishment [v. 3] and denounced His relationship with Israel [v. 2]. He would take away the fertility of the land (since they worshipped Baal as the god of fertility). God, Who provided all blessings, the rain, the sun, good harvest, health and protection, would also remove all these until the Israelites repented. Are you thankful for your blessings? Who gave you the ability and health to earn and own material goods? Where does your health come from? Reflect on the goodness of God each morning when you get up and again before you sleep.

Thought We love Him, because He first loved us. – 1 John 4:19

Evening

READ : Psalm 119:49–72

LESSON : My portion

VERSE 57 : Thou art my portion, O Lord: I have said that I would keep Thy words.

What do you think of God? Do you look upon Him as your Father, Redeemer or Shepherd? Have you ever thought of Him as your portion?

The Psalmist made it clear that the Lord is our portion. He is all we need. What is a portion? The Hebrew word has the basic idea of dividing family inheritances so that each person had his allotted portion. The priests and Levites were not given an inheritance in the land of Canaan because the Lord was their inheritance and their portion. The word also has a wider meaning as it was used to describe the relationship between God and His people.

Believers today have a rich spiritual inheritance in Christ. He is our life, our refuge and strength. Christ is all and in all. He controls everything. Our riches in Christ is revealed in His Word and it never diminishes.

The Psalmist's promise in verse 57 is echoed in the words of our Lord Jesus in John 14:23a, "If a man loves Me, he will keep My words." Notice that "the person" comes before "the precept". Love the Lord and it will be easy to obey what He says.

Thanks Thou my everlasting portion, More than friend or life to me.

28 Oct 08 Morning

READ : Hosea 3

LESSON : Paid in blood

VERSE 5 : Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days.

The metaphor of Hosea's family life and God's covenant relationship with Israel continues. Hosea loved his wife Gomer even though she was adulterous. God asked Hosea to love his wife again. It was another difficult order for Hosea but he obeyed God. The situation was so bad that Hosea needed to redeem Gomer by paying silver and barley. (Perhaps Gomer's practice of prostitution had forced her into slavery.)

The similarity between Hosea's marriage and that of God's covenant is a high level of unselfish love. Gomer lost her freedom and so did Israel. They were no longer able to govern themselves. They were exiled for discipline's sake. Eventually they realised how much better it would be to be faithful to God. Just as Gomer needed to be redeemed by Hosea, we too need to be redeemed by God.

Today, we have freedom from the bondage of sin. Jesus paid for our sins. He redeemed us through the shedding of His own blood. As a result of this those who accept Jesus as their saviour have a free passage to heaven. We are freed at a great price. Let us be grateful and faithful to God.

Thought Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for He hath visited and redeemed His people. –
Luke 1:68

Evening

READ : Psalm 119:73–96

LESSON : Divine comfort

VERSE 82 : Mine eyes fail for Thy Word, saying, When wilt Thou comfort me?

We must accept both pleasant and unpleasant experiences of life as from the Lord [Job 2:1–10; Philippians 4:10–13]. It seems that the Psalmist is cast down for two reasons: his own moral frailty and unjust persecution. He said, "My soul fainteth for Thy salvation. For I am become like a bottle in the smoke." This is how the Psalmist felt because of his trouble, trials and persecution. In the midst of his trials and weakness, he cried out to God: "When wilt Thou comfort me? How many are the days of Thy servant?" These questions are the natural responses of suffering saints [Jeremiah 15:15]. It is difficult for most people to wait for things they can see. It is even more difficult to wait upon our unseen Lord to work out His will. Let us see what the Psalmist has to say: (a) I hope in Thy Word; (b) I will not forget Thy statutes; (c) All Thy commandments are faithful; (d) I forsook not Thy precepts; and (e) I shall keep the testimony of Thy mouth. The Word of God is the source of our comfort. So let God's Word work in your heart.

Prayer Thank You, Lord, for Your comforting presence.

29 Oct 08 Morning

READ : Hosea 4

LESSON : God charges the people

VERSE 11 : Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart.

The chapter begins with the words, “Hear the Word of God”. It was a charge the Lord had against Israel. His people had broken their covenant with God, so He was taking them to task. They had been charged for not showing faithfulness and love to God. There was no knowledge of God in the land. The evil consequences of their sin affected every creature in the land, including animal life [v. 3].

There was another charge laid on the priests. They were involved in cult prostitution. In the Canaanite fertility cults, the priests and the cult prostitutes were engaged in sexual immorality as an act of “worship”. The gross sins were intended to emulate the gods to share in their powers of procreation. The goal was to compel the gods to preserve the earth’s fertility.

This was practised by the priests of Israel, God’s chosen people! These abuses would bring God’s punishment on the people and priests. God would take away the sacrificial system that fed the priests so well. He would hold them—and not their daughters—accountable for the cult prostitution that males supported and allowed to flourish. God is fair in His judgement.

Thought For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. – Matthew 6:21

Evening

READ : Psalm 119:97–120

LESSON : Love God’s Word

VERSE 97 : O how love I Thy law! it is my meditation all the day.

The central theme of Psalm 119 is summed up by the exclamation, “O how love I thy law! [v. 97]. The Psalmist declared his love for God’s commandments in verses 47 and 48. Now he said that he loved God’s law, and meditated on it all the day. Can you honestly say that you love God’s Word?

The Psalmist could, and did. So should every believer in Christ. Loving God’s Word flows directly from loving God. Loving God’s Word should be one of the marks of every true believer in Christ. Why should we love God’s Word?

God’s Word is trustworthy. It is always true. We can trust it. We don’t have to worry about Him lying to us because He is holy and faithful. It is because God’s Word is eternal and changeless [v. 89; Matthew 24:35]. It is full of spiritual wisdom [v. 98]. It is sweeter than honey [v. 103]. It is important to read the Bible daily. Knowing God’s Word helps us to grow spiritually and overcome life’s problems. Best of all, the Word of God tells us how we can go to heaven. Do you love God’s Word?

Question How much do you love God’s Word?

30 Oct 08 Morning

READ : Hosea 5

LESSON : Repent while there is yet time

VERSE 15 : I will go and return to My place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek My face: in their affliction they will seek Meearly.

This time the chapter begins with the words, “Hear this”. It was directed at the priests and the leaders. The priests and prophets did not teach the Word or help the people know God. The priests became wayward and followed the Canaanite fertility-cult teaching that was condemned by God.

Another problem was that the Israelites turned to Assyria and Egypt for political help instead of bringing their problems to God in prayer. It was a ridiculous situation. God had blessed the nation. The people enjoyed themselves and pursued a self-indulgentlifestyle that left little need to seek the Lord.

The leaders moved the boundary stones. Moving a boundary stone meant changing the traditional land allotments, which is considered theft. The leaders were placing their own landmarks or ignoring God’s guidance. God withdrew Himself and His blessingsand let the people reap what they had sown.

God withdraws so that we can realise what we are missing and want Him to come back to us again. He will return with blessing if only we repent. God is waiting for us to come back to His fold.

Thought I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. – Luke 13:3

Evening

READ : Psalm 119:121–144

LESSON : God’s wonderful Word

VERSE 129 : Thy testimonies are wonderful: therefore doth my soul keep them.

In this section, the Psalmist begins with the wonder of God’s Word. He expressed his desire for God’s Word. He wept for those who disobeyed God’s Word.

God’s testimonies are wonderful in and of themselves, regardless of what people may think of them. In that sense, God’s Word is not affected by the attitudes and actions of people. It is the Word of God, not of man [2 Peter 1:21]. It is absolutely perfect, without error or contradiction, and is relevant to us. Up till today, God’s enemies have sought to burn it, destroy it, alter it, deny it and do all manner of grievous things to it. Isaiah 40:8 says, “The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the Word of our God shall stand for ever.”

The Holy Spirit shows us wonderful things in God’s Word and enables us to meditate on His wonderful works. His light gives us spiritual insight and understanding. He enables us to walk according to His Word and keeps us away from sin.

We must bless and praise God for His Word. We are to make the daily reading and study of it our discipline and delight. Will you do it?

Refrain Beautiful words, wonderful words, wonderful words of life.

31 Oct 08 Morning

READ : Hosea 6

LESSON : Our heart matters

VERSE 6 : For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

Israel had broken her covenant with the Lord by going after Baal. As a result, God withdrew His blessings. God would wait until Israel would seek Him earnestly and admit their guilt.

God was very disappointed that the people compared Him and equated Him with nature. In return, He compared the people to morning mist and early dew. Their covenantal relationship was as temporary as these phenomena. If the people truly acknowledged God, they must manifest that in their human relationships. They should care for all levels in the society—husband, wife, father, son, host, guest, kings and subjects. The knowledge of God must be expressed in action on another person's behalf. Instead they not only sinned against God but they also transgressed against one another.

Today, we have Christians who repent in the same shallow manner. God wants genuine repentance [v. 6]. How deep is your loyalty to the King of kings? Who do you pledge allegiance to? We should continually remind ourselves that we are frail humans and our sinful ways can only be changed when we surrender our will to God.

Thought ... Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice ... – 1 Samuel 15:22

Evening

READ : Psalm 119:145–176

LESSON : The Word of God and prayer

VERSE 145 : I cried with my whole heart; hear me, O Lord: I will keep Thy statutes.

The Word of God helps us to pray in the will of God. The Word of God and prayer go together.

The more we know God's Word, the more effectively we will pray in the will of God.

The way the Psalmist addressed God reminds us that our God is personal. He acknowledged God as his Lord and Master. He was addressing the God Who is real, mighty, glorious, holy and true. He is praying to the faithful God Who keeps His Word. This matter of relationship is very important in prayer.

Then the Psalmist gives us different aspects of the God to Whom we pray. He is able and willing to answer our prayer [Isaiah 65:24]. We need this divine quickening [v. 149b]. He is the Lord Who is always near us [v. 151a]. Man is near to harass; God is near to help. Man is near to hurt; God is near to protect. Man is near to discourage; God is near to comfort. Man is near to drag us down to the world, the flesh and the devil; God is near to lift us up to the heavenly things.

If God is for us, who can be against us?

Prayer Teach me to long for Your Word always.

01 Nov 08 Morning

READ : Hosea 7

LESSON : Stay close to God

VERSE 10 : And the pride of Israel testified to his face: and they do not return to the Lord their God, nor seek Him for all this.

Hosea condemned Israel for relying on her own strength, rather than God's. When Israel should have sought divine power, her people relied on their own power, either through their chosen rulers or through political alliances with other nations.

Jeroboam II was a powerful king who enjoyed a long peaceful reign but turmoil followed after his death. Of the six kings after him, four were assassinated as political factions fought for power. They turned to violence instead of seeking God. Israel was filled with wickedness and chaos.

Hosea gives the example of the ancient oven, which depicted the passions, power struggle and instability of the people who devoured their own rulers. The plot for another king began at the coronation of the new king, a state of affairs that resulted from people relying on their own devices. The situation did not improve, no matter how many kings they changed or which foreign power they sought alliance with.

Trusting in human strength is a folly that brings us to downfall. Israel did not realise that they were ageing and losing strength by trusting in foreigners. Like a senseless dove, Israel was deceived by worldly powers such as Assyria and Egypt.

Thought Meditate on James 4:8.

Evening

READ : Psalms 120–122

LESSON : Peacemakers

PSalm 120:1 : In my distress I cried unto the Lord, and He heard me.

The next 15 Psalms are known as “The Song of Ascents”. Ten of them are anonymous, four are written by David [Psalms 122, 124, 131, 133] and one by Solomon [Psalm 127]. These psalms are thought to be the songs that Jewish pilgrims sang when they went to Jerusalem for feasts three times a year (Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacle), as required by the Lord. Spiritually speaking, it was to remind them that they were still pilgrims [1 Chronicles 29:15]. Many believers want to be settlers, not pilgrims. We need to remind ourselves that we are pilgrims on earth but citizens of heaven.

Psalm 120 begins with distress and ends with war. The Psalmist deals with deception and slander. Instead of complaining about his situation, he shared it with the Lord. His problem was that the people were lying about him and slandering his name.

The writer was a peacemaker and tried to encourage his godless Jewish neighbours to be peaceable. However, his loving words only made them angrier and more intent to make war. They were arrogant troublemakers.

The Lord did not change his circumstances. God gave him the endurance that he needed to be faithful under pressure before He gave deliverance.

Reminder As God's children, let us be peacemakers for the Lord's sake.

02 Nov 08 Morning

READ : Hosea 8

LESSON : Worship God as instructed

VERSE 14 : For Israel hath forgotten his Maker, and buildeth temples; and Judah hath multiplied fenced cities: but I will send a fire upon his cities, and it shall devour the palaces thereof.

The Israelites were trying to worship God in their own ways so that they could be allied to the world at the same time. God had given the commandment to worship as well as the way He wanted to be worshipped. There is no other way to worship God than in the way that He has instructed.

The sin of the calf idol of Samaria was not worshipping the wrong god but worshipping the true God in the wrong way. God would not allow Himself to be represented by a dead image made by a craftsman. The people have been instructed repeatedly but they disobeyed. They would come to a terrible awakening when their worldly alliances turned against them and swallowed them up. They would then become a worthless thing [v. 8].

Hosea condemned the people for having their own concept of sacrifice. Sacrifices were offered at altars with the thinking that God ought to be present to accept the offerings. God was displeased with the many altars. If we do foolish things, we face the destructive consequences of our action. If we sow in the wind we will reap the whirlwind of destruction.

Thought : Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God. – Psalm 20:7

Evening

READ : Psalms 123–125

LESSON : Look up!

Psalm 123:1 : Unto Thee lift I up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens.

Psalm 123 was probably written by King Hezekiah, when the Assyrians were invading Judah and surrounded Jerusalem. The immediate occasion was probably the humiliating speeches made by Rabshakeh, in which he tried to subvert the loyalty of the Jewish people [Isaiah 36–37].

When we find ourselves being ridiculed and persecuted, where do we go for help? If our outlook is disturbing, we must look up. That was what the Psalmist did [Psalm 123:1]. Looking to the Lord means trusting Him and handing our problems over to Him. It means to acknowledge His sovereignty.

When we look up to God, we acknowledge that He is mightier than we. He is the Creator; we are the creatures. He is the Master; we are the servants. To look up to Him means we are willing to follow His direction [Psalm 123:2]. In eastern countries, masters often command their servants by means of hand signals so the servants keep their eyes on the master's hand. The master gives them his direction for their work through hand signals. So we are to look up to God for direction. Looking up to God means we are seeking His help. Did God answer Hezekiah's prayer? Yes! [2 Kings 19:35–36].

Thought : When the outlook is bad, try the uplook!

03 Nov 08 Morning

READ : Hosea 9

LESSON : Bad influence leads us to apostasy

VERSE 2 : The floor and the winepress shall not feed them, and the new wine shall fail in her.

The feast of the Tabernacles was a time to celebrate joyfully the harvest that God has blessed. Hosea asked the Israelites to “rejoice not”. Produce was an essence of the feast. God would stop blessing them in future and there would be no harvest. Instead, Israel would be exiled and would have to eat “unclean food” in foreign lands. In exile, they would no longer be able to come to the tabernacle to worship. They would have to give up their freedom and their produce to their earthly task-masters.

Some take “the prophet is a fool” [v. 7] to refer to Hosea, in which case it would refer to the people’s rejection of Hosea and his warnings. Others think that it was Hosea’s judgement of the false prophets. In any case, the warning is that it is folly to defy the Word of God. Instead of keeping true to God’s Word, Israel’s contacts with the Canaanites had brought apostasy.

We are to obey God’s Word and not to be influenced by the world. Naturally, the world hates God because they are swayed towards the pleasures of sin. Just as sin and disobedience kept Israel from God, it too will draw us away from God.

Thought Read 1 Peter 4:17.

Evening

READ : Psalms 126–128

LESSON : Fear the Lord

Psalm 128:1 : Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord; that walketh in His ways.

The word “blessed” is the usual word found throughout the Old Testament. It is in the plural form. It is the word for happy. It can be rendered: “Happy is everyone that feareth the Lord.” If we are to be happy, our lives must be centred on the Lord. The word “fear” is not slavish fear but spiritual fear (combining elements of reverence and trust). When we fear the Lord, God will bless us in three areas of our lives.

He will bless us in our walk with the Him [Psalm 128:1]. This means that our conduct and character become holy.

God also blesses our work [Psalm 128:2]. How often we think that our planning, skills and hard work are all we need to be successful in our career, but such is not the case [Psalm 127:1]. It is the Lord Who gives His people the “power to get wealth” [Deuteronomy 8:18].

Finally, God blesses us in our homes [Psalm 128:3]. This does not mean that everyone is going to have a family. It means that we are going to be a blessing to our family. So, let us fear Him, walk in His ways and receive His blessings.

Reminder Reverence is the holy fear of God.

04 Nov 08 Morning

READ : Hosea 10

LESSON : Remember the source of your blessings

VERSE 12 : Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the Lord, till He come and rain righteousness upon you.

It seems so ironic that we pray for blessings and when God blesses us with plenty, we use the prosperity only for our own pleasure. We no longer have time for God. God entrusts us with physical resources to use and enjoy but we take them for granted and allow wealth to replace God as the centre of our lives.

As Israel became prosperous, the people built multiple altars and sacred sites that did not glorify God. How deceitful and ungrateful man can be! Hosea had warned that they would reap what they had sowed. They planted wickedness and deception so they would reap judgement and punishment. They were likened to a young heifer forced to bear the yoke to plough. Since Israel now trusted in their warriors, Hosea prophesied that Israel would be destroyed. We know that the Assyrians led a siege on Israel. Violence and ruthlessness followed in the destruction of the Jews.

Pray that we be good stewards of God's blessings. We are to honour Him and return His love in giving and serving. All blessings come from God and it is only right that we acknowledge the source and honour Him.

Thought : What have you done for the Lord today?

Evening

READ : Psalms 129–131

LESSON : Plow of suffering

Psalm 129:3 : The plowers plowed upon my back: they made long their furrows.

Psalm 129 was probably written after the exiles returned to the land of Canaan, where they were surrounded by their enemies. No matter how severe the persecution, the Psalmist declares that nothing can destroy the people of Israel. He instructs us on how to handle suffering for the sake of Christ.

Accept it as from the Lord. Persecution is not something “strange” in the life of the believer [1 Peter 4:12]. Many godly people had suffered for the Lord. Israel has suffered more than any nation in history. Yet Israel has not been destroyed! The church of Jesus Christ has experienced many forms of persecution but it still stands, and will stand until the Lord's return [Matthew 16:18]. If the Lord allows people to plough on our backs, it happens because He has planned a harvest. Just be sure we plant the right kind of seed. If we plant anger and malice, we will not reap the blessings of the Lord. However, if we show love, peace and patience, we will experience spiritual harvesting.

Trust the Lord to help us in His own time. Finally, wait for the Lord to judge your enemies and don't be revengeful in your attitude towards them.

Thought : Suffering is within God's permissive will for His children.

05 Nov 08 Morning

READ : Hosea 11

LESSON : God never gives up on His people

VERSE 10 : They shall walk after the Lord: he shall roar like a lion: when he shall roar, then the children shall tremble from the west.

There is hope in God. God would not utterly destroy Israel as He did to other heathen cities (such as Sodom and Gomorrah). In family terms, Israel's relationship with God is like that of a pendulum, swinging back and forth.

God had been like a father to a child. He taught His child how to walk, healed him, fed him and guided him with kindness. Yet the child did not return his parent's tender love, unashamedly chasing instead after Baal and other idols. For rebellion, Israel was forced to submit to the harsh rule of Assyria. Their trusted ally Egypt did not help.

According to Mosaic law, the disobedient son was to be stoned to death [Deuteronomy 21:18–21], though Israel was spared. God is merciful, gracious and full of love. In Hosea's case, he continued to love Gomer although she was adulterous and unfaithful.

Thank God that His heart is divine and not human. "I will not execute the fierceness of Mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee: and I will not enter into the city" [v. 9].

Thought Read Deuteronomy 13:3

Evening

READ : Psalms 132–134

LESSON : What is your ambition?

Psalm 132:5 : Until I find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob.

What is the consuming ambition of your life? David's dream was to build a temple for the Lord [Psalm 132:4–5]. During much of his life, David was a man of war. He defended Israel from her enemies and brought peace to the land. Then he said, "I am not going to have any sleep until I find a place for God to dwell." That was his consuming ambition. He yearned to build the temple and that was his holy ambition. However, the Lord did not allow David to fulfil his holy ambition. He chose his son, Solomon, instead.

Of course, David was disappointed at first, but said, "If this is the will of God, I will accept it." Then he did a wonderful thing: he helped his son to build the temple. He provided the plans for the temple and the means needed for the project [1 Chronicles 28:11–19].

We may not fulfil all of our plans and ambitions but we can do the next best thing. If God does not allow us to accomplish our goals, let us help others to meet theirs. We cannot do everything, but we can do something to help others.

Prayer Help me to be on fire for You, Lord.

06 Nov 08 Morning

READ : Hosea 12

LESSON : Wait on thy God continually

VERSE 6 : Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgement, and wait on thy God continually.

Israel's speech has been a perpetual string of lies and deceitfulness [Hosea 11:12]. Their false speech, compounded with violence [v. 1], had carried them away from God into alliance with Assyria and Egypt. It was a life of deceit that began with Jacob's grasping of Esau's heel at birth [Genesis 25:26] and continued with Jacob's struggle to overpower God [Genesis 32:24–30]. Israel was commanded to observe mercy and justice and wait continually on the God of their fathers.

Hosea also listed the sins that were committed by the Israelites. Ephraim (another name for the 10 northern tribes) was dishonest in his business dealings. They became rich but were oblivious to their own sin. God warned them through the prophets but they rejected the Word of God. Whoever despises the message of God will perish.

Let those who have dealt unjustly and unkindly repent and return to God. Turn to God in faith, to love, obey and depend on Him. Walk with Him in all conversation and godliness. As we wait upon Him continually, may we experience His wonderful presence. May we say with the Psalmist, "In Thy presence is fullness of joy" [Psalm 16:11b].

Thought Read and ponder on Revelation 3:14–22.

Evening

READ : Psalms 131–136

LESSON : Hallelujah!

Psalm 135:1 : Praise ye the Lord. Praise ye the name of the Lord; praise Him, O ye servants of the Lord.

Have you ever wondered why the Psalmist instructs us to "Praise the Lord, hallelujah"? Firstly, we should praise the Lord because "God is good". Sometimes we take His goodness for granted. Secondly, we should praise God because of His grace. It was an act of grace for God to choose Israel [Deuteronomy 7:7–8] and take her to be His peculiar treasure [Exodus 19:5]. The Hebrew word for "peculiar treasure", occurring only eight times in the Old Testament, denotes how special and treasured God's people are in His sight. When God chose us [John 15:16], we also become precious in His sight. Thirdly, we should praise Him for His greatness. "For I know that the Lord is great, and that our Lord is above all gods."

Finally, he tells us that we should praise God for His government. He does what He pleases. He is the ruler over all creation, from the heights of the heavens to the depths of the sea [Exodus 20:4b]. Even the weather is under His control.

Whatever your situation, when you think of the goodness of God, His grace, His greatness and power, you cannot stop praising the Lord.

Prayer Help me to praise You at all times.

07 Nov 08 Morning

READ : Hosea 13

LESSON : God's love restores Israel

VERSE 9 : O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in Me is thine help.

The Israelites were reproved and threatened for their idolatry, wantonness, pride, luxury and other abuses of their wealth and prosperity. They chose dissipation rather than exaltation. Having cut themselves off from the Lord and His righteousness, Israel's sin increased and the inevitable result was the complete dissipation pictured in verse 3 by the morning cloud of mist that passed away and like the chaff and smoke blown away [Hosea 6:4; Psalm 1:4].

Israel had destroyed herself by her rebellion; but she could not save herself. Her help was only from the Lord. The One Who had been companion and guardian through the Israelites' trials would meet them in just vengeance as the most terrible beast that inhabited their forests. Except that sinners repent and believe the Gospel, anguish will soon come upon them. Israel would be desolated for her sin. Great sorrow and pain would come upon them. Yet there would be a merciful and powerful interposition of God to save a remnant of them.

Hosea offered one last glimpse of hope. God has power over death and the grave [v. 14]. Israel faces impending judgement for her sin because of her refusal to repent.

Thought Read and meditate on Romans 11:26–27.

Evening

READ : Psalms 137–138

LESSON : An abundant faith

Psalm 138:7 : Though I walk in the midst of trouble, Thou wilt revive me: Thou shalt stretch forth Thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and Thy right hand shall save me.

David wrote Psalm 138 when he was surrounded by his enemies. He committed himself to wholehearted praise and thanksgiving. He acknowledged the boldness and strength that the Lord had given in answer to his cries. All the kings and their people will praise God as a result of hearing His Word.

“Though the Lord be high, yet hath He respect unto the lowly” [Psalm 138:6a]. God's active involvement on behalf of us is clear evidence of His loving kindness [Psalm 138:2]. He also knows where the proud are. The Psalmist is confident of God's ability to rescue him even when trouble surrounds him [Psalm 138:7]. His abundant faith gives him a two-fold confidence in the government of God. First, God will revive him because an all-powerful, all-knowing and all-loving God is with him. Then God will rescue him. He will stretch out His hand against the wrath of His enemies.

Are you in the midst of trouble? Perhaps you are hurting and afraid. Even so, you can praise the God of power, love and mercy. You can rely on Him for deliverance. He will be merciful. He will deliver and never forsake you.

Thought Our troubles seem smaller when we remember the greatness of God.

08 Nov 08 Morning

READ : Hosea 14

LESSON : Israel's repentance and God's blessing

VERSE 4 : I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for Mine anger is turned away from him.

Chapter 14 is powerful, comforting and full of hope. Hosea called upon his people again; "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God" [v. 1]. He urged them to confess their sins [v. 2–3]. They had to pray for forgiveness and abandon their reliance upon Assyria. They must also not depend on Egypt for military might or trust in man-made idols for spiritual blessings. A merciful God is always ready to forgive and restore a penitent humble nation. Repentance brings full restoration. He will love them freely and turn away His anger. He will heal their backsliding and bless them spiritually and materially. This will produce spiritual freshness like the dew, a lily taking root downwards and progressing upwards. Idolatry and sin will be forsaken. "From Me is thy fruit found" is the Lord's final reminder to Ephraim that every blessing has come from above. Hosea concludes that life's essence is to be found in "the ways of the Lord". The righteous walk in them but the rebellious stumble and fall. Are you a stumbling sinner or a forgiven sinner? Let us heed God's call to repentance. If we return to Him, He will receive us, restore us and revive us.

Thought : It's never too late to repent.

Evening

READ : Psalm 139

LESSON : He created me

VERSE 14 : I will praise Thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are Thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.

Psalm 139 is a wonderful psalm of praise to God our Creator. It celebrates creation, in particular, the supernatural creation of the human being. God's involvement in the life of a child does not begin at birth but at conception.

Our Creator, the life giver, knows us before we begin to breathe. He is the One Who watches us while we are being formed secretly in our mother's womb. Our God beholds our unformed substance and sees us being "intricately woven" in the lowest part of the earth. As a great mercy all our members in continuance are fashioned according as they are written in God's book, even all the days of our lives.

We are but one part—an important part but still one part of this wider world that is also fearfully and wonderfully made. Creation is to be taken seriously and treated with reverence and respect, while still to be enjoyed as beautiful and wonderful. We express our gratitude to God for His omnipotence. We marvel at His creative and designing miracle of human conception and redemption. Let us give ourselves totally to Him.

Prayer : Thank You, Lord, for Your beautiful creation and Your faithfulness in sustaining Your world and us.

09 Nov 08 Morning

READ : Joel 1

LESSON : Awake and repent

VERSE 5 : Awake, ye drunkards, and weep; and howl, all ye drinkers of wine, because of the new wine; for it is cut off from your mouth.

The name Joel means “one to whom Jehovah is God” (worshipper of Jehovah). Joel’s prophecies were probably given in the early days of Joash (870–865 BC). This chapter describes a terrible devastation caused by the invasion of countless armies of insects that was to befall the country of Judah as God’s judgement. It was a calamity so terrible that even the older generations had never previously witnessed.

All the people were called to mourn this judgement [v. 8–13]. They were exhorted to humble themselves in earnest repentance before God [v. 14–20].

One group of people who was rebuked were the drunkards. Intoxicated with wine, they had become senseless and indifferent to the reality of their spiritual condition. Joel rebuked them to “awake” as they would soon be without the wine that they had loved so much. No new wine would be produced as the vineyards would be destroyed.

Like the drunkard, when we become so obsessed with life’s pleasures that we live in excess, God may see it fit to remove them from us. The more we depend on worldly cares for satisfaction and happiness, the more open we are to trouble and frustration.

Thought : Sowing a lifestyle that defies God’s Word will eventually reap disaster.

Evening

READ : Psalms 140–141

LESSON : God is listening

Psalm 141:3 : Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.

David asked God to guard his mouth and his heart. He wanted to be preserved from sinful utterances and sinful deeds. He wanted to remain holy and separated from all evil things. Evil comes in many forms: the sins of speech, of the heart and of action [Psalm 141:3–4].

The wise man carefully watches his heart, lest he succumbs to the sins of speech or action.

Speech is an indicator of one’s relationship to the Lord. The wicked use their tongues to destroy [Psalm 140:3] but the speech of the righteous expresses love and fidelity [Psalm 15:2–3].

Lies, gossip, indecent jokes, angry words, vulgar comments and disrespectful use of the Lord’s name should never come from our lips. We must ask God to preserve us from a forward mouth and perverse lips [Proverbs 4:24].

The Lord Jesus warned “that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgement” [Matthew 12:36]. We should speak only things that God approves of. Our desire should be the same as David’s prayer in Psalm 19:14, “Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.”

Thought : Every word we say on earth will be accounted for.

10 Nov 08 Morning

READ : Joel 2

LESSON : A time to weep

VERSE 12 : Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning.

The day of God's judgement drew near as the alarm was sounded [v. 1]. The trumpet sound was a call to the people of Judah to come together to fast, weep and pray—outward signs of inward remorse and grief. It was going to be a terrible time as numerous armies of insects sent by God would have devastating results when they advanced [v. 2–11].

Besides warning of the coming judgement, God gave the people a chance and exhorted them to repent. They were to rend their hearts and not their garments, a call to true repentance and not merely an outward show of remorse. True repentance is earnest and comes from the heart.

A heart that is unrepentant and continuously sinful invites God's wrath. Proverbs 6:16 lists seven things that the Lord hates—a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked imaginations, feet that are swift in running to mischief, false-witness bearing, and one who sows discord among brethren. All these sins are injurious to our neighbour. God hates sin. Let us search our hearts honestly and humbly repent.

Thought God fully knows what lurks in our hearts.

--- Evening

READ : Psalm 142

LESSON : Loneliness in suffering

VERSE 6 : Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low: deliver me from my persecutors; for they are stronger than I.

This Psalm teaches the importance of praying for help in times of persecution. David had fled from Saul and taken refuge in the cave of Adullam [1 Samuel 22:1]. Trouble and trouble-makers hounded him. Hemmed in by his circumstances and smothered by danger, he cried to the Lord for help. He knew that there was no human being to rescue him, give him refuge or care for his soul. He was trapped, so he begged for freedom.

In distress, David trusted God for release. In release, he promised to praise God for his deliverance. He asked God to bring him out of the prison-like cave so that he might be able to give public acknowledgement to God's name. David cast all his care upon God and his trust sustained him.

Complaint was replaced by faith. Desperation was replaced by praise. Loneliness was replaced by fellowship. David was convinced that God had heard him and that He would do as he had asked. David's last words were, "for Thou shalt deal bountifully with me" [v. 7].

When we bring our complaints to God, remember He is still our portion. Let us have confidence that He will yet "deal bountifully with us".

Thought When we experience suffering, God's comfort will abound.

11 Nov 08 Morning

READ : Joel 3

LESSON : The restoration of the Jews and Gentiles

VERSE 1 : For, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem,

The final chapter of Joel reveals the prophecies relating to God's judgement in the last days [v. 1–17] and the blessings enjoyed by the Church [v. 18–21]. While the Jews saw it as a return from Babylon, some interpret it to be a restoration of the Jews to their land. This includes the gathering of the Gentiles who would eventually be saved [Romans 11:12, 15; Galatians 3:29]. The beauty of God's redemptive plan is seen in His inclusion of the Gentiles. Christ is the fountain and His saving grace flows even to the most remote parts of the Gentile world [v. 18]. We do not deserve the gift of salvation but Christ came to die for us. By God's grace through faith, it is now possible for us to enter heaven.

Galatians 3:28 says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek ... for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." We are all on the same level. Whatever our physical condition, social status or race, we need to confess our sins before God to be saved.

At the foot of the cross shall all come, for none shall be turned away when he calls on the saving grace of Christ.

Thought "... Your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake" [1John 2:12b].

Evening

READ : Psalm 143

LESSON : Depression

VERSE 1 : Hear my prayer, O Lord, give ear to my supplications: in Thy faithfulness answer me, and in Thy righteousness.

The last of the penitential Psalm was written by David during Absalom's rebellion. He was broken, lonely, afraid, overwhelmed and desolate. In his distress he turned to God. He appealed to God's faithfulness and righteousness. His soul was doomed, his safety was destroyed and his spirit was desolate. He recalled God's mighty acts in times past. He then brought petitions for God to act upon: "Hear me speedily, O Lord" [v. 7a]. "Cause me to hear Thy loving kindness in the morning" [v. 8a]. "Deliver me, O Lord, from mine enemies" [v. 9a]. "Teach me to do Thy will" [v. 10a]. "Quicken me, O Lord, for Thy name's sake" [v. 11a]. "And of Thy mercy cut off my enemies" [v. 12a].

Low-spirited and languid, David further pleaded with God for His mercy to deal drastically with all his enemies. His plea was granted [Psalm 144:2, 10] and David praised God as his Deliverer, delivering "His servant from the hurtful sword".

Prayer helps us look beyond today's troubles and fills us with hope. Much of this prayer of David can be applied to our own lives when we face trying circumstances. May God give us grace in our trials.

Thought When the actions of others upset us, our first response should be to look to the Lord.

12 Nov 08 Morning

READ : Amos 1

LESSON : The call of God

VERSE 1 : The words of Amos, who was among the herdmen of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.

The book of Amos takes us primarily to Israel, the northern kingdom. Under the reign of Jeroboam II, Israel enjoyed a time of peace and prosperity. But the underlying foundations were wicked and God sent Amos to warn them of His coming judgement by the Assyrians in 722 BC. Amos was a herdsman and a farmer—probably without formal training—called by God to preach His Word. A man's call to God's ministry is not limited in any way by qualification and talent.

Throughout history, we see God using all sorts of people to do His work. While Moses [Acts 7:22] and Paul [Acts 26:24] were highly educated, at least seven of our Lord's disciples were fishermen [John 21:1–3]. Yet God used each of them mightily. More recently, although Evangelist DL Moody received little education and RA Torrey was a brilliant man who worked closely with Moody, God used them both to accomplish great things for Him.

What God needs in His servants is not so much ability as dependability and sincerity. He can certainly use the weakest and the most lowly person to serve His purpose [1 Corinthians 1:26–29].

Thought When God measures a man, He puts the tape around the heart instead of the head.

Evening

READ : Psalm 144

LESSON : A happy people

VERSE 15 : Happy is that people, that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people, whose God is the Lord.

The first 11 verses of this Psalm celebrate God's power in contrast to human weakness. David Tried out to God for help and then praised His great salvation. The meaning of God's deliverance and abundant blessings for future generations is described in verses 12–15. He concluded that "happy is that people, whose God is the Lord".

Genuine happiness—a mood of contentment, joy and hope—does not depend on the country one lives in. Happiness and all of the unlimited benefits that flow from the storehouse of heaven are contingent upon our relationship with God. Only His children are entitled to receive these things that lend themselves to happiness. In order to be His child, there must be the surrender of the will to Him. By faith through grace, happiness comes as a gift of God through Christ.

Any country that departs from God sows the seeds of its own disunity, discontent and dissolution. So let us rejoice. As citizens of our Lord's kingdom, we can experience true joy by His grace.

Proverbs 16:20b tells us, "and whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he". Psalm 146:5 indicates that happiness comes to those who find their help and hope in God.

Thought Trusting and obeying the Lord brings true happiness.

13 Nov 08 Morning

READ : Amos 2

LESSON : The weariness of continuous sin

VERSE 13 : Behold, I am pressed under you, as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves.

The task of Amos was most unpleasant. God had directed him to warn the people of Moab, Judah and Israel. “For three transgressions ... and for four” was the usual catchphrase. This utterance—not to be taken mathematically—means that the sin has piled up. Hence, God’s coming judgement was upon the people.

The Lord is gracious, merciful, compassionate and slow to anger [Psalm 145:8]. However, there is a time when His patience will end. When men persist in doing evil and do not repent, God will show no mercy. Noah was called to sound the cry of repentance to his people but nobody listened until God closed the door to the Ark. And judgement came.

The rulers of Moab were condemned for their despicable acts in which the King of Moab had burnt the bones of the King of Edom into lime and probably used it to plaster the walls and ceilings of his palace in hatred. The sins of Judah were no better as immorality hit a new low of shameful acts.

It is no different today. Man’s sinfulness is everywhere and God’s judgement is at hand.

Thought Sin’s consequences may not come immediately, but they will come eventually.

Evening

READ : Psalm 145

LESSON : God is approachable

VERSE 18 : The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon Him, to all that call upon Him in truth.

This world’s false religions portray God as remote and unapproachable, but David said otherwise. When Jesus came as God manifest in the flesh, He was the most approachable of men. Prayer is an acknowledgement of God’s all-sufficient grace and of our dependency upon Him for all things necessary for our life on earth. In the verse quoted above, David emphasised two important factors in all true prayer. First, he promised that God is ever nigh, whether we call on Him or not. Is it not comforting to know that whenever we have a sense of need or a sense of guilt, He is near, lovingly to listen to our cry and graciously willing to help in our difficulty or distress?

The second aspect is that He only responds to our approach if we call upon Him in truth, which means that our prayer must be in accordance with His revealed will. It is only thus that He promises to hear and answer [1 John 5:14–15]. Now we have an open invitation to “come boldly unto the throne of grace” [Hebrews 4:16].

If we draw nigh unto God in all reverence, adoration and faith, He then has delight in responding to our petitions.

Thought God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth. – John 4:24

14 Nov 08 Morning

READ : Amos 3

LESSON : The foolish rich people

VERSE 15 : And I will smite the winter house with the summer house; and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall have an end, saith the Lord.

The message by Amos in this chapter is one of judgement, first to Israel and then to her neighbours. God punished them because they had sinned against God in spite of their privileged status in being His chosen nation.

One group of people that was singled out was the corrupt wealthy. Here, we have a glimpse of their luxurious living. Not only had they winter and summer homes, these were also adorned with ivory. These proud people had a false sense of security by trusting in their riches.

The Bible warns us against putting our whole trust in wealth. Luke 12:16–21 tells of the rich fool who thought he had it all planned with his wealth. Instead of giving thanks to God, he heaped praises on himself. He was busy thinking how he could build bigger barns to contain all his riches, forgetting that his time was in God's hand.

There is nothing wrong with being wealthy. However, when we fail to acknowledge God as the Giver, it displeases Him. He knows and observes all that we think within ourselves. Beware of covetousness for it can eat into our spiritual sanctity. To desire beyond what is necessary is sinful.

Thought But godliness with contentment is great gain. –1 Timothy 6:6

Evening

READ : Psalms 146–147

LESSON : While I live

Psalm 146:2 : While I live will I praise the Lord: I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being.

Psalm 146 begins and concludes with imperatives to praise God Who is ever faithful. It may be analysed as having four movements. The first movement is found in verses 1 and 2, where the Psalmist was determined to praise the Lord as long as he had life. Praise should come naturally and regularly. The second movement [v. 3–6] shows us that the Psalmist affirmed that all help and hope are found in the Creator Who is faithful forever. All of His dealings in the past and all of His present reality unite to encourage us to keep trusting in His continuing faithfulness.

In the third movement [v. 7–9], the Psalmist shows God's love by opening blind eyes, raising up the downcast, loving the righteous, watching over strangers, relieving the fatherless and widows and overturning the wicked. The last verse presents the concluding thought of the passage, as the Psalmist demanded the praise of the Lord Who reigns eternally over all generations.

Praise is the gift of the lips, for the glory of God, done with knowledge and determination. By a life of praise we respond to our ever-faithful God.

Prayer Lord, let my heart learn to sing when everything around me seems so dark. Give me Your grace to praise You.

15 Nov 08 Morning

READ : Amos 4

LESSON : The sin of obstinacy

VERSE 12 : Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.

The prophet Amos identified three sins of the Jews that displeased God: oppression of the poor [v. 1–3], hypocrisy [v. 4–5] and obstinacy [v. 6–11]. The corrupt rich were compared to the “kine of Bashan” [v. 1], a very strong breed of cattle that was unruly and trespassed neighbouring pastures instead of keeping to its own.

Amos also warned that the idolaters—those who went to the holy places of Bethel and Gilgal—would be hardened in their idolatries. Bethel was a special place to the Jews while Gilgal was where Joshua and the people had camped when they first entered the Promised Land. These places had now become shrines for pagan gods. Worse, they claimed to be worshipping God. With so many bringing their sacrifices and tithes, it looked like a spiritual revival but their sacrifices were offensive to God [Leviticus 2:11, 6:17]. Bent on doing as they pleased, they imitated God’s instituted rituals at the altar of Bethel.

It is foolish to contend against the great and powerful Creator-God. There is no way anyone can flee from Him. Let us search our hearts, prepare to meet Him in repentance and set things right.

Thought God sees the heart in every believer.

Evening

READ : Psalms 148–150

LESSON : Praise to God

Psalm 150:6 : Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord.

Psalm 148 is pure praise while Psalm 149 is a song of victory over Israel’s enemies. Psalm 150 is a beautiful expression of praise. In six verses the Psalmist answered four questions: Where, why, how and by whom God is to be praised.

Where is God to be praised? God’s “sanctuary” (earthly temple) and “mighty firmament” (vast heavens) is the usual place of worship [Psalm 150:1]. However, wherever you are, you can praise the Lord.

Why is He to be praised? Two reasons are given: “His mighty acts” and “His excellent greatness” [Psalm 150:2]. God is excellent in His attributes and acts, His person and performances. He is “great and greatly to be praised”.

How is He to be praised? God has prescribed the use of music in praising Him. We can praise God in many ways and on many occasions [Psalm 150:3–5].

Who is to praise Him? The Psalmist said, “Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord” [Psalm 150:6]. God’s will is for everyone to whom He has given the breath of life to use that breath to acknowledge His power and greatness. Praise begins and ends with God.

Doxology Praise God, from Whom all blessings flow; Praise Him, all creatures here below; Praise Him above, ye heav’nly host; Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

16 Nov 08 Morning

READ : Amos 5

LESSON : Our great God

VERSE 8 : Seek Him that maketh the seven stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night: that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth: The Lord is His name.

This third message of Amos was a lamentation with reference to the nation of Israel. He urged the people to denounce their wicked ways and seek Jehovah. It was only when they sought the Lord that they would be saved. Otherwise, destruction would befall them.

Our God is an awesome God and there is none like Him. No man can understand the complexities that make the whole of creation work. Sadly, man has not given credit to the Creator but has come up with theories that deny God.

What is our response when we think about God's wondrous works? We should be encouraged by the fact that God is in charge not only of great galaxies but also of our tiny lives. Even the very hairs on our heads are numbered. He values us more than the sparrow and knows our infirmities. God made each of us unique—our features, our characteristics and our abilities. And He is personally involved in the very details of our lives.

Thought God is in sovereign control of all that happens in and around us.

Evening

READ : Luke 1:1–38

LESSON : The problem of doubt

VERSE 18 : And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years.

Zacharias had the faith to keep on praying but when the answer came he did not have the faith to accept it. Every thinking person has struggled with the problem of doubt. It is easy to yield to disappointment if God has not answered as we thought He should have, and disappointment can quickly lead to doubt.

The biblical response is not to waver in unbelief when God doesn't answer our prayer our way. God is sovereign. We must believe that He will do what He says, even if His way takes a different form than we had expected. Doubt need never be fatal. We can recover if we will submit to God's gracious discipline.

Luke wants us to see that God is faithful to His promises. The doubts that we have clearly show that we need a Saviour because we are sinners. Only sinners doubt the all-powerful, gracious, sovereign God Who has shown so many times that He is trustworthy.

When you are in doubt, call out to Him to save you from your sin. He is mighty and will save all who cry out, "God be merciful to me a sinner" [Luke 18:13].

Thought What God promises is so much beyond human ability that it is almost unbelievable.

17 Nov 08 Morning

READ : Amos 6

LESSON : The dangers of luxury and false security

VERSE 1 : Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came!

Amos reminded both Judah (Zion) and Israel (Samaria) of their sins. The focus here is on their over-confidence in themselves and indifference toward God. They regarded themselves as “chief of the nations” as their geographical locations gave them apparent security. Moreover, they were wealthy and strong in their defence.

However, God thought otherwise of their “success”. Through Amos, God pronounced “woe” to both nations because the people were spiritually corrupt. False confidence and complacency among the people were built on lies and pride. Like the church of Laodicea, the people considered themselves “rich, and increased with goods and have need of nothing” [Revelation 3:17] when, in reality, they had lost all that mattered in their spiritual life. The people thought, “It can’t happen here!” In reality, three judgements awaited them—death [v. 9–10], destruction [v. 11–13] and defeat [v. 14].

Complacency is dangerous because it leads us to rely on something besides God. When God sees His people depending on their self-sufficiency, He sends trials to rebuke and remind them that they need Him. God prefers the humble, the broken and even the remorseful.

Our confidence must be built on Christ the solid rock, nothing else.

Thought We have to learn to trust God one day at a time.

Evening

READ : Luke 1:39–80

LESSON : How to receive from God

VERSE 53 : He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He hath sent empty away.

God satisfies the spiritually hungry but sends the self-satisfied away empty. This is the spiritual principle: God humbles the proud and exalts the humble. Most people think that God helps those who help themselves. This is human pride against the biblical principle that God helps those who come to the end of themselves and cast all their cares upon Him.

Many Christians buy into the view that you have to believe in yourself. But Scripture states, “Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord” [Jeremiah 17:5]. To trust in yourself is to turn away from trusting God. Trusting in God means that before we can do anything for Him, we must recognise our own inability and rely on Him for His grace and strength, so that He gets the glory. That is the principle Mary expressed in Luke 1:53.

God sends none away empty except those who are full of themselves. He will satisfy the hunger of anyone who acknowledges his spiritual need and seeks Him. Hunger after God and His righteousness and He promises that He will fill you with good things.

Thought The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing. – Psalm 34:10

18 Nov 08 Morning

READ : Amos 7

LESSON : God's standard

VERSE 7 : Thus He shewed me: and, behold, the Lord stood upon a wall made by a plumb line, with a plumb line in His hand.

The last three chapters of Amos deal with Israel's future and mention five visions of judgement. Chapter 7 deals with God's judgements of famine caused by locusts [v. 1–3], fire [v. 4–6] and the plumbline, leading to utter ruin [v. 7–9].

Amos interceded for the people in the first two visions and God relented. In the third vision, Israel was out of line and had to be destroyed. The people's sin saw them setting up high places and sanctuaries where they worshipped in ways that were abominable to God. They had failed to match God's standard. Destruction was at their doorstep.

The plumbline is a tool that is used to determine if a wall is vertical. God's Law is the standard by which God measures His people to see how faithful they have been in obeying His Word, and whether they are of good character and conduct [Isaiah 28:17].

God is ever ready to forgive but it does not mean He will always tolerate those who are incorrigible and unrepentant. God has many ways of humbling a wilful sinner. The time will come when those who have always been spared will no longer be spared.

Thought If God were to measure your life today using His plumb line, how would you fare?

Evening

READ : Luke 2

LESSON : Don't waste your life

VERSE 37 : And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fasting and prayers night and day.

Anna was married for only seven years before she was widowed. She had been a widow ever since. No doubt Anna had experienced a difficult life. Yet she did not turn her back on God. In fact, God declares that He has a special concern for orphans and widows. "A father of the fatherless and a judge of the widows, is God in His holy habitation" [Psalm 68:5].

Anna took refuge under God's protective care. Her trials drove her to deeper devotion to God, not away from Him. She spent her time worshipping, fasting and praying. Anna filled her life with God. God was enough for her.

Even though the ministry of fasting and prayer may not be your area of gift, you still should set aside time to seek the Lord as Anna did. Spend time in devotion to the Lord. A life devoted to anything else, no matter how noble or how highly praised in the world, is a life ultimately wasted.

Whatever you do for a living, make sure that devotion for Jesus Christ is at the heart of why you are living. To live for anything else is to waste your life.

Thought A life devoted to God is a life well spent.

19 Nov 08 Morning

READ : Amos 8

LESSON : Be not deceived

VERSE 2 : And He said, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A basket of summer fruit.

Then said the Lord unto me, The end is come upon My people of Israel; I will not again pass by them anymore.

It was the end of the road for the wicked people of Israel. Amos was shown a basket of summer fruit—symbolising the end of harvest. This is a play on words [v. 2] as the Hebrew word for “summer” or “ripe” is similar to the word “end”. The end of harvest had come for the farmers and so had the end of Israel come, through God’s judgement. Israel was ripe for destruction. For a long time, God had spared them but now His patience had run out.

One of God’s attributes is His long-suffering, as seen in the account of Noah, where God waited 120 years before sending the flood. Despite opportunities to repent of their wicked ways, the people were busy eating and drinking, enjoying themselves. By the time they had realized their folly, it was too late. The door of the Ark had shut.

There is much wickedness in the world today. The Bible warns us that the end times are near; the signs are all around us. When God pours out His judgement, there is no stopping Him.

Do not take for granted the seemingly good times the world is enjoying. God’s judgement will come in due time.

Thought : When we focus on the wrong things, we miss the main thing that life is all about.

Evening

READ : Luke 3

LESSON : True and false repentance

VERSE 7 : Then said He to the multitude that came forth to be baptised of Him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

When we see Scripture like this, it is easy to be offended because it hits us directly at our own shortcomings. If we are offended and respond defensively, we will go away like the Pharisees and Sadducees did.

There are three possible responses to a straight forward message like this. Some will be offended and walk away without any repentance. They will face God’s coming wrath. Others will be superficially repentant and will put on the cosmetics of outward change, but they will not honestly face the corruption of their hearts. They, too, will face God’s coming wrath, probably with great surprise. The third response is to be truly repentant, to realise the sinfulness of your heart, to turn to God and appeal to Him for a new heart and a clean conscience through the blood of Christ. These will go on to grow fruits of repentance.

The fearsomeness of the judgement is described by the word “wrath”. Who can endure the wrath of God? Who can be thrown into the Lake of Fire without terrible consequence? Just because His judgement is delayed does not mean that it will not happen.

Thought : True repentance reveals itself by bearing good fruit.

20 Nov 08 Morning

READ : Amos 9

LESSON : The restoration of God's people

VERSE 15 : And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God.

The concluding chapter of Amos has three parts: judgement, sifting and blessing. The scene at the sanctuary of Bethel was an abomination to the Lord. The Lord would not let anyone go unpunished. God would sift the false from the true so that not one true worshipper would be lost. Amos ends his prophecy with the comforting promise that Israel shall be planted, protected and never again pulled out from her land. This prophecy[v.15]might not have been fulfilled yet. As history shows, Israel had been sacked by the Assyrians, then by the Babylonians, the Medo-Persians, the Greeks and the Romans. Since then, they have been scattered all over the nations. Though the Jewish nation has been restored, they have no king, priest, temple or sacrifice. But one day, God will establish the kingdom that He has promised. When Christ the Messiah returns, the separation between Israel and Judah will be healed. Isn't it encouraging to know that God always keeps His promises? One day, He will bring all who are His to be with Him in heaven for eternity. What an encouraging prospect!

Thought "The future is as bright as the promises of God!" – Adoniram Judson (1788–1850), a missionary to Burma

Evening

READ : Luke 4

LESSON : Be wise to the scheme of Satan

VERSE 2 : Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days He did eat nothing: and when they were ended, He afterward hungered.

To live in this world means that you will encounter temptation. Some don't even try to fight it. Others want to be delivered from temptation. If we want to be godly, we must learn to resist the temptations that come at us from the world, the flesh and the devil.

We can be tempted to evil by our own sinful desires from within or by Satan from without. Jesus did not have a sinful nature. So He was never incited to sin in the same way that we are. God never tempts anyone, but temptation is also a test that God uses to reveal what is in our hearts. Here was Satan tempting Jesus from without, but the result proved that Jesus was the obedient Son of God Who would not put God to the test.

Christ conquered Satan in His hour of greatest weakness. This proves that He is the righteous Son of God, mighty to save all who call upon Him. If we trust in Him as Saviour and walk in His strength each day, we can overcome temptation when it hits.

Thought Temptations, unlike opportunities, will always give you many second chances.

21 Nov 08 Morning

READ : Obadiah 1

LESSON : Promise of deliverance

VERSE 17 : But upon mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.

The book of Obadiah is the shortest of all the books of the Old Testament. The first part of this book is an indictment against Edom and their offences against Jacob [v. 1–16]. The second emphasises the eventual restoration of the Jews and their flourishing state [v. 17–21]. It shows the truth of the downfall of pride and the uplifting of the humble.

Thank God for His omniscience in knowing the end from the beginning. God’s children need not despair and give up hope in times of trials. Just remember to rest in the Almighty God for His divine intervention to deliver us. Our Lord always vindicates His own.

Whenever we feel discouraged, the Lord is always there to uplift us. Whatever our problems may be—being bullied in school, facing uncertainty in our job—God will vindicate us in His time.

What is troubling you at this moment? Do not fear any threats from anyone. May all persecutors and the persecuted be warned that the trials of the righteous will soon end. Therefore, be sure to trust in God’s promise of His deliverance because He is a covenant-keeping God Who always protects His own.

Thought He will hold me fast.

Evening

READ : Luke 5

LESSON : Help our friends find forgiveness

VERSE 19 : And when they could not find by what way they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling with his couch into the midst before Jesus.

Luke draws a contrast between the Pharisees and the men who brought their friend to Jesus. The Pharisees were there for the purpose of finding fault with Jesus. The men came as seekers who realised that they had a friend with a problem that only Jesus could fix. Even though they encountered obstacles, they persevered by faith until they received from Jesus what they had come for. The Pharisees went away empty.

If you come to church as a proud skeptic, watching for something you don’t agree with to pounce on, you will go away convinced that you are right and that Jesus has nothing to offer you. But if you will come to Jesus as needy as the man with palsy, believing that Jesus truly can forgive you of your sins and reconcile you to the Holy God, you will go home forgiven, rejoicing and glorifying God.

An African proverb says, “There is only one crime worse than murder on the desert, and that is to know where the water is and not tell.” We who know Jesus know where the living water is.

Let us tell our friends, so that they can find forgiveness.

Thought While we cannot force the Gospel on people, we should communicate the urgency of eternal matters.

22 Nov 08 Morning

READ : Jonah 1

LESSON : Jonah running

VERSE 16 : Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the Lord, and made vows.

Chapter 1 opens with Jonah's disobedience against God's calling. Instead of heading for Nineveh, Jonah fled to Tarshish [v. 1–3]. To admonish Jonah, God sent a storm to stop his flight [v. 4–7]. The mariners' discourse with Jonah revealed their religious background [v. 8–12]. Jonah was miraculously preserved from imminent death [v. 13–17].

Jonah's miraculous preservation in the belly of the fish is a type of Christ. Divine grace towards sinners can be seen in God's dealings with the Ninevites. Throughout Scripture, we read of God's grace upon men. Beginning right from His judgement during the time of Noah to the end times, God's grace is given freely to all who will receive it.

We also read of the goodness and mercy of God as contrasted with the rebellious and peevish impatience of His servant, Jonah. We may wonder at Jonah's affront to disobey God's direct and clear command. However, there may be areas in our lives where, like Jonah, we choose to go our own way and do what we like.

Divine providence may seemingly have opened doors for Jonah, yet "the ready way is not always the right way" (Matthew Henry). How do you respond to God's will?

Prayer Help me to do Thy will readily.

Evening

READ : Luke 6

LESSON : Obedience is not optional

VERSE 46 : And why call ye Me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?

Christianity is not a system of rules that you have decided you will start working on. It is a personal relationship. You must hear Jesus' words, which is growing in your knowledge and understanding of His teachings, as revealed in the Bible. If you are not daily feeding on God's Word, you are living according to the desires of the flesh.

As you read and study your Bible, your aim should not be simply to fill your head with knowledge. The bottom line for biblical knowledge is that you will please God by loving Him and loving others as He commands. You apply Scripture to your life. It means continually examining ourselves in soul-searching obedience, down to our very thoughts, motives and attitudes.

How then should we live? If you know that a flood will certainly hit your area in the near future, you check the foundation of your home. If you are living in daily obedience to Jesus on the heart level, your house will stand. However, if you call Him "Lord" but you are living for self, you had better start building on the rock!

Thought We are saved by grace through faith, but the faith that saves always results in good works.

23 Nov 08 Morning

READ : Jonah 2

LESSON : Jonah praying

VERSE 9 : But I will sacrifice unto Thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord.

Verses 1–9 show us when and where Jonah prayed. Take note of whom Jonah prayed to, as well as the content of his prayer. Verse 9b is a quotation from Psalms 3:8 and 37:39, emphasising the central theme of the Bible. Verse 10 reveals the power of God in miraculously delivering Jonah from certain death.

When a believer is out of the will of God, there is only one way for him to go—down. This was what happened to Jonah. Notice the words “went down” in Jonah 1:3, 5 and Jonah 2:6. It must have been a horrible experience for the prophet.

However, it is not too late when we remember to turn back to the Lord. God forgave Jonah’s rebellion and was willing to use Him to minister to the Ninevites.

This change of Jonah’s attitude from running to praying is an indication of God’s power at work. Do you realise the impact of God’s enabling when you leave everything to Him? How is your prayer life? Praying does to the spirit what breathing does for the physical body.

Prayer Teach me to be more prayerful, O Lord.

Evening

READ : Luke 7

LESSON : Compassion for the lost

VERSE 14 : And He came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And He said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise.

This account of Jesus raising the young man to life shows us that the life-giving word of Christ is a message of hope and power in a world of despair and weakness. The Gospel of Jesus Christ offers true hope and real power in this hurting world. Many, even Christians, struggle with personal problems. A preacher said, “Preach to the suffering, and you will never lack a congregation. There is a broken heart in every pew.” Sometimes we feel like the guy who saw some light at the end of the tunnel but then he realised that it was a train coming at him. That is false hope! We need true hope.

We must always go about doing our Father’s business. The Gospel is the life-giving word of Christ, a message of hope in a world of despair, a message of power in a world of weakness. Be an effective witness for Christ. You never know what can come from God imparting life to a single sinner through your witness. Our job as witnesses is to cut holes in the darkness of this hopeless world with the good news that Jesus came to give new life through His Word.

Thought Evangelism is not the job of a salesman who persuades people to believe in Christ.

24 Nov 08 Morning

READ : Jonah 3

LESSON : Jonah preaching

VERSE 2 : Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.

God's direct commission to Jonah is renewed. This time, Jonah willingly obeyed God to preach in Nineveh [v. 1–4]. The Ninevites were mercifully spared from complete destruction as a result of their repentance [v. 5–10].

This change in Jonah's attitude towards God's command resulted in effective preaching and the saving of souls. Notice the difference between the words "But Jonah ..." [Jonah 1:3a] and "So Jonah arose ..." [v. 3a]. What God can do through one person's obedience is seen here, both through Jonah as well as the king's influence upon his people.

Be aware of your influence upon others. One wrong word can cause others to stumble. On the contrary, an appropriate word of encouragement spoken at the right time can help someone who is discouraged.

Are you a stumbling block or a stepping stone? Take heed of Jonah's change of heart. Allow the Lord to take charge of your life. Not many of us have the opportunity to preach the Word of God. However, the attitude you portray in a changed lifestyle is a living sermon for all to see.

Prayer Lord, help me to witness for You willingly.

Evening

READ : Luke 8

LESSON : Careful how you listen

VERSE 18 : Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whoso ever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.

Just as we often fail to listen carefully to other people, so we fail often to listen carefully to the Lord. God's Word is clear on the issue we are facing. But our minds are already made up and we don't want to hear what He says because it opposes the direction we want to go.

Listening carefully means taking time to read God's Word and meditate on its meaning. Even among those who attend church regularly, many are ignorant of what the Bible says because they don't take the time to read and meditate on it. We often rush through devotions without taking the time to chew on what the text means and how it applies to our lives.

When you are reading God's Word, ask yourself the two questions that Paul asked the Lord on the Damascus Road: "Who art Thou, Lord?" and, "What shall I do, Lord?" [Acts 22:8, 10].

Whether you are listening to a sermon or reading God's Word, take care how you listen! The Bible is God's revealed truth. If you listen with a view to obedience, you will be blessed. There are riches there for those who listen.

Thought The privilege to be close to Jesus is open to anyone who walks in obedience to Him.

25 Nov 08 Morning

READ : Jonah 4

LESSON : Jonah pouting!

VERSE 3 : Therefore now, O Lord, take, I beseech Thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.

We find Jonah in depression here. He was fretting and pouting over God's merciful grace to the Ninevites [v. 1–4]. God reproved him for his self-pitying attitude. Object lessons in the form of a gourd, a worm and an east wind were sent to discipline Jonah [v. 5–11].

Jonah's emotional state reminds us of the prophet Elijah's response after his victory in Mount Carmel [1 Kings 19:4]. Both servants of God felt suicidal after their successful ministries. This also reminds us of the parable of the prodigal son, where his elder brother remained outside the house in bitterness [Luke 15:25–32].

Though Jonah obeyed God's directive the second time round, his heart was not completely right. Jonah's love for his own people took precedence over his calling as God's servant. He was angry with God for saving and pardoning his enemies.

What about you? How is your attitude towards those whom you dislike? Do you feel that they are "beyond redemption"? Are you hesitant about witnessing to them? May the Lord forgive us for harbouring such thoughts and be always thankful for His mercy and grace.

Prayer Lord, help me overcome any wrong attitude.

Evening

READ : Luke 9

LESSON : Who is Jesus?

VERSE 20 : He said unto them, But whom say ye that I am? Peter answering said, The Christ of God.

Asking and answering correctly the right questions can mean the difference between eternal life and eternal condemnation. While there are a number of crucial spiritual questions, none is more important than the question Jesus asked in Luke 9:20.

What is your answer to Jesus' crucial question, "Whom say ye that I am?" You may be standing with the multitude, saying, "Jesus is a great teacher, but He is not the Sovereign Lord of my life." That is a wrong answer. You may be standing with Peter, saying correctly, "You are the Christ," but not understanding the sort of Christ He really is. That is an improvement over the first answer, but it is inadequate.

You must stand with Jesus Who came as God's Anointed to bear your sins, Who was raised in triumph over sin and death, Who calls us to follow Him in obedience to the will of the Father. Peter preached, "God hath made that same Jesus, Whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" [Acts 2:36].

If you stand there, ready to obey God no matter what the cost, you have correctly answered Jesus' crucial question, "Whom say ye that I am?"

Thought The joy of the Christian life is getting to know the Lord Jesus more intimately.

26 Nov 08 Morning

READ : Micah 1

LESSON : Warning of impending doom

VERSE 2 : Hear, all ye people; hearken, O earth, and all that therein is: and let the Lord God be witness against you, the Lord from His holy temple.

The book of Micah comprises three sections – Chapters 1–2, 3–5 and 6–7. The prophecies in Micah confirmed the prophet Isaiah’s predictions of threatened judgement and hope. Verses 1–7 refer to impending judgement on the northern kingdom of Israel. Similar consequences on the southern kingdom of Judah are predicted in verses 8–16. Such is the wrath of God against His people for their disobedience and waywardness.

Unlike the Ninevites [Jonah 3:6–10], the Israelites were unrepentant. They did not mourn over their imminent destruction. God loves His people too much to allow them to go on sinning. The punishment was to discipline them for their disobedience.

Though our God is a pardoning and forgiving Saviour, we must not try His patience. As God’s children, let us not take His love for granted and “stretch” His grace too far. The Apostle Paul warns us against living in sin so that grace may abound [Romans 6:1].

Throughout Scripture, many incidents of His dealings with disobedience and rebellion are recorded. Come to Christ for forgiveness and cleansing. If you are already a child of God, emulate Micah in his compassion and pray for the salvation of your loved ones.

Prayer Help me to be a faithful witness to the lost.

Evening

READ : Luke 10

LESSON : The crucial message

VERSE 2 : Therefore said He unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He would send forth labourers into His harvest.

It is easy to get our priorities mixed up, where we confuse the inconsequential with the crucial. Are we too busy with our activities to take the time to rescue those who are perishing without Christ? If a person’s response to the Gospel is the deciding factor in where he or she will spend eternity, should we not do all that we can to get this life-giving, soul-saving message to them?

Do we have the proper sense of urgency about spiritual matters that we ought to have?

When you think about the Lord’s words in verse 2, you have to ask yourself, “Do I pray for the harvest? Do I ask Him to send out workers into His harvest? Am I willing to be sent?” Does the Lord’s harvest matter enough to me to motivate me to pray and to go?

Pray for the harvest and for more workers. Go with a sense of mission to labour in the harvest field. Live and speak the message in a way that honours Jesus Christ as Lord and King, and that shows lost people His offer of peace. In light of eternity, the gospel is the crucial message. We are the messengers.

Thought Must every Christian have a sense of mission?

27 Nov 08 Morning

READ : Micah 2

LESSON : Do no evil

VERSE 7 : O thou that art named the house of Jacob, is the spirit of the Lord straitened? Are these His doings? Do not My words do good to him that walketh uprightly?

The prophet Micah continued his lament against his people for their sin of social injustice. He warned of impending judgement on the oppressors [v. 1–5]. These evildoers became the enemies of their own people. As a result, Israel was not a safe and secure place of rest anymore [v. 6–11]. Just as judgement would surely befall Israel, restoration was equally certain. The Messiah would lead the faithful remnant back to Himself [v. 12–13].

It is bad enough to harm people, let alone premeditate and plan evil in order to execute them [v. 1]. Read verse 3 and be warned that vengeance belongs to the Lord. Punishment will definitely befall oppressors who use violence to get what they want.

How comforting for the child of God to realise that God knows and cares. Thank God for the truth of Romans 8:31.

However, we need to remember that we must walk uprightly and be good testimonies for God. As His children, we are always in His safe-keeping grace. With God on our side, nothing bad will befall us without His permission.

Prayer Lord, teach me to love others the way You do.

Evening

READ : Luke 11

LESSON : Prayer

VERSE 1 : And it came to pass, that, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, one of His disciples said unto Him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.

Prayer is the acknowledgement that our need is not partial but total. So if we ask the Lord to teach us to pray, He may put us in situations where we are so overwhelmed that we recognise that we have no choice but to pray. So, if you dare, say, “Lord, teach us to pray.” It was after watching Jesus pray that this disciple was prompted to request instruction in prayer. If the Lord Jesus, Who is God, prayed often, what should that say about our need for prayer?

Jesus modelled for us a life of total dependence on the Father. His prayer life and His instruction on prayer are foundational as we struggle to grow in our prayer life. That prayer can be taught means that it can be learnt. If you struggle to pray as you ought, then our Lord’s instruction here should be of great help and encouragement.

If we learn to pray as Jesus has instructed us, we will focus on the Father’s purpose. We will focus on needs for provision, for pardon and for protection from sin, not so that we will be blessed, but so that we will have what we need to carry out the Father’s purpose.

Thought How would implementing Jesus’ pattern of prayer change your prayer life?

28 Nov 08 Morning

READ : Micah 3

LESSON : Be responsible leaders

VERSE 8 : But truly I am full of power by the spirit of the Lord, and of judgement, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin.

This is the second part of Micah's prophecy of imminent judgement and hope of restoration. We read of the wicked deeds of the princes and the lies of the prophets. The leaders of Israel ill-treated their own people and the prophets lacked vision, caring only for themselves [v. 1–8]. Micah warned those in power against wrong and evil motives in discharging their duties. They were “using” God as a tool for their own selfish ends [v. 9–12].

All true prophets of God speak forth His Word irrespective of popular opinion. Therefore, Micah had no fear in doing so. He warned his people about being led astray by false prophets.

This is a good lesson for all in authority. Be warned against abusing your position. A higher standard of accountability is expected of leaders [James 3:1]. Those who trustingly look up to us deserve to be properly led.

Are you a Sunday school teacher, a Bible Study leader or serving in other areas? Be responsible in fulfilling your duties faithfully. Not forgetting those in other areas of leadership—parents, an elder sibling, a mentor—we need to be faithful in carrying out our responsibilities in the fear of God.

Thought The higher we go, the harder we fall.

Evening

READ : Luke 12

LESSON : Seek ye the kingdom of God

VERSE 31 : But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Jesus taught His followers to confess Christ openly, beware of covetousness and be faithful in service.

We are not to be hypocrites; hiding the truth by pretending to be what we are not. “For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known” [v. 2].

Hypocrisy stamps from the fear of the wrath of men. When we fear God alone, we need be afraid of nothing and we can boldly witness for Christ. We are important to God and precious in His sight; so never fear what people can say or do.

Covetousness is an insatiable desire and lust for more and more, so that the focus of life is on the accumulation of wealth. There is no room for anything, not even God. This is why it is so hard for a rich person to enter God's kingdom.

Jesus warned us to be vigilant, do our work faithfully and long for His coming. The Lord will deal with careless servants when He returns, so we had better be ready.

Thought You will be owned or disowned by Christ, according as you now own or disown Him.

29 Nov 08 Morning

READ : Micah 4

LESSON : Kingdom of Christ

VERSE 5 : For all people will walk everyone in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever.

The next two chapters relate to Israel's hope of restoration. The Messiah would set up His kingdom of true righteousness and peace. The day would come when His people would walk in His way [v. 1–8]. Before this could take place, judgement would first be meted out. Then Israel would have final victory over the Assyrians [v. 9–13].

For the condition in verse 3 to occur, God has to judge the world first. Weapons of warfare will now be used as weapons of livelihood—swords into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks. This change can only be wrought by the power of God.

True peace can occur only when Christ is in charge of your life. Every child of God looks forward to that spiritual kingdom of Christ. This is the reason for our evangelistic outreach to the lost. All sinners will be judged for their unbelief one day.

Before that day of reckoning, be zealous for our Lord and win souls for His kingdom. Are you prepared for that day? Do you have peace in your heart? Do not be caught unawares, for the coming of the Lord is like a thief in the night.

Question Are you ready for the kingdom of Christ?

Evening

READ : Luke 13

LESSON : Repent before it is too late

VERSE 3 : I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

Let us learn from the three parables Jesus taught in this chapter. In the parable of the barren fig tree [v. 6–9], the tree did not bear any fruit after three years of special treatment. The owner ordered it cut down, not only because it was useless but it exhausted the soil. However, the vinedresser interceded to give the tree one last chance. If it did not bear fruit after another year of care and treatment, it would be cut down. Similarly, God is patient and forbearing, but continual refusal to repent spells certain doom.

The Gospel's progress was foretold in these two parables: the parable of the mustard seed and leaven [v. 18–22]. A mustard seed can grow into a big tree. A little leaven added to dough is able to make it rise. Similarly, the growth of God's kingdom may be small and insignificant but it is the beginning of a mighty kingdom.

The door of salvation is opened to any who would enter, but many fail to take advantage of the opportunity. They wait until the door is closed before trying to enter. No amount of effort or excuses will avail once the door is closed.

Thought Salvation is not a theory to discuss; it is a miracle to experience.

30 Nov 08 Morning

READ : Micah 5

LESSON : The promised Messiah

VERSE 2 : But thou, Beth-lehem Ephratah, though thou belittle among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.

This chapter refers to the oft-quoted prophecy of the coming of the promised Messiah. Micah foretold the deliverance of Israel through the birth of Jesus [v. 1–6]. God did not give up on His people but would restore peace to the nation. True peace comes from trusting in Him [v. 7–15]. This prophecy of the birth of Christ was known to the Jews (Matthew 2:5–6). The setting up of His spiritual kingdom is a comfort to all His children. Peace will prevail because Christ is our Priest and King. Life will be serene and peaceful then.

As Priest, Christ is our Mediator between God and men [1 Timothy 2:5]. What a privilege it is indeed. As our mediator, He always acts in our best interest. Our Lord speaks on our behalf to God. As King, God will protect His children. He will care and provide for their needs. On our part, we must remain faithful and loyal.

Have you accepted Christ as your Saviour? If so, then you are a child of God. He is your both your Priest and King. Acknowledge Him as the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Question God keeps His promises. Do you?

Evening

READ : Luke 14

LESSON : Charity and humility

VERSE 11 : For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

The Pharisee had an ill design in entertaining Jesus at his house. But our Lord would not be hindered from healing a man on the Sabbath. It requires care to understand the proper connection between piety and charity in observing the Sabbath, and the distinction between works of real necessity and habits of self-indulgence.

In verses 7–14, Jesus taught that works of charity are better than works for show. The spiritual lesson is that one must not seek the pre-eminence, but be content to work in lowly places, from whence he can be invited to higher honour if his merits so demand. When we invite guests to dinner, we need to ask ourselves if we are doing it for earthly reward or out of pure love.

In the parable of the great banquet, the salvation invitation is despised by the higher class of Jews. The host then sought out the poor. But there was room in his house, and he sends out to seek the Gentiles, and bring them in. The very poor and lowly in the world shall be as welcome to Christ as the rich and great.

Thought Salvation is free but not cheap. It involves repentance, commitment and renunciation of anything that stands in the way of abundant life in Christ.

01 Dec 08 Morning

READ : Micah 6

LESSON : Virtue of humility

VERSE 8 : He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

This last part of the book of Micah contains a prediction of doom and judgement for Israel. However, typical of biblical prophets, restoration of hope was prophesied. God sent judgement upon the Israelites for disobeying His covenant. They were guilty of idolatry [v. 1–5]. Hence, walking humbly before the Lord was necessary for repentance [v. 6–8]. The wickedness of the people was evident in their unjust behaviour [v. 9–16].

God's mercy is seen in His dealings with His people. Though the Israelites have disobeyed the Lord time and again, He is still forgiving and loving towards them. Even after sending trials to judge them, God's love is shown through His deliverance.

The Word of God is our guide for daily living. As God's children, how we behave towards others is a testimony to our Lord. Read the Bible faithfully for instructions on holy living. Pride has caused the downfall of many servants of God. Don't stumble others by your proud attitude and behaviour. Be careful in your speech and actions. When we fear God and walk humbly before Him, He will surely bless us.

Warning Pride goes before a fall.

Evening

READ : Luke 15

LESSON : Joy of the lost being found

VERSE 10 : Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

We read here about the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the prodigal son. A shepherd had a hundred sheep but lost one of them. A woman had lost her coin. Both diligently sought for and rejoiced greatly when they found their lost item. The sheep was lost because of its natural tendency to go astray. The coin was lost due to the woman's carelessness.

The prodigal son, however, was lost because of his wilfulness to choose a life free of responsibilities and filled with wanton living. Unlike the lost sheep and coin, where the owner diligently sought to recover the lost item, the father did not search for his son but let him learn his lessons the hard way.

When a person is lost, he must choose to receive God's forgiving love. He must turn away from himself and come to his senses. Although the prodigal son felt no hope of restoration to son ship, the father gave him a princely welcome and unconditionally acknowledged him as his son.

I've wandered far away from God – Now I am coming home; The path of sin too long I've trod – Lord, I'm coming home.

Thought God accepts all repentant sinners, no matter how outcast they may be.

02 Dec 08 Morning

READ : Micah 7

LESSON : A pardoning God

VERSE 7 : Therefore I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me.

Micah sorrowed over the breakdown of the Jewish society. He grieved over the wickedness of his people [v. 1–6]. Israel would triumph over her enemies if only they trust in the Lord. [v. 7–13]. The promised restoration of Israel would occur one day. This book ends with a beautiful hymn of praise describing God’s mercy and forgiveness [v. 14–20].

Throughout Scripture there are many instances of God’s forgiving attitude towards His people. The book of Micah depicts restoration despite disobedience and idolatry. As God’s children, we must be tender and forgiving when hurt by others.

Thank God that He is a pardoning God. No matter how much we have strayed away from Him, He is always waiting with open arms to receive us back into His fold. In spite of our waywardness and rebellion, there is hope of forgiveness. God is only a prayer away.

Have you ever been hurt time and again by the same person? Or perhaps you are the one guilty of hurting others. The Word of God teaches us to forgive as He forgives. Human nature retaliates by “giving back as good as we get”. However, divine nature responds with loving tenderness [Ephesians 4:32].

Question Who is a pardoning God like Thee?

Evening

READ : Luke 16

LESSON : The dishonest steward

VERSE 13 : No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

Knowing that he would be called to give an account, the steward knew he could never pass the scrutiny of his master. He was not prepared to dig or beg if he lost his job. So, the steward made friends with his master’s debtors by settling their accounts for less than they actually owed. He used his present position to prepare him for the next stage of his life.

While not condoning his conduct, the master did in fact approve the steward’s shrewdness. This parable is a praiseworthy example on several points. First, he knew he would be called to account for his life and he took that seriously. Christians should be serious about the idea that they will be called to account. That idea can be a joy if we use wealth for the master’s good and not for our own pleasure. Second, he took advantage of his present position to assure a comfortable future.

“For the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light” [v. 8b]. If we pursue the kingdom of God with the same vigor and zeal that the children of this world pursue profits and pleasure, our lives would be radically changed.

Thought It is a shame that Coca-Cola is more widely distributed than the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

03 Dec 08 Morning

READ : Nahum 1

LESSON : Taking refuge in God

VERSE 7 : The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that trust in Him.

Nahum, the seventh of the 12 minor prophets, was a native of Elkoshai, a little village of Galilee. Little is known about this prophet but in him, God found a man who, with flaming conviction, proclaimed the message that the great Nineveh, which was then still at the height of its power, would fall and disappear.

Nahum remembered that God is slow to anger [v. 3]. God's anger, unlike man's, is not selfish or capricious. God's anger is controlled. If He were to deal with our sins instantaneously, we would have been destroyed long ago. However, God is not infinitely patient with the sinful and wicked actions of men. He, being holy and just, will punish them. God's judgement can be severe so that none would be able to abide in the fierceness of His anger.

Although God was going to destroy Nineveh, not all is lost because He is good and a stronghold when we are in trouble. God's goodness is His holiness. God's goodness, which causes Him to punish sin, also tempers His judgement with mercy. God's goodness is a refuge to those who trust in Him, but He can be an overrunning flood to His enemies.

Thought Those who rely on the wisdom of this world and plan ahead without God will be completely cut off [v. 9–14].

Evening

READ : Luke 17

LESSON : Faith

VERSE 6 : And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you.

Faith is like a seed, though small but when cultivated, it will grow and release power. We need faith in many areas of our lives. Faith to forgive [v. 1–4]: When people sin repeatedly, we tend to give up on them. But we must forgive them and trust God to work in their lives. Faith to serve [v. 5–10]: It takes faith to do our duty, be it work or preparing a meal, and we are to do it well.

Faith to pray [v. 11–19]: The 10 men believed that Jesus could heal them of their leprosy, and He did. But only one came to thank Jesus and received salvation. When God answers your prayers, be sure to thank Him.

Faith to prepare for His coming [v. 20–37]: Knowing when He is coming is not important. It is more crucial to be ready when He comes. Watch, work and pray. When the Master comes, He will say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

When I fear my faith will fail, Christ can hold me fast! When the tempter would prevail, He can hold me fast!

Prayer Lord, give me holy faith that dispels fear, mighty faith that overcomes the world, heavenly faith that reaches to Your throne.

04 Dec 08 Morning

READ : Nahum 2

LESSON : God loves His Church

VERSE 2 : For the Lord hath turned away the excellency of Jacob, as the excellency of Israel: for the emptiers have emptied them out, and marred their vine branches.

A rendering in the ASV makes this verse clearer, “For Jehovah restoreth the excellency of Jacob, as the excellency of Israel; for the emptiers have emptied them out, and destroyed their vine-branches.”

God taunted the Ninevites to secure their city as the enemy was advancing against them. However, no matter what they did, they could not stand against the judgement of God through the hands of the father of Nebuchadnezzar and his allies. The capture and destruction is described in graphic detail [v. 3].

The Assyrians (of which the chief city is Nineveh) have oppressed God’s people (Jacob and Israel). They have emptied them and marred their vine-branches. Although this was done some time back, God would reckon with them. God would restore the eminence of Jacob and Israel. Both names stand here for the whole of Israel (the 12 tribes). As Cyril has shown, the distinction is this: Jacob is the natural name which the people inherited from their forefather and Israel the spiritual name which they had received from God. Indeed, Christ would redeem His Church and many Jews would become believers [Romans 11:26].

Thought God is against those who are against the Church.

Evening

READ : Luke 18

LESSON : Prayer, humility and discipleship

VERSE 1 : And He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.

The ungodly judge gave in to the woman’s request because she could not stop bugging him. If the unjust judge would answer the persistent request, how much more will a righteous God? Our persistence in prayer is not to change God, but to bring a transformation into our lives, building into us the character of God Himself.

The Pharisee relied on his own power and deeds before God, but the tax collector relied on the mercy and compassion of God. He recognised that he was a sinner who needed the mercy of God. True humility is simply seeing things the way they are. We gain nothing by coming to God in pride. God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.

The rich man asked, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

[v. 18]. If we really want to do the works of God, it must begin with believing in Jesus, Whom the Father has sent [John 6:29]. Jesus challenged him to put God first, to fulfil the law to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength [Deuteronomy 6:5]. The disciples left all to follow Jesus. That is true discipleship.

Thought Is prayer your last resort or is it your first resource?

05 Dec 08 Morning

READ : Nahum 3

LESSON : Judgement against nations and all who are against the true God

VERSE 5 : Behold, I am against thee, saith the Lord of hosts; and I will discover thy skirts upon thy face, and I will shew the nations thy nakedness, and the kingdoms thy shame.

There are many who think they can bully, persecute and kill Christians. They think they can get away with their actions, pouring scorn on Jesus and the Church for whom He died to save. They believe that they have found a way to eternal life with their false religions or philosophies of life. Sadly, many Christians are mentally imprisoned and defeated by Satan into thinking that they are insignificant, that the situation is hopeless, that they cannot effect changes even though Jesus has overcome the world. They believe that Christians should either compromise or suffer in silence when governments pass unjust laws and allow for exploitation against its citizens. To them, Jesus says, "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God."

Nineveh was a great city of a great nation. It was a city of blood where a great deal of innocent blood was shed by unrighteous war, or under colour and pretence of public justice, or by suffering barbarous murders to go unpunished. It was full of lies, truth was banished from among them and its judicial system served only the well-connected.

God Himself is against the Ninevehs of this world.

Thought God will strip bare the pretense of hypocrites and lay bare their inward foulness.

Evening

READ : Luke 19

LESSON : Seeking the lost

VERSE 10 : For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

Zacchaeus was short, wealthy and hated by many. Determined to see Jesus, he climbed up a sycamore tree where Jesus would pass. Jesus looked up and called him to come down immediately and invited Himself to his house for dinner. Zacchaeus was overjoyed and emerged a changed man, promising to give half of his possessions to the poor and pay back four times in cases where he had defrauded someone.

There are some lessons we can learn from this story of Zacchaeus. No one is beyond redemption and repentance. Love changes people. Acceptance and openness, which were Jesus' modus operandi, must become ours, too. Jesus does not wait for people to come to Him. He actively seeks the lost in order to save them. God can give us both natural and supernatural insights into people so that we may help them. Our ministry to others may require a boldness to call and meet them.

As Christians, we must not be overly concerned about tarnishing our reputation. We must not be more concerned about ourselves than we are for the lost. We need to be willing to take the shame of their sin upon us, so that we may bring Jesus' love to them.

Thought Jesus takes our shame upon Himself willingly, waiting, hoping that we will understand and repent.

06 Dec 08 Morning

READ : Habakkuk 1

LESSON : God delivers His people in ways that surprised them

VERSE 2 : O Lord, how long shall I cry, and Thou wilt not hear! Even cry out unto Thee of violence, and Thou wilt not save!

Little is known of the prophet Habakkuk. The reference in 3:1, 19 and 1 Chronicles 25:1–8 may mean that he was a Levite associated with temple singers. He ministered before the Babylonians invaded Judah. The wicked were prevailing both inside and outside Judah. Habakkuk cried out against the violence, lawlessness and injustice all around him.

This book records the dialogues between God and Habakkuk regarding questions such as “Why is it that God seems not to care with so much evil going on, and the guilty are let off freely?” and “How long is God going to tolerate this?”. The same question is being asked today, “Why is there evil in this world?”

God told Habakkuk that he would be surprised by God’s actions, “for I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you” [v. 5]. When things around us seem really bad and we wonder if God cares about us, it is times like these that we remember that God has a plan and He orders the circumstances to accomplish His will. If only we be patient, waiting for His timing, He shall unfold the answers right in front of our very eyes.

Prayer Father, when we are at our wits’ end, not knowing what to do, You will deliver us.

Evening

READ : Luke 20

LESSON : We belong to God

VERSE 25 : And He said unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar’s, and unto God the things which be God’s.

Jewish authorities sought to trap Jesus in a religious-state issue. The Jews resented their foreign rulers and despised paying taxes to Caesar. If Jesus answered that it was lawful to pay taxes to a pagan ruler, then He would lose credibility with the Jews who would regard Him as a coward and a friend of Caesar. If He said it was not lawful, then the Pharisees would have grounds to report Him for sedition to the Roman authorities and have Him arrested.

Jesus avoided their trap by confronting them with the image of a coin. Rulers issued coins with their own images and where the coin was valid the ruler held political sway over the people. Since the Jews used the Roman currency, Jesus explained that what belonged to Caesar must be given to Caesar.

This story has another deeper meaning. We, too, have been stamped with God’s image since we are created in His own likeness [Genesis 1:26–27]. We rightfully belong not to ourselves but to God Who created us and redeemed us with the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ [1 Corinthians 6:19–20]. We are to present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God [Romans 12:1].

Thought Do you acknowledge that your life belongs to God and not to yourself? And do you give to God what rightfully belongs to Him?

07 Dec 08 Morning

READ : Habakkuk 2

LESSON : The just shall live by faith

VERSE 4 : Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.

On hearing that God would use the Chaldeans (Babylonians) to punish the sins of His own people [Habakkuk 1:6–11], Habakkuk was utterly surprised because the Judeans were less corrupt and idolatrous than the Chaldeans. Yet they were used by God to punish His own people [Habakkuk 1:12–14]. Habakkuk began to question God and the prophet was willing to be proved wrong [v. 1].

God's answer is true. It is timeless and always correct. Though it tarries, wait for it, because it will surely come. The proud shall utterly fall and the righteous shall live by their faith. The wicked and proud Babylonians would be brought down but they that put their trust in God would be preserved and flourish. God is righteous and He will punish sin to the fullest extent. And yet God is merciful and He will forgive those who come to Him with contrite hearts.

Those who are truly good, and whose hearts are upright with God, will value the promise, and venture their all upon it; and will keep close to God and duty in the most difficult trying times, and will then live in communion with, dependence on, and expectation of Him.

Thought A believer has genuine faith in God whereas the proud relies on self, position and accomplishment outside of God.

Evening

READ : Luke 21

LESSON : Be watchful

VERSE 34 : And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.

Jesus taught that real giving must come from the heart [v. 1–4]. A gift that is given with a grudge or for display loses most of its value. But a gift given out of love, with a spirit of generosity and sacrifice, is invaluable.

Jesus foretold many signs of God's action, judgement and second coming [v. 5–33]. The Jews sought Jesus for a sign that would indicate when this would occur. Jesus admonished them not to seek signs but rather to seek God's kingdom. Jesus also spoke of the judgement at the end of the world. Disaster awaits in the day of judgement for those who refuse to heed God's Word of grace and salvation.

God wants our hearts but our hearts can be weighed down by many cares and by sin [v. 34–37]. Jesus warned us of the temptation to become lethargic or to fall asleep spiritually. The Lord knows our shortcomings and struggles and He gives us the grace to bear our burdens and to walk in His way of holiness. But there is one thing He does not tolerate: indifference or being passive when we should be actively seeking God, and an attitude of not caring and doing nothing!

Prayer May the fire of the Holy Spirit inflame my heart with an eager longing for You and for Your return.

08 Dec 08 Morning

READ : Habakkuk 3

LESSON : Enjoying God whatever the circumstances

VERSE 18 : Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

In Chapter 1 Habakkuk spoke to God, then God to him, then he to God again. In Chapter 2, God spoke wholly to him through prophecy. Here, he speaks wholly to God through prayer.

The prayer follows the style of David's Psalms, for it is directed "to the chief musician", and is set to musical instruments. The prayer is an example for the Church, and particularly of the Jews in their captivity, while they were waiting for their deliverance, promised by the vision in the foregoing chapter. He asked God for deliverance. He recounted the past events of God's mercies and wrath against enemies of God's people. With revelation from God, Habakkuk was able to powerfully express his faith in Him.

Like Habakkuk, we should realise that God went ahead for the salvation of His people, even for salvation with His Anointed

[v. 13]. With this, we certainly can rest in the day of trouble [v. 16]. Our faith can ultimately and finally be left in the God Who keeps His covenant forever. Our assurance does not rest in earthly blessings but rather in the unchanged and unchangeable God.

Thought The Lord God is my strength, and He will make my feet like hinds' feet, and He will make me to walk upon mine high places. – Habakkuk 3:19

Evening

READ : Luke 22

LESSON : Betrayal at Passover

VERSE 42 : Saying, Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me: nevertheless not My will, but Thine, be done.

The Passover is an annual feast commemorating the deliverance of the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt [Exodus 12]. On that night the angel of death slew the first-born of the Egyptians but he "passed over" the homes of the Israelites because the lintel and the sides of their doors were smeared with the blood of an unblemished lamb sacrificed for the occasion. This would be Jesus' last meal with His chosen 12. Jesus transformed the Passover of the old covenant into the meal of the "new testament in My blood" [v. 20]. He spoke of His body and blood being this new meal—a memorial of His death and resurrection.

Do you know the pain of rejection from someone close to you? Judas' betrayal with a kiss shows the hypocrisy of his love and trust. Peter was passionately loyal to his Master but he was unprepared for the test that was to come. Jesus not only warned Peter but prayed for him, too. Jesus met His betrayal and arrest with serenity and confident trust in His Father. When adversity strikes how do you respond? Is it with fear and panic or with confident hope and trust in God?

Prayer Fill me with Your Holy Spirit that I may have the strength and courage to embrace Your will in all things and to renounce whatever is contrary to it.

09 Dec 08 Morning

READ : Zephaniah 1

LESSON : No neutrality with God

VERSE 12 : And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil.

Zephaniah is the son of Cushi and a descendant of Hezekiah [v. 1], the king of Judah. Being of royal parentage he could openly rebuke the sins of the princes. The central theme of his prophesy is “the day of the Lord”, which occurs more often in this book than any other in the Bible.

He portrayed a nation stricken with social inequalities, complacent luxury and a spiritual decline. He foretold the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, set their sins before them, called them to repentance and gave encouraging promises of their joyful return out of captivity in due time, which has a reference to the grace of the Gospel [Zephaniah 3:14–20].

We live in times where “economic progress”, “GDP growth” and “have fun” are watchwords of our nation. We are careless, contented with the goods of this life. We trust in our riches and become irreligious. We may acknowledge that there is a God but we think that He is sleeping. How wrong are we! God can search our hearts and punish the complacent. You’re for Him or against Him.

Thought Neither our silver nor our gold shall be able to deliver us in the day of the Lord’s wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of His jealousy.

Evening

READ : Luke 23

LESSON : Jesus’ death

VERSE 46 : And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, He said, Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit: and having said thus, He gave up the ghost.

Pilate found in Jesus “no crime deserving death”. But he sacrificed justice under the pressure of the Jews. The Romans reserved crucifixion for their worst offenders. It was designed to be the most humiliating and excruciatingly painful way they knew for execution.

When Jesus was nailed to the cross He was already half-dead. The scourging alone and the crown of thorns beaten into His skull had nearly killed Him. Why did He not react with anger at those who jeered and insulted Him? Jesus’ first words were addressed to His Father as a prayer of forgiveness for those who have harmed Him unjustly, even out of ignorance. Jesus’ second words were directed to the repentant thief who asked for mercy.

Jesus’ parting words, “Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit!” expressed triumph rather than defeat. Jesus bowed His head and gave up His spirit knowing that the strife was now over and the battle was won. Even on the cross Jesus knew the joy of victory.

By Jesus’ death on the cross, He has won pardon for us and freedom from the tyranny of sin and death. You may live in the joy and freedom of your victory over sin and death.

Thought God’s mercy frees us to love and to forgive as Jesus did. Do you forgive those who offend you?

10 Dec 08 Morning

READ : Zephaniah 2

LESSON : A call to repentance

VERSE 1 : Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired.

Zephaniah, having declared the judgements that would befall his people, earnestly exhorted them to repentance so that the judgements might be averted. He then foretold the fate of other neighbouring and hostile nations. In the close of the chapter we have a prophecy against Nineveh.

The day of the Lord means that the coming judgement on sinners by God is unavoidable. However, God has provided a way of escape when there is true repentance. An earnest call is made to Judah to gather (repeated twice) themselves together. The gathering has two sides to it. Each is individually to take hold of oneself, to bring oneself, all one's thoughts together, and so, have full possession of oneself—act by act, word by word, thought by thought, are to be examined and repented of.

God's people must meet together as a corporate body, e.g. a prayer meeting, to consider carefully how they have sinned against God, to seek righteousness, a God-directed lifestyle and self-effacing humility. Only when they completely abandon their agenda and follow God's will is salvation possible [v. 3].

Thought Take the Lord's warning seriously.

Evening

READ : Luke 24

LESSON : Resurrection and ascension of Jesus

VERSE 7 : Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.

Jesus' death scattered His disciples and shattered their hopes and dreams. They saw the cross as defeat and could not comprehend the empty tomb until the Lord appeared to them and gave them understanding. The reality of the resurrection is the central fact of the Christian faith.

Jesus' departure and ascension into heaven was both an end and a beginning for His disciples. While it was the end of Jesus' physical presence with His beloved disciples, it marked the beginning of Jesus' presence with them in a new way. Jesus promised that He would be with them always, to the end of time. Now, as the glorified and risen Lord and Saviour ascended to the right hand of the Father in heaven, Jesus promised to send them the Holy Spirit Who would anoint them with power.

Just as the first disciples were commissioned to bring the good news of salvation to all the nations, we, too, are called to be witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus Christ to all who live on the face of the earth. Do you proclaim the joy of the Gospel and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus to those around you?

Thought The greatest joy we can have is to encounter the living Lord and to know Him personally.

11 Dec 08 Morning

READ : Zephaniah 3

LESSON : Death of a church

VERSE 5 : The just Lord is in the midst thereof; He will not do iniquity: every morning doth He bring His judgement to light, He faileth not; but the unjust knoweth no shame.

The Church of Christ lasts forever, from before the foundation of creation to eternity. Local churches, however, going by history, do not last very long. They are gone after a few generations. Even in countries (Algeria, Tunisia, Mauritania, Morocco, Libya, Egypt, Syria) where ancient churches were once dominant, there are now either virtually no Christian witnesses or only a small percentage of the population are Christians.

Jerusalem [v. 1], a symbol of the church, is no different. Firstly, they are polluted with filth from the world, have adopted her ways, became gluttonous, making provisions for the flesh and so fulfil their lusts. They are filled with pride, neglecting correction from the Word of God and the prompting of the Spirit. Likewise, this is an age where many go to church to be entertained. Worse still, both civil and religious leaders behave like ravening beasts of prey. They completely pervert their calling. Rather than speaking God's truth, they seek glory for themselves by their own lying treachery. But God is righteous and brings His justice to light. Is it any wonder why a church dies?

Thought I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

Evening

READ : John 1

LESSON : Jesus, Word made flesh

VERSE 1 : In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The beginning of the Gospel of John— also known as the Synoptic Gospel—is quite different from the other three gospels. Although all four Gospels were written under the divine inspiration of God, John's Gospel has many things that are not recorded in the others. The other three Gospel writers have given us full statements about the divinity of Christ, justification by faith, the offices of Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit and the benefits of believers as in John's Gospel.

John 1:1 is one of the most beautiful verses in the Bible. In fact, the first five verses contain a statement of matchless sublimity concerning the divine nature of the Lord Jesus Christ. One of the reasons the Son of God is called the Word (Logos) is that our words (if we speak the truth) communicate our minds to others. Thus the Son of God was sent to reveal the Father's mind to us. Christ is God's perfect revelation of Himself.

The world was from the beginning, but the Logos was in the beginning. Jesus is eternal, and He was with God and yet a distinct person, a revelation we can only understand by faith.

Thought Logos, which means word spoken, doctrine, reason is very properly applied to Jesus Who is the fountain of all wisdom and the source of life to man.

12 Dec 08 Morning

READ : Haggai 1

LESSON : Having wrong priorities

VERSE 6 : Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.

Nine of the 12 minor prophets preached before the captivity, but the last three lived and preached after the children of Israel returned from captivity. The Israelites were determined to restore the worship of God and planned to build a new temple in Jerusalem. But soon they forgot their priorities as opposition and apathy set in. Haggai challenged the people with “Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?” [v. 4].

The people felt that it was not the right time to build the Temple [v. 2] but they were living in houses with the inside walls inlaid with costly woodwork. Living in such houses was a sign of luxury and comfort. Their priorities were revealed by their attitudes. The Lord spoke plainly to them. Their hard work and labour were in vain because it was confounded by the Lord. They put in much effort but the results were meagre. However, our Lord told them exactly what they must do [v. 8] to win back God’s favour. Our worldly successes yield little joy if God is not our priority. Seek God first, and all things will fall into place.

Prayer Lord, speak to us plainly when we have our priorities wrong, that we may find pleasure in Your sight.

Evening

READ : John 2

LESSON : Separation of church and commerce

VERSE 19 : Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.

Our Lord physically chased out the Jews who turned the house of God into a marketplace. He chased out those who were selling oxen, sheep and doves, and He overturned the money changers’ tables. He did not complain to the religious leaders, for he knew they tolerated these corruptions. Our Lord’s zeal for His Father’s house led Him to take action.

The Jews asked Jesus by what authority He acted. He told them that if the temple were destroyed, He would raise it up again in three days. By the temple, Jesus was referring to the dwelling place of God. But He also meant the temple in the sense that in Him “dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” [Colossians 2:9]. When our Lord spoke of raising the temple in three days, He was speaking of His resurrection, a spiritual truth not fully realised by His disciples until He rose from the grave.

Are you like the Jews, who worshipped at the temple but desecrated it by turning it into a place to get material gain? Do you bring your body into church every Sunday but leave your heart somewhere else?

Thought Parents, train your child in the godly habits of worship by worshipping aright.

13 Dec 08 Morning

READ : Haggai 2

LESSON : “Be strong,” God encourages us

VERSE 9 : The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts.

This is one of the three sermons [v. 1–9, 10–19, 20–23] preached in this chapter by Haggai to encourage those who were building the temple. The older Israelites, who had seen the first temple before it was destroyed, were disappointed with its replacement. The older temple was much grander than the present structure. The new one was nothing when compared with the one built by Solomon.

God told Joshua to be strong the first time he entered the Promised Land [Joshua 1:6–7]. He also told Joshua, son of Josedech, to be strong. On both occasions the two Joshuas (not related) acted on God’s instruction and God assured them of His presence with “I will be with thee” or “I am with you”. Our covenant-keeping God always sends His Spirit [v. 5] to be with His people. They are assured that He is forever faithful to His covenant.

God’s appraisal of the temple was different. To Him, the glory of this latter house would be greater because it was the desire of all nations. It refers to the coming Messiah Who would enter the temple [Luke 2:27, 32] and fill it with His glory and peace. Hallelujah!

Prayer O God, send Your Spirit to guide and strengthen us.

Evening

READ : John 3

LESSON : Straight talk and political incorrectness

VERSE 19 : And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

Nicodemus, a Pharisee and spiritual leader, came to Jesus secretly by night [John 7:50, 19:39] because he wanted to know more about what Jesus taught. But he could hardly believe what our Lord said about spiritual rebirth [v. 8]. Our Lord Jesus was just as surprised when Nicodemus revealed his ignorance concerning the doctrine of regeneration, “Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?”

Ignorance such as that of Nicodemus is far too common in the Church of Christ, even today. Paper diplomas, titles and personal charisma are no proof that a person is taught by the Spirit. There are religious leaders who get to positions of power because they are personable, and they can be all things to all peoples by changing colours and singing different tunes. It is one thing to be a theologian, but quite another to be a born-again Christian. It is one thing to know about God, but quite another to know God.

No man can know God truly unless he first comes to Christ humbly by faith. The surest way to know the truths of the Christian faith is to give your heart to God and live to His glory.

Thought The Christian knows the truth because the Holy Spirit enlightens him.

14 Dec 08 Morning

READ : Zechariah 1

LESSON : God remembers His own

VERSE 3 : Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith the Lord of hosts: Turn ye unto Me, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of hosts.

Together with Haggai, the prophet Zechariah ministered to the Jews after their return from the Babylonian exile. He encouraged them to rebuild the temple. The city seemed to be forsaken, but God assured them that He was “jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with great jealousy” [v. 14]. But the people, unlike their stubborn and rebellious forefathers, had to repent and turn to God first. By calling them to repent, Zechariah is preparing the Jews for the messages he would give them.

God gave Zechariah a series of eight visions. In the first, the rider on the red horse, God’s angels reported that the Gentile nations were at rest and in peace while the Jewish nation was still suffering. But God would comfort Zion because Jerusalem was His chosen city. In the second, the four horns, God assured His people that He had not abandoned them and would judge the nations that had terrified them.

When we go through suffering, we should remind ourselves that God identifies with our suffering and is in charge of our future. Our responsibility is to repent, confess our sins and believe His “comforting words” [v. 13].

Prayer Turn us again, O God, and cause Thy face to shine; and we shall be saved. –
Psalm 80:3

Evening

READ : John 4

LESSON : Worshipping God as it was meant to be

VERSE 24 : God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.

Our Lord varies His methods of reaching out to different people with the same Gospel message. With Nicodemus, a Pharisee, Jesus dealt with him as a self-righteous man who needs to be “born again”. With the rich young ruler, He said, “Sell all and give it to the poor.” With the crowd hungering after food, He said, “Labour not after the meat that perishes.” With the simple-minded Samaritan woman of questionable morals, He was tactful and gently revealed Himself as the Messiah, the One Who gives “living water”.

Jesus ended the discussion with the Samaritan woman with an important doctrine on worship: God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth. At the heart of true worship is approaching God with a contrite heart and humble spirit [Isaiah 57:15] because “the Lord looketh on the heart” [1 Samuel 16:7].

We tend to make religion a mere matter of outward form and ceremony, and to attach an excessive importance to the observances of worship. Our Lord Jesus teaches that worship must be based on truth derived from Scriptures, and worship must be a spiritual activity whose only goal is that God be glorified.

Thought Your attendance and attention at the Lord's Day worship service is part of your Christian testimony

15 Dec 08 Morning

READ : Zechariah 2

LESSON : Precious to God

VERSE 10 : Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord.

In his third vision, Zechariah saw a man—later identified as an angel [v. 3]—tasked with measuring the dimensions of Jerusalem. It is clear that Jerusalem was God’s city and He would one day claim it and restore its glory. The small remnant of Jews in the ruined city keeping it alive would one day be greatly honoured and blessed by God. He admonished the Jews still living in comfort and security in Babylon to leave the city and join the remnant in Jerusalem to rebuild it.

God reassured the Jews that they are precious in His eyes. Someday, He will summon them from the widespread dispersion they had suffered at the hands of the Assyrians and Babylonians. God will restore Israel to glory in the kingdom age and judge the nations that have oppressed and afflicted Israel and Judah.

Do you want to have a part in that glorious kingdom? Then come to Jesus Christ and accept Him as your Lord and Saviour. This is the only way we Gentiles can be grafted onto the glorious tree that is Israel and become branches precious to the Almighty God [Romans 11:17].

Sing ‘Tis heaven below, my Redeemer to know; for He is so precious to me.

Evening

READ : John 5

LESSON : Right way to study Scripture

VERSE 39 : Search the scriptures: for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me.

This verse is better understood within the context of the chapter when translated in the indicative mood (as is the case of many translations), “[Ye] search the scriptures; for ...” The thrust of Jesus’ argument is that the Jews, in particular the Pharisees, studied Scripture for the wrong reasons. In Matthew 23:2–3, Jesus said that the Pharisees had the authority of Moses and told the disciples to observe the Pharisees’ teachings but not to follow after their works. They did not practise what they preached.

The Pharisees studied the Scriptures diligently but had a superstitious way of interpreting them. While studious in the letters and words of Scripture, they remained strangers to its power and influence. They thought they could be saved by observing the ceremonial laws. They were meticulous in copying the words and knew exactly how many words and letters each chapter contained. Yet they could not recognise the Saviour standing right in front of them.

The Pharisees knew the Word of God but did not know the God of the Word. If they had known Him, they would have gone to Him that they might have life [John 5:40].

Thought Search the Scriptures diligently and seek the Saviour devotedly.

16 Dec 08 Morning

READ : Zechariah 3

LESSON : No condemnation

VERSE 4 : And He answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him He said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.

Joshua was the high priest who ministered to the returned Jews [Ezra 3]. In this fourth vision, Zechariah saw a courtroom scene where Joshua, standing before the Lord as a representative of Israel, was clothed in filthy garments. Satan, the adversary, was accusing him but Christ interceded on his behalf. God commanded the angels to take away Joshua's filthy garments and clothe him with "rich robes" and placed a clean turban on his head. All this is symbolic that Israel's sins will be forgiven and she will be restored to service.

At the second coming of Christ, when Israel beholds the One Whom they pierced [Zechariah 12:10], they will repent and be cleansed. When that happens, God will fulfil the promises of peace that He has made to Israel through the prophets. Resting under one's vine and fig tree [v. 10] is an image of peace and security.

Like Israel, those who put their trust in God's servant, the Branch [v. 8], will have their sins forgiven and will not face condemnation on the Day of Judgement.

Furthermore, they enjoy the privilege of serving Him in this life.

May Zechariah's fourth vision encourage us to serve God with greater zeal.

Question Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?

Evening

READ : John 6

LESSON : No turning back

VERSE 66 : From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him.

How sad indeed that these professed followers of Christ turned away and left Him. This happened from that time when they were offended by the remarkable declarations of our Lord's impending sacrifice of Himself for the sins of the world. They had no genuine faith but were merely looking to some temporal benefit and using religion for their own selfish desires.

Just like Orpah who forsook Naomi [Ruth 1:15], these people forsook Jesus and returned to their families and their gods. Jesus did not detain them, but He turned affectionately to the 12 disciples and asked: "Will ye also go away?" [v. 67]. Jesus Christ does not compel anyone to follow Him against his will. He gives us the freedom of choice.

The rich young man went away sorrowful [Matthew 19:22]. He chose to turn his back on Christ rather than part with his great possessions. Take time to examine yourself and your motives in following the Lord. "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" [Luke 9:62].

How tragic the outcome of some "professed" believers is. Once they followed Jesus, but now they walked no more with Him.

Thought I have decided to follow Jesus; no turning back.

17 Dec 08 Morning

READ : Zechariah 4

LESSON : Serving God with confidence

VERSE 6 : Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.

Zerubbabel was the governor who led the returned Jews in civil affairs [Ezra 3]. In his fifth vision, Zechariah saw a golden lampstand with a bowl at the top into which oil dripped from two olive trees, and fed seven lamps. Unlike the candlestick that Moses had put into the tabernacle, this candlestick did not require the high priest to provide the oil.

An angel explained that they represented the Word of the Lord. God wanted Zerubbabel to know that the rebuilding of the Temple would not be accomplished through human effort but through dependence on the Spirit of the Lord of hosts. God assured Zerubbabel that He would remove the toughest obstacles and the project would be completed under Zerubbabel's leadership, and the people would rejoice at what God has done through them.

The lesson for believers is that, to successfully carry out God's assignments, we have to depend completely on Him and not our own strength and ability. Only this type of work glorifies God and will endure the fire of His judgement [1 Corinthians 3:12–15].

May Zechariah's fifth vision encourage believers to serve God with greater confidence.

Question God delights in using small things against large opponents.

Evening

READ : John 7

LESSON : A life that blesses others

VERSE 38 : He that believeth on Me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.

Christ is the fountain of life Who revivifies those who quench their spiritual thirst in Him. We who have trusted in Christ not only receive the water of life that springs to eternal life but also become the channel to dispense the blessing of salvation to others. Christians must be rivers of living water for the spiritual refreshment of others.

Water quenches, refreshes and invigorates the parched soul. This thirst refers to a strong desire and longing for spiritual blessing. If you desire to be truly happy, come to the Lord and let Him rule your life. The woman of Samaria found a constant flowing spring in Christ when she came to draw water at Jacob's well [John 4:14], and she immediately dispensed the living water to others, who received the blessing as well.

As God's children, we must be His instruments of blessing to influence the lost with the gospel of Christ. We must be good testimonies for the Lord in every situation of life. "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" [Proverbs 4:23]. Let the grace of God sanctify the fountain of your heart so that your actions will bring glory to God.

Question Is your life a channel of blessing?

18 Dec 08 Morning

READ : Zechariah 5

LESSON : Cleansing of the land

VERSE 3 : Then said He unto me, This is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth: for everyone that stealeth shall be cut off as on this side according to it; and everyone that sweareth shall be cut off as on that side according to it.

In his sixth vision, Zechariah saw a flying scroll about 30 feet long and 15 feet wide. It represented the Law of God that brings a curse on those who cheat and lie. In his seventh vision, Zechariah saw a woman in a basket. She represented wickedness and was restrained and carried by two angels to the land of Shinar. Shinar probably refers to Babylon, which, in the Tower of Babel episode as well as in the future [Genesis 10:10; Revelation 17, 18] symbolises the world's enmity against God. The two visions warn us that with the second coming of Christ, God, "the Lord of the whole earth" [Zechariah 4:14], will remove all sinners who rebel against His law, starting with the house of Israel.

Today, we live in societies where lying and the breaking of vows are condoned and even encouraged in personal living, as seen by ever increasing adultery and divorce rates, as well as in business. "As in the days of Noah", wickedness and iniquity abound. God's Word warns Christians that even though they are "in the world", they must not be "of the world". We must be vigilant and separate ourselves from all evil and uncleanness.

Thought Why are Christians called a peculiar people? Read Titus2:13-14.

Evening

READ : John 8

LESSON : New life in Christ

VERSE 11 : She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.

Jesus was the only One Who could stone the woman caught in adultery. He alone had the right to condemn and forgive. Her accusers, from the eldest to the youngest, were convicted by their own conscience and left the woman alone with Jesus. They could not condemn her, and Jesus would not. Our Saviour and Redeemer called her to repentance with words of mercy and compassion, reflecting His gracious and forgiving spirit. Our Saviour gave neither threat judgement nor words of condemnation but only words of assurance and hope for a second chance.

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" [Romans 8:1]. Our omniscient Lord addressed the needs of the woman. He forgave her sins and prepared the way for a new start in life. He told her to make a clean break and "sin no more".

The adulterous woman is a picture of every sinner. We stand alone, sinful and condemned before God, awaiting His judgement, but our loving Saviour provided the way of salvation for those who repent and ask for forgiveness. Have you turned your life over to Him?

Sing New life in Christ, abundant and free.

19 Dec 08 Morning

READ : Zechariah 6

LESSON : God judges the nations

VERSE 13 : Even he shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.

Zechariah's eighth vision was similar to John's vision of the "four horsemen of the apocalypse" in Revelation 6:1–8. These four chariots represent God's angels assigned to different parts of the world to judge the nations. This will happen during the Great Tribulation. When their missions are accomplished, they will cause God's Spirit to rest [v. 8], meaning that God's Spirit will no longer strive with the inhabitants of the earth [Genesis 6:3].

In verses 9 to 15, three Jews from Babylon will come to Jerusalem with gold and silver for the temple. God told Zechariah to make a crown and put it on Joshua and make him a king-priest. In the Old Testament, Jews were strictly forbidden to hold both the offices of priest and king. This must be symbolic of the coming of the Messiah, Who has often been referred to as the Branch. He will reign from the future glorious temple.

The prophet wants to encourage his people in their daily work and to live their lives "in the future tense" because they have a part in God's glorious plan for Jerusalem. Likewise, Christians who have a blessed hope in Christ, should watch, pray and labour till the Master comes.

Thought True faith goes from assurance to action.

Evening

READ : John 9

LESSON : The mystery of iniquity

VERSE 39 : And Jesus said, For judgement I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind.

This chapter records another of Jesus' miracles in healing a man who had been blind from birth. It also gives testimony to the hardened unbelief of the Pharisees who simply refused to believe the blind man. Having witnessed the many spectacular miracles that Jesus performed, "which no man can do", the Pharisees accused Jesus of being from Beelzebub, the prince of the devils, instead of acknowledging Him to be from God [Matthew 12:24]. How could the Pharisees of Jesus' day be so blind?

The reason is that Satan, the god of this world, had blinded their eyes [John 12:40]. Furthermore, their sinful nature caused them to "love darkness rather than light" [John 3:19].

Thus we should not labour under the delusion that as soon as we tell a loved one the gospel of salvation, he would joyfully receive it, and be saved. More often than not, we meet fierce opposition. As Paul says in Ephesians 6:12, we wrestle not against flesh and blood. But we thank God that although it is impossible for us, with God all things are possible. Pray therefore, that the Holy Spirit will remove your loved one's spiritual blindness.

Thought Iniquity entraps the wicked as in a net, and binds them as with cords. – Charles H. Spurgeon

20 Dec 08 Morning

READ : Zechariah 7

LESSON : Beware of self-centred worship

VERSE 5 : Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto Me, even to Me?

The Jewish exiles in Babylon had added new fasts to commemorate the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. But with the rebuilding of the temple and the city in progress, certain citizens sent Sherezer and Regemmelech to ask the priests if they should continue to observe the times of fasting and mourning. Zechariah used the opportunity to teach the Jews about true spiritual worship.

Through Zechariah, God asked three questions that are relevant to us even today: (a) When you fasted, did you do it for God or for yourselves? (b) When you feasted, was it for the Lord or for yourselves? (c) Did you hear the words that the Lord spoke to your fathers through the prophets during times when the city was inhabited and in prosperity?

Zechariah reminded them of the way their forefathers routinely practised their religion but failed to hear God's Word and obey from their hearts. But the leaders continued to exploit the people for personal gain.

Is your worship self-centred or God-centred?

Prayer Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts. – Psalm 139:23

Evening

READ : John 10

LESSON : Your salvation is secure

VERSE 29 : My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand.

This chapter gives great comfort to the believing reader. It contains many wonderful promises. In verses 27 to 29, Jesus tells us that He is our Shepherd and we are His sheep. When we hear the voice of this wonderful Shepherd, and follow Him, He will give us eternal life. Not only that, nothing in this world can pluck us out of the Father's hand.

This is the promise of our eternal security, the assurance of our salvation. It means that our salvation is not dependent on our holding on to Him. If it did, we are doomed because there is no sinner who can secure his salvation through his own good works. But thanks be to the Almighty God, our salvation rests on His ability to hold on to us.

This chapter also teaches us one vital truth. Jesus is the only door. There is no other door by which we can enter into eternal life. Like the door to Noah's Ark, some day it will be shut and it will be too late for those who ignore the Gospel. Let us warn those who are still outside that door.

Sing For my Saviour loves me so, He will hold me fast.

21 Dec 08 Morning

READ : Zechariah 8

LESSON : Let your hands be strong

VERSE 13 : And it shall come to pass, that as ye were a curse among the heathen, O house of Judah, and house of Israel; so will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing: fear not, but let your hands be strong.

Just as the angels would proclaim to a group of humble shepherds on a cold Christmas night in time to come, Zechariah now brought “tidings of great joy” to the small group of Jews rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem. God was exceedingly jealous for them. He will once again bless Jerusalem with His presence and fellowship. Jerusalem will become a city of truth and peace. God will prosper their labours, bless them and make them a blessing, and turn their fasting to feasting. The Messiah will bring joy in worship, not sorrow.

This description contrasts sharply with the displeasure that God had shown to their forefathers. The response that God requires of the hearers of these promises [v. 9] is that they must let their hands be strong. Look to the future with confidence and commitment to complete the construction of the Temple. Furthermore, in their conduct, they were to speak the truth, render sound and true judgements [v. 16], devise no evil against their neighbours, and love not false oaths.

Thanks to the finished work of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Christians have a share in these blessings. But they, too, are required to respond in like manner.

Prayer Take my hands and let them move at the impulse of Thy love.

Evening

READ : John 11

LESSON : Do not limit the power of God

VERSE 23 : Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again.

When Lazarus died, his sisters Mary and Martha sent word for Jesus. But our Lord Jesus delayed for four days before coming to Bethany. When the two sisters met Jesus, they wept and said that had Jesus come earlier, Lazarus might not have died. Jesus told the people to open the tomb and commanded Lazarus to arise.

Throughout the entire event, the Jews followed and observed Jesus’ every action. Some were convicted and believed [v. 45] but others chose to deny Him and even plotted against Him [v. 51] for fear that they might be forsaken.

Jesus’ tardiness was deliberate. Martha and Mary might have thought the best solution to Lazarus’ illness was to heal him. However, Jesus had a reason for His delay. He told the disciples that He was glad for their sakes that He was not at Bethany so that they might believe [v. 15].

Jesus used the miracle as an opportunity to demonstrate that He had the power to give life. Jesus is the resurrection, and He is the life. Faith in Christ is not always getting what we want. It is believing that what Christ has for us is infinitely better.

Thought God’s will and timing are always perfect.

22 Dec 08 Morning

READ : Zechariah 9

LESSON : Maranatha—our Lord cometh!

VERSE 9 : Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: He is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.

Chapter 9 begins a new section where Zechariah looked beyond the immediate historical situation of his day to events associated with the life, ministry and death of Jesus Christ. The remaining chapters contain two “burdens” or oracles. Chapters 9 to 11 emphasise the first advent of the Messiah while Chapters 12 to 14 look forward to Christ’s second coming.

Verses 1 to 8 describe God’s judgement against the pagan nations around Israel, possibly through the armies of Alexander the Great. God promised that foreign invaders would no longer threaten the temple or the people [v. 8]. Verse 9 beautifully describes the first arrival of the Messiah. He would not be mounting on a charging warhorse, but would enter the city of Jerusalem on a lowly beast of burden.

Verse 10 onwards describe the Messiah’s second coming. He will come in power and great glory and Israel will be delivered, her enemies defeated. Weapons of war will be abolished and Christ will reign “from sea to sea”.

Seeing that these events will come to pass shortly, Christians are to lead holy lives and serve our living Saviour with greater zeal [2 Peter 3:11, 1 John 3:3 and 1 Thessalonians 5:6].

Prayer Pray for greater faith and strength to serve Him.

Evening

READ : John 12

LESSON : Hierarchy of giving

VERSE 7 : Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of My burying hath she kept this.

Jesus was dining at the home of Lazarus, Martha and Mary when Mary anointed Jesus’ feet with expensive oil and wiped them with her hair. The ointment cost 300 pence, which was equivalent to a year’s wages. When Judas Iscariot saw this act of devotion, he rebuked Mary for her extravagance, claiming that the oil should have been sold and the money given to the poor. Jesus defended Mary because her action showed that she was more perceptive than the other disciples. Jesus said that Mary had prepared the ointment for His death.

When to spend, when not to spend, and whom to spend on? Christians who do not understand the meaning of stewardship spend freely on themselves but give very little thought to God or His kingdom. They are rich to themselves but not rich towards God [Luke 12:21]. Mary’s act shows us that spiritual perception is needed in the area of our finances.

It is not wrong to give to the poor; it is also not a sin to spend money on yourself. However, it is the spiritually perceptive Christian who knows the love of God and expresses his love for God in the most superlative way.

Thought Do not be like the rich farmer who “layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” [Luke 12:21].

23 Dec 08 Morning

READ : Zechariah 10

LESSON : The faithful Shepherd

VERSE 3 : Mine anger was kindled against the shepherds, and I punished the goats: for the Lord of hosts hath visited His flock the house of Judah, and hath made them as His goodly horse in the battle.

In this chapter, Israel is portrayed as a flock led by evil shepherds who caused them to wander and go astray [Matthew 9:36]. Israel in the latter days would be like wandering sheep because their leaders followed lies instead of God's truth [Ezekiel 34].

But the Lord will return and be their Shepherd. He will punish the leaders of Judah for leading the people astray. He will gather both Israel (Joseph) and Judah (Ephraim) from worldwide dispersion and reunite them as one people. Transformed from a flock into a warhorse, Israel will trample her enemies down like mud in the streets, and they will go from victory to victory in the strength of the Lord.

Like the Jews, the Church today is weak and disunited. But the same God can give us the same blessings. We are fighting battles against the enemy and God can unite and strengthen us in Christ. He can turn His helpless sheep into victorious warhorses. How much He is willing to do for us if only we will admit our failures and unbelief and turn to Him for help.

Prayer Remember your church leaders daily in your prayers.

Evening

READ : John 13

LESSON : A commandment to love

VERSE 34 : A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

This chapter records the last meal our Lord Jesus had with His disciples. After eating, Jesus took a towel and began washing the feet of His disciples. Simon Peter was uncomfortable that the Master should be washing the servants' feet.

Jesus explained that His washing of His disciples' feet was an example and a lesson on humility and service to one another. This is the principle of servant-leadership. The one who leads is the one who serves. Later that evening, our Lord Jesus finally revealed the disciple who would betray Him—Judas Iscariot. But the other disciples did not know what Jesus was talking about, and they never knew the evil intent of one of their own.

These were uncertain times for the disciples, and human weakness tends to lend to more strife. We sometimes see Christians falling out with each other in adverse circumstances.

But in the face of a potential blow-up, our Lord Jesus gave the commandment that would not only unite the 11 disciples but also bear testimony to the world—love one another as I have loved you. We are to love others to the same extent that our Lord loves us.

Prayer Dear Lord Jesus, I pray that You fill my heart to love even my enemies.

24 Dec 08 Morning

READ : Zechariah 11

LESSON : Beauty and Bands

VERSE 10 : And I took My staff, even Beauty, and cut it as under, that I might break My covenant which I had made with all the people.

This chapter describes the coming judgement of God. To illustrate His point, God told Zechariah to play the role of a shepherd and to portray the events of Israel's rejection of the Messiah. First, Zechariah was to serve the people but he was rejected. Next, the shepherd would abandon the people to face the consequences of their rejection.

Jewish shepherds commonly carried two staves with them, one to drive away wild animals and the other to guide the sheep. Here, the shepherd had two staves—one called "Beauty" (grace or favour) and the other called "Bands" (unity)—to tend to the flock.

But when the people rejected the shepherd, Zechariah broke the two staves "Beauty" and "Bands" [v. 10, 14], symbolising God's setting aside His providential care for His people. This led to the oppression of Israel by her enemies.

As a further insult, they paid him 30 pieces of silver as a way of telling that his prophetic ministry was as valuable as that of a common slave. Our Lord Jesus Christ was betrayed for the same amount. Our Lord Jesus gave His life for sinners. We ought never to take lightly the value of that sacrifice.

Thought Obey the Shepherd and keep close to Him lest we lose His grace and fellowship.

Evening

READ : John 14

LESSON : Comfort amidst trouble

VERSE 27 : Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

The disciples were troubled for several reasons. Jesus had informed them of His departure and revealed a traitor among them. He predicted that Peter would deny Him thrice. Things must have been very difficult for the disciples at that time.

Knowing that His disciples were anxious, Jesus comforted them with the promise of a Comforter—the Holy Ghost. Jesus told them that He would go to His Father's house and prepare a place for them. In His absence, the Comforter, also known as the Spirit of truth, would dwell in the disciples [v. 16–17].

The Americans thought they could stay out of the Second World War. They thought the Japanese army would not attack them because of the US naval power stationed at Pearl Harbour. Pearl Harbour was attacked by the Japanese air force and the American navy severely crippled. The American sense of security was as short-lived as it was false.

However, that is not the peace offered by the Holy Ghost. He is the Comforter sent from heaven to come alongside us to strengthen the weak, lift up the downtrodden, cheer the sorrowful, guide the lost, convict the sinner and soothe the troubled.

Thought Real peace comes from the Prince of Peace. Real comfort must come from the Holy Comforter.

25 Dec 08 Morning

READ : Zechariah 12

LESSON : In that day

VERSE 8 : In that day shall the Lord defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the Lord before them.

Chapter 12 describes a great future battle against Jerusalem. Nations who oppose God's people will not prevail forever. Finally, the Jews will realise that Jesus, the man whom they pierced and killed, is indeed the Messiah. There will be a great awakening, Israel will mourn and face their sorrow.

The phrase "In that day" is mentioned six times in Chapter 12 alone. It generally refers to "the day of the Lord", pointing to the great end-time invasion of Israel by multi-national armies of the Beast. The Lord will return in great glory to judge the world.

In that day, the Lord will "make Jerusalem a burdensome stone, smite every horse with astonishment, make the governors of Judah like a hearth of fire among the wood, defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem, seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem". There will be a great mourning in Jerusalem [v. 3–11].

Verse 10 shows us the pattern for coming to Jesus and true repentance. First, we look to Jesus. Then we mourn for our sins. Looking to Jesus must come first. This verse sets out the path for us to follow so that we will not be left behind "in that day".

Thought The Father sends the Spirit so that we would look upon the Son.

Evening

READ : John 15

LESSON : Bearing fruit

VERSE 2 : Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

A rare occurrence in the Gospel of John, John 15 records our Lord Jesus' parable regarding the true vine. Here, Jesus says He is the "true vine", God is the "gardener" and we are the "branches". He also points out that there are two types of branches: the fruitful and the fruitless. The fruitful branch is one that abides in Christ. Our Lord says, "Without Me, ye can do nothing" [v. 5]. We look at a plant but cannot see how the tissues in the vines and branches are connected. It is the fruits that are visible. If the branches and vines are connected, there will be fruits.

Likewise, the inner workings of a believer's abiding in Christ cannot be seen. What is visible are the results of the abiding. As our Lord points out, the results are obedience to His commandments

10], which describes our relationship with God; fullness of joy

11], which describes our temperament as we obey God's Word; and love for the brethren [v. 12], which is the natural outflow of our obedience to God and the joy we have in Him.

Believers who abide in Christ will naturally bring forth good fruit.

Thought First abide in Christ, then abound.

26 Dec 08 Morning

READ : Zechariah 13

LESSON : A fountain to cleanse sin

VERSE 1 : In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness.

This chapter pictures the final days of the earth. For God's new era to begin, there must be cleansing. All evil must be banished. Idols will be thrown away and false prophets will be ashamed of themselves. They will no longer try to deceive God's people. Israel has finally recognised and embraced the Messiah. They now enjoy a fountain that brings cleansing for sin and uncleanness. The cleansing comes after their mourning for the One Whom they have pierced.

In Christ, there will be a never-ending supply of God's cleansing power. The fountain is used in the Bible to symbolise God's forgiveness. Jesus tells of His "living water" that satisfies completely. "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" [John 4:14].

All our "good" works cannot cleanse us of our sins. Only God's fountain can. Do you desire to experience God's cleansing power? Are you spiritually thirsty? Drink from the fountain of the Lord.

Thought The atonement is not a fountain hid and concealed, and closed and barred and bolted. It is a fountain open. – Spurgeon

Evening

READ : John 16

LESSON : Joy that cannot be taken away

VERSE 20 : Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.

Jesus gives us two aspects of the ministry of the Holy Spirit: to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgement [v. 8–10]; and to guide us into all truth [v. 13–14].

Our Lord Jesus also told the disciples that He would go to the Father, which troubled His disciples. Our Lord added that His departure would bring much sorrow to them and much joy to the world. Just as a mother who experiences great travail in giving birth forgets her pain when she holds her child in her arms, so our Lord Jesus assures His disciples that their weeping will turn to joy [v. 20–21].

This promise of joy is founded upon our Lord's seeing them again, a reference to His resurrection. The resurrection of Christ changed the disciples as it should also change us. Because He lives, we shall live also. Because He is risen from the dead, we must never sorrow as those who have no hope [1 Thessalonians 4:13].

This joy promised by our Lord can never be taken from us [v. 22] because it does not depend on circumstances. But it can be lost as a result when we forget that we have a living Saviour.

Thought Rejoice in Christ, we serve a risen Saviour.

27 Dec 08 Morning

READ : Zechariah 14

LESSON : Behold, the day of the Lord cometh

VERSE 16 : And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles.

Zechariah 14 pictures the eventual triumph of the Messiah over all the earth and His reign over God's people. The future events show that God has various ways of dealing with His people. God gives believers an escape route if they obey His Word and stay spiritually ready. On the day of the Lord, everyone will worship the Lord of hosts and keep the feast of tabernacles [v. 16]. Instead of coming to Jerusalem for battle now the nations come to honour God and remember His faithfulness. This last feast points to the final restoration of the Jews after years of wandering in sin and unbelief. It celebrates the harvest of human souls for the Lord. A lesson for us is that Jesus told us to go to the ends of the earth to spread the Gospel because the world will finally come to Jerusalem to worship and honour Him. On that day, Jerusalem will be honoured as the capital city of the millennial earth and the focal point of worship. God will fulfil the Jews' dreams of a new Jerusalem. Similarly, God will fulfil believers' dreams of a new life in Christ.

Thought Every day of a Christian's life is a day of the feast of tabernacles.

Evening

READ : John 17

LESSON : All for one, one for all

VERSE 10 : And all Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine; and I am glorified in them.

This chapter records the beginning of the longest recorded prayer of Jesus [v. 1–26]. It is also known as the High Priestly Prayer. Our Lord Jesus began by first praying for Himself [v. 1–5], then for His disciples [v. 6–19], and, finally, for the church [v. 20–26].

The first central theme of His prayer is to affirm His deity and glory. Jesus is the Son sent by the true God [v. 3]. The next is that God protects His disciples from evil while they are in the world [v. 15–16]. Finally, our Lord Jesus—the Head of the Church—prays for the unity of the Church “that they all may be one” [v. 21].

However, our Lord neither prays nor unites indiscriminately. He says, “I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given Me; for they are Thine” [v. 9]. Our Lord prays for the redeemed. This is also the basis for Christian unity. We are one in God only because we bear witness to the same Christ.

It is comforting to know that our Lord Jesus prays for us. What better prayer can be more efficacious than that of the beloved Son to a loving Father.

Thought Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine.

28 Dec 08 Morning

READ : Malachi 1

LESSON : God dislikes imperfect sacrifices

VERSE 10 : Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought? Neither do ye kindle fire on Mine altar for nought. I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of Hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand.

Malachi, which means “my messenger”, was the last of the prophets. He reproached the priests for failing to please God by disobeying His law of sacrifices in the rebuilt temple. To the priests, worshipping God was no longer a heartfelt adoration but simply a burdensome chore.

In the Old Testament, God required the priests and people to offer Him perfect animals without blemish. The Jews disobeyed by offering blind, lame and sick animals. He was greatly displeased because His people had dishonoured Him with substandard sacrifices. Similarly, if we give our leftovers to God, be it our time, money or energy, we are no different from the old Israel who did not offer God perfect animal sacrifices. What we give God reflects our attitude towards Him.

The priests, as intermediaries between God and the people, were supposed to reflect God’s character by upholding the dignity of sacrifices. By accepting blemished animals, they sent a message to the people that half-hearted service was acceptable to God. As believers, we too are to reflect God to the people around us. If we sin knowingly, we are telling others that it is all right to do wrong casually.

Thought : What images of God’s character do people see in us?

Evening

READ : John 18

LESSON : Godly conduct

VERSE 23 : Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou Me?

A band of soldiers, accompanied by Judas Iscariot and the Pharisees, came to arrest Jesus at the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus did not hide. He even rebuked Peter for injuring the high priest’s servant. He was brought before the Jewish authorities, Annas and Caiaphas, but was later referred to Pilate. This was done because the Jews needed permission from the Roman authorities to kill Jesus.

Pilate tried Jesus but found Him guiltless. Jesus posed no threat to Rome so Pilate offered to release Him. However, the Jews strongly objected to it and chose to have Barabbas, a convicted thief and murderer, set free instead.

The dislike that the Jews had for Jesus escalated to a conspiracy to kill Him. When they cannot accept the truth; they killed Him. Later they would also do the same to the Apostles. They cannot accept the truth and killed the messengers. When we have disagreements with others, do you want to “get even” or even get rid of your opponents?

Jesus reacted to the false accusations meekly. He told the truth and stood His ground. Let us learn from our Lord the biblical way to act in the face of false accusations and let the truth of our character vindicate us.

Thought Actions speak louder than words.

29 Dec 08 Morning

READ : Malachi 2

LESSON : Priests reprov'd for their unfaithfulness

VERSE 2 : If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto My name, saith the Lord of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart.

In the Old Testament, priests had a special responsibility to uphold God's law and spread His Word [Nehemiah 8:7–8]. But they had departed from the way and caused the people to stumble. So Malachi had to continue to warn them that if they did not honour God's name, He would punish them. The prophet was angry with these messengers of God because they did not take their service for God seriously [v. 1–2] and they did not know God's will [v. 7–8].

Like the priests, believers too are called to honour God's name and worship Him. Honouring God means acknowledging Him for Who He is—the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth. He alone is perfect and able to save mankind from eternal suffering.

How do we know what God wants from us? We need to listen and obey His Word. We learn to set our hearts and minds on doing His will. When we love and obey God, His Word (the Bible) becomes a shining light on our paths that guides our daily activities. The priests in Malachi's day had stopped loving God and therefore did not know or care what He wanted. They are no role models for us.

Thought : It is hard work to seek and do God's will but we must try.

Evening

READ : John 19

LESSON : Be ready to meet our Maker

VERSE 30 : When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, He said, It is finished: and He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost.

The key events in this chapter are Jesus' suffering, death and burial. After physically and emotionally torturing our Lord, Pilate offered to Jesus go, but the Jews would hear nothing of it. They even questioned Pilate's loyalty to Caesar as they said Jesus proclaimed to be a king. Finally, Pilate gave in to their demands and sentenced Jesus to be crucified. Throughout all this, Jesus was ready to meet God.

On the cross, Pilate affixed a sign "JESUS OF NAZARETH KING OF THE JEWS", in three languages. The Jews protested the title but Pilate refused to change what he had written. It might have been a mistake on the part of Pilate, but it was surely decreed by God.

Christ has prepared us to meet God. Every person who comes to Christ in faith will surely go to heaven. When we will meet Christ is a secret known only to God [Psalm 31:5]. Nevertheless, we must be prepared to see God, and we must look forward to that day with eager anticipation. Let us prepare ourselves to meet God anytime.

Thought : Are you ready to meet God today?

30 Dec 08 Morning

READ : Malachi 3

LESSON : Giving a tenth to God

VERSE 8 : Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed Me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed Thee? In tithes and offerings.

During Malachi's day, the Jews ignored God's command to give a tenth of their income to His temple. The Levites, who were charged with a God-given duty of caring for the Temple, had to work to earn a living. So Malachi urged the Jews to obey God's command in tithing [v. 8–12]. The tithe was used to support the tribe of Levi and the priests who ministered before the Lord. The Jews might have held back their tithes either out of sheer ignorance of God's command or fear of losing their hard-earned income.

Everything we have comes from God. When we refuse to return to Him a part of what He has given us, we are in effect robbing Him.

When we give to God, we receive more blessings from Him in return. However, we must neither expect immediate nor material returns. The blessings of God may not be felt instantly. They do not always come in material form either. We must remember that tithing, without love for and obedience to God, is nothing but a meaningless act of giving.

Thought Give, and it shall be given unto you. – Luke 6:38a

Evening

READ : John 20

LESSON : Stop doubting and believe

VERSE 29 : Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

This chapter records the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. Mary Magdalene was the first to discover the empty tomb. She reported this to the disciples. Peter and John ran to the tomb to investigate, and they saw only the burial clothes. Jesus' body was gone.

On the same day, our Lord Jesus appeared to the disciples again, but Thomas was not present. When the disciples told him about the risen Christ, Thomas refused to believe until he saw Jesus himself. A week later, Jesus appeared to the disciples again with Thomas present, and having seen Jesus, Thomas believed. But our Lord says, "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" [v. 29].

"Seeing is believing." This is what magicians rely on to convince viewers of their tricks. But the magicians always have another trick up their sleeves to distract their audience.

There was neither trick nor distraction involved in our Lord's resurrection. Thomas did not believe at first. He wanted to see for himself. But sight does not necessarily lead to faith. It is faith that leads to sight. Believe in Christ, and you will see His glory and grace.

Decision I want to believe today so that I can see my Saviour.

31 Dec 08 Morning

READ : Malachi 4

LESSON : The Sun of Righteousness

VERSE 2 : But unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.

The Old Testament ends with the threat of a curse and with the expectation of a new dawning of the Sun of Righteousness (Jesus Christ). In this final chapter of the Old Testament, Malachi makes reference to the first and second coming of Christ. On Judgement Day, our Lord Jesus shall be revealed in a flaming fire to mete out punishment to the wicked. However, the same Christ is a warming light to those who have served Him faithfully.

For believers who are committed to God, Judgement Day will be a day of rejoicing as it ushers in eternity. Remember, commitment to God demands a great deal of effort and sacrifices on our part. But we are sure they will be worth it when we see our Lord face to face.

After this chapter, God did not speak to His people again for 400 long years until John the Baptist arose to preach repentance as he prepared the way of the Lord. Though believers today have no more prophets to give us God's messages, we have the Bible. Therefore, we must keep up our communion with God through reading His Word and through prayer.

Thought God has an eternity to reward our commitment and faith.

Evening

READ : John 21

LESSON : Tend to Christians

VERSE 17 : He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me? Peter was grieved because He said unto him the third time, Lovest thou Me? And he said unto Him, Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed My sheep.

Despite seeing the risen Jesus, Peter decided to return to his old trade of fishing, and several others followed him. They fished all night but caught nothing. In the morning, Jesus stood on the shore and inquired of their catch. He then advised them to cast their net on the other side, and they hauled in a massive catch. John—that disciple whom Jesus loved—told Peter that it was the Lord.

It was a tender moment as Jesus sat down to a meal with Peter and the other disciples. Peter had denied the Lord three times, and he needed to be restored for the ministry. Jesus asked Peter three times concerning the sincerity of love. Peter knew what Jesus was doing. Peter was grieved by his denials of Jesus, but our Lord was gracious. He commanded Peter to “feed His sheep”. “Feed the sheep” is to provide for, care, protect or guide. It is to do the work of a shepherd. A good shepherd provides for the wants of his flock. What a confidence booster for Peter. The Great Shepherd Whom he denied is now entrusting to him the work of looking after the flock.

Thought Be concerned for the needs of other believers.