

Scriptures That Will Keep Drawing You Back Again and Again

This is semi-funny. In my retirement ministry—preaching in various churches—I naturally preach the passages that mean a great deal to me. And, since I know them so well, in many cases I quote the verses from memory.

Often, I don't even carry a Bible to the pulpit with me. To read, I need cumbersome reading glasses, and if I already know the Scripture, what's the point? Just recite the passage and preach it. If someone asks—as they often do, probably not seriously—whether I have memorized all the Bible (try to imagine that!), I say, “No, I just preach the parts I've memorized.” That's flippant, I suppose, but pretty much how it is.

I do love the Word of God. I love all of it, not just the parts I've preached again and again. And I love how those well-known familiar passages keep yielding insights and blessings. Here are a few thoughts on five passages I dearly love.

1. Romans 8 is the mother lode of spiritual insight. In my sermon on prayer last Sunday morning, Rom. 8:26a played a huge part. “Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weaknesses, for we do not know what to pray for as we ought.”

We are poor pray-ers. If the Apostle Paul did not know how to pray, it's a lead-pipe cinch that you and I don't. But we're not to despair.

The Holy Spirit picks up the slack and helps us. He is our intercessor. (I admit to having no idea what that is like, how the Spirit intercedes with the Father; and see no point in

trying to figure it out.) And then—this is where it gets good—in verse 34, the Lord Jesus is said to be our intercessor. He “is also at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.” Think of that! We have the Son and the Spirit interceding for us.

If we thought imagining how the Spirit intercedes was difficult, now imagine both the Spirit and the Son doing it. And yet, that’s what we see in Romans 8.

Now, just in case we are tempted to say “two members of the Trinity are interceding for us, so the heavenly Father is outvoted from the first,” Romans 8:31b says “God is for us!” (That’s what that verse means, even though it says “if God is for us.”) The first 30 verses of Romans 8 braid together the three-pronged truth that the Father is for us, the Son is for us and the Spirit is for us. Then, drawing it all together, verse 31 says since God is for us, it doesn’t matter who or what is against us. Such a truth is too wonderful for words and furnishes meditating material for a month or more.

Reinforcing all this, verse 32 says, “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him freely give us all things?” Since God has given us the best heaven has, is He now going to start withholding further blessings?

This is just a small sample of the riches of this chapter.

2. Psalm 103 is saturated with wonders. After memorizing this psalm and preaching it for years, one day I noticed in my grandmother’s Bible a note beside verse 17. “Papa’s favorite verse.” I was stunned. That’s the great-grandfather I never knew but who preached the Word in and around the turn of the 20th century, traveling on horseback, in a wagon or on foot.

Psalm 103 is all about God’s love. The psalmist stacks insight upon insight, accolade upon accolade. Never should we let people say the Old Testament is about wrath or law and the New

about grace. It's all grace, from beginning to the end. The psalmist quotes from God's self-revelation in Exodus 34:6-7, perhaps the most-quoted Old Testament passage of all.

Verse 14 is great comfort to those of us who sin. (That would be all of us.) "He Himself knows how we are formed; He remembers that we are dust." He who created us knows we are made of humble stuff. He knows He got no bargain when He saved us. When we sin, we are the only ones who are surprised. And yet, God loves us still, as He did from the first. That's why He built into the system a fail-safe way back into His presence when we sin. It's called the cross, pre-figured by every altar in the Old Testament.

Three measurements of God's love are given in Psalm 103:11-13, then reinforced and extended in verse 17.

3. Matthew 10:16ff. so perfectly describe the life (the expectations, the conditions, the requirements) of the Christian worker. As a young pastor, I would preach this passage using the outline of wise up, speak up, stand up and look up (with maybe another "up" point or two in there which I've forgotten). It's the charter of God's people on assignment for Him.

Look at what He promised us as we go forth to serve Him:

- We should expect difficulty and opposition. "I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves" (Matt. 10:16b). He assumes we know what that means. In Acts 14:22, Paul and Barnabas told the new believers something similar.

- That as we go, we are representing Him. Is there a greater honor? We are ambassadors for Christ (2 Cor. 5:20).

- That people will treat us the way they treated Him. "It is enough for the disciple that he be like his teacher, and the servant like his master" (Matt. 10:25a). We cannot say He didn't warn us.

– That He will use us, even in our weakest, darkest moments. “It is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks through you” (Matt. 10:20). Acts 16 shows how God used Paul and Silas in jail. With their backs bleeding from the whipping they had received, and their feet locked into stocks, they sang hymns and prayed. In the middle of their pain, they were faithful. We read, “and the [other] prisoners were listening to them” (Acts 16:25b). This is such encouragement for believers who suffer for Christ.

– And that we will not lose our rewards (Matt. 10:42). The Lord pays His bills and honors His promises. Hebrews 6:10 says if God were to forget those who have labored long and hard for Him, it would be sin on His part.

Every time I encounter pastors who have been mistreated, I encourage them to move into Matthew 10:16ff. and set up residence there, just before moving on to Luke 6:27ff. Jesus did everything He could to prepare us for just this very thing. There will be no room for bitterness; we are given no license for anger. By being faithful during our mistreatment, we often shine forth more brilliantly than ever. (By the way, I am well aware some ministers are women. Please do not be distracted by the pronouns. Thank you for your faithful service to our Savior.)

4. Luke 18 is my favorite “prayer chapter.” I particularly love how it begins and the way it concludes. Jesus “told them a parable to illustrate that it is necessary always to pray and not to lose heart” (get discouraged and quit.) He gave two parables here, followed by other insights about prayer. Even though it may not be immediately obvious, this chapter is all about prayer.

The jam-packed chapter concludes with the story of the blind beggar of Jericho. When Bartimaeus learns that Jesus of Nazareth is arriving, he begins to call on Him, which is the essence of prayer. He continues to call loudly when others try

to quiet him. He perseveres, demonstrating his faith. Finally, when he is brought before Jesus, the Lord asks him to get specific. "What exactly do you want?" Enough with the generalities, Bartimaeus. What are you praying for? (Up to this point, Bartimaeus had been asking the Lord to "have mercy on me" [Luke 18:38b, 39b]. That's a broad category.) "Lord," he said, "grant that I may receive my sight."

The Lord wants us to call on Him, to remain steadfast in praying in spite of discouragement, and to pray specifically.

5. The entire second epistle to the Corinthians is a huge favorite. There are so many riches in this epistle, so I'll mention just two. I'm impressed by the various metaphors Paul uses to describe believers in Christ. We are a fragrance for Christ (2:15), living letters (3:3), earthen vessels containing precious treasure (4:7), our bodies are earthly tents (5:1), we are ambassadors for Christ (5:20) and we are the temple of the living God (6:16).

I particularly stand in awe of Paul's reverse resumé given in chapter 11. In establishing the authenticity of his apostleship, instead of trotting out his degrees and accomplishments, he points to his scars: "... in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. Five times I received from the Jews forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I suffered shipwreck" (2 Cor. 11:23b-25a).

Wonder what would happen if a prospective pastor handed something similar to a search committee: "I was run off from three churches, nearly lynched in a business meeting, beaten up by a distraught church member. ..." {eo}

Note: This is the first in a series of two articles about Scriptures that will continually bless you. Tune in Friday for

part 2.

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