

Oak Grove Church of Christ Newsletter - 2023.04.16

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Sermon recordings

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Speaker-AM: Isaac Helterbrand

Title: A Severe God

Recording:

tinyurl.com/IsaacSevere

Speaker-PM: Nathan Vick

Title: Ezekiel Ch 14-18

Recording:

tinyurl.com/NateEzekiel14

Ezekiel 14:4

King James Version

Therefore speak unto them, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet; I the LORD will answer him that cometh according to the multitude of his idols;

Romans 11:22

King James Version

Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.

The Wisdom of Prudence, 4/16/23 by Doy Moyer

“Whoever digs a pit will fall into it, and a stone will come back on him who starts it rolling” (Proverbs 26:27).

“The prudent sees danger and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it” (Proverbs 27:12).

“Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits will have plenty of poverty” (Proverbs 28:19).

One of the hallmarks of wisdom is the ability to look a little into the future and see where a present course of action will lead. While we do not have the ability to see the future as God, wisdom is able to project and see possible consequences of foolish and questionable behaviors as defined by God. It is a barrier to what naturally happens from our own folly and sin. Wisdom is our eyes on the road ahead to take note of the twists and turns that will surely come our way.

Wisdom also helps us develop a conscience that is rightly trained to detect and discern good and evil. It is the mark of maturity: “For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil” (Hebrews 5:13-14).

Wisdom does more than ask whether something is technically right or wrong. It asks, “Does this show good discernment? Is it prudent? Is it helpful? Does it show a heart for God or is it selfish? Does it demonstrate discretion and understanding?”

How will we show wisdom today?

More Than Conquerors, 4/12/23 by Matthew W. Bassford

Yesterday was a difficult day for me. I woke up without fever, breathing issues, or any of the other problems that have kept me from assembling with the saints. However, once the time came to leave, I discovered that my hand didn't want to cooperate in steering my power chair. In fact, it was a struggle for me even to get back in the house once I left it.

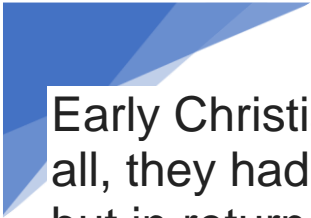
Hello livestream, my old friend. I've come to watch you once again.

As you might imagine, I watched with considerable vexation of spirit. I longed to be with my people, a perfectly holy and godly desire. Nonetheless, I was back at home, mired in the debilitation and tedium that is ALS. What gives, God?

Worship, even the online variety, has a way of answering such questions. My answer came from the fine old hymn "Soldiers of Christ, Arise". The second verse of the hymn concludes with the statement, "Who in the strength of Jesus trusts is more than conqueror." It is a clear reference to Romans 8:37.

In the hymn, the line sounds like straightforward spiritual cheerleading, but in Romans, its meaning is considerably more complex. It is an answer to the question posed two verses up, in verse 35. There, Paul asks whether things like affliction, distress, and persecution can separate us from the love of Christ.

This is no mere strawman to be brushed aside. In fact, Paul doubles down in the next verse by quoting from one of the most challenging psalms, Psalm 44. In this psalm, the psalmist is lamenting before God because the Israelites are being defeated in battle even though (for once) they have been keeping the covenant with God. In fact, he claims that their faithfulness has led them not to success but to failure.



Early Christians easily could have raised the same question. After all, they had shown great faith in accepting Jesus as the Messiah, but in return, they've gotten nothing but earthly misery. Does God reward His faithful servants with defeat?

Paul's reply does not dismiss the pain of earthly suffering. Instead, it puts that pain in perspective. True victory for the Christian does not lie in attaining earthly comfort, safety, and success. Instead, it lies in faithfulness despite trial. Even the Christian who has been cut down like a dog because of his faith has not been defeated. Rather, he has overwhelmingly conquered.

The same is true for me in my frustration and weakness. I may feel like I have been defeated by my body, but I have not been. I have overwhelmingly conquered. The same is true for every servant of God who is remaining steadfast through devastating illness.

Of course, the applications do not end there. If you are a caregiver for somebody like me, and you are burned out, stressed out, and at the end of your rope, but you are still holding fast to God, you are not a loser. You are more than a conqueror. If you are fighting for your failing marriage even though your spouse doesn't seem to care anymore, no matter how defeated you may feel, you are more than a conqueror. If you are mired in mental illness and can't seem to escape, but you are still seeking God, you are more than a conqueror.

These victories may seem cruelly abstract to us, but they are the only victories that matter. The joys of earthly life are fleeting, but in the hand of God are pleasures forever. Is it better to be the rich man or to be Lazarus? Life can be difficult and disappointing, but none who rely on Christ will be put to shame.