

individuals to come to know Jesus and be excited and motivated to know him more. Their whole perspective on life changes; they are filled with joy and delight in encouraging others with what they have come to know about Jesus. However over time they can begin to change. The demands and concerns of life seem to creep in. Perhaps they take on more responsibility and the weight distracts them even further. They move from joy, peace and love that are part of the Christian life to trying to survive. They lose the wonder and awe of what Jesus has for them each day to wondering if they will have enough energy to get everything done that demands their attention. Perhaps the Christians of Sardis had forgotten the joy and wonder of Jesus and were just trying to survive life. Jesus' words are a reminder to each of us. There come times in our life when we need to wake up and confess that we have slipped. Our focus on and commitment to Jesus has waned. We've gotten sucked into life; we've become more focused on the way the world does things than on what Jesus taught. We are more concerned about what others think of us than on what Jesus thinks. Through all these means we can slowly become people who go to church but then live pretty much like everyone else does. The only solution is what Jesus told the Christians of Sardis—wake up.

Saturday, February 27, 2010

Daily theme: Jesus will evaluate our lives and determine if what we did was of value.

Questions

Read 1 Corinthians 3:12-15

1. What is Jesus looking for in our lives?
2. What criteria can we use to evaluate our lives?

Consider

Anytime we build something we need to consider the foundation. Paul tells us that the foundation of our Christian life is Jesus. Therefore the results of our life need to be consistent with who Jesus is. A number of times Jesus focused his disciples' attention on what was important. For example the prophet Micah told us what the Father desires in our life, justice, kindness and humility (Micah 6:8). Jesus spoke of loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and loving our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-39). Since these are the things that Jesus said were important to him, they can also become the criteria by which we consider our own lives. Are our lives filled with consistency and integrity? Do we exhibit justice and honesty in the way that we conduct our life? Are we kind to all people as Jesus desires or just the ones who are kind to us? Are our lives marked with a poverty of spirit and a recognition of our need for God's grace? It appears that it is not so much what we do, but why we do things in the first place. When our actions are the result of justice, kindness, humility and love, then those actions will endure Jesus' evaluation. When our actions are motivated by self-interests, success and the desire to be honored, these actions will not survive.

You might not finish this chapter.

James 4:13-14

Sermon Series: Crazy Love: Overwhelmed by a relentless God
Devotional Notes February 22-27, 2010

Monday, February 22, 2010

Daily theme: Living with Jesus reminds us that each day we are dependent upon him.

Questions

Read James 4:13-14

1. Why was James critical of businessmen?
2. How does the realization that our life is so short impact the way we live each day?

Consider

As we read James' critique of businessmen, it is important to acknowledge that he was not critical of doing business, but of the way that they did business. These Christian businessmen operated in a manner that ignored Jesus' role in their decisions. They assumed that they could make decisions today and implement them tomorrow. James pointed out a significant problem with their approach. They could not control tomorrow or even whether or not they would be alive tomorrow. They also failed to fully acknowledge another truth, that their lives were actually very short. James compared them to a vapor, like when we see our breath on a cold day. It is visible for only a few seconds and then is gone forever. From the big picture this is the length of our life. Rather than make plans, James instructs Christians to consider the role of Jesus in our daily life and our dependence upon his sustaining power. We should not assume that we can make our plans and that Jesus will bless them; rather we are to consciously acknowledge our dependence upon Jesus and consider what it is that he desires. James' second reminder that our lives are like a vapor reminds us that what we think is so important today may not be most important. How much of what we will do today will outlast our life time? The truth is most of the activities that we give our lives to have an even shorter life span than we do. If that is the case, should we give them the importance that we do? That brings us to an even greater question, what can I do today that will have a lasting impact? While we still must fulfill our responsibilities, could we do them in such a way that they reflect and give honor to Jesus?

Tuesday, February 23, 2010

Daily theme: The nearness of Jesus produces joy despite our circumstances.

Questions

Read Philippians 4:4-7

1. Why should we rejoice at all times?
2. When we fail to rejoice what message do we send to Jesus?

Consider

Paul gave a surprising command considering his circumstances. When he wrote Philippians he was imprisoned in Rome. In chapter 1:25 he indicated that he expected to be released and have further ministry among the Philippians, but at the moment of his writing he was not free. Furthermore, immediately before urging the Philippians to rejoice always in the Lord, he attempted to solve a conflict situation between two women in the Philippian church. Even in the midst of conflict Paul urged us to rejoice in the Lord always. The reason why Paul could rejoice and urge us to follow his example was because Jesus was and is near to us. This phrase can be taken in two ways. First the return of Jesus is near. The New Testament teaches that the return of Jesus should always be something that we keep in mind as we live each day. Second, Jesus informed his disciples that he would be with them (and us) until the end of the age (when he returns) (Matthew 28:20). The reason for our joy is Jesus, his nearness to us as we live each day as well as the nearness of his return to establish his kingdom. Our circumstances do not change that reality, therefore we can rejoice in Jesus always. However the reality of our life is that we do not always rejoice; we don't always live out joy. This does not mean that we should not feel sorrow at times. Jesus felt sorrow outside the tomb of Lazarus. Christian joy is something more than emotion; it is founded on the confident hope that we have in Jesus. We may experience sorrow, but we have hope in Jesus. This is what Paul is talking about and what should increasingly become our reality as Christians. When we fail to practice this joy, we are actually communicating to Jesus, that he is not sufficient to produce joy in our life.

Wednesday, February 24, 2010

Daily theme: Knowing that Jesus acknowledges us before the Father brings joy and peace.

Questions

Read Matthew 10:32-33; Hebrews 7:25

1. In what ways can we confess Jesus before men?
2. How does knowledge that Jesus recognizes us before the Father encourage us each day?

Consider

Typically we think of confessing Jesus before men as being verbal. That is one way in which we can confess Jesus before men. However there are other ways as well. When a man wears a wedding ring he is identifying himself with his wife. The ring communicates without words. Like a wedding ring, the way that we live our lives can confirm what we say verbally. The joy, confidence and hope that we have in our life confirms our testimony that we are followers of Jesus. Jesus affirmed to his disciples and to us that when we live our lives in a way that confesses our identification with him he will recognize us before the Father. When we enter into a new social situation, it is much more comfortable to have someone with us who will introduce us. Jesus says that he will do that for us when we enter into the Father's presence. Jesus will be delighted to acknowledge us before the Father as belonging to him. Even now we know that Jesus is praying

for us before the Father. As we have identified ourselves with Jesus while on earth, we will have joy of entering into heaven and having Jesus acknowledge us before the Father.

Thursday, February 25, 2010

Daily theme: We receive more benefit from recognizing our future than from acting as though the future will not happen.

Questions

Read Ecclesiastes 7:2

1. How could it be better to do something uncomfortable than doing something fun?
2. What benefits do we derive from acknowledging that some day our physical life will end?

Consider

It is interesting how we equate something as being better if it is more enjoyable for us. That is why Solomon's words can seem somewhat strange to us. Solomon is also declaring that it is actually better to participate in an event that is not fun than it is to be involved in something that is quite enjoyable. Solomon's point is that it is more beneficial to us when we associate with those who are mourning, because some day we will be the one who is mourned. We will leave this life and leave behind loved ones, perhaps a spouse, brothers, sisters, children and grandchildren. Our lives have a beginning and an end. Each year we celebrate the beginning of our life, but we tend to avoid thought of our end. However, when we do reflect on the end of our life, we derive benefits. We consider more how we spend the days that are given to us. We evaluate whether how we are living has meaning and whether that meaning will last. Considering the end of our life gives our life focus and reminds us that we have only a certain amount of time to accomplish that which is truly important. It reminds us that relationships with others and with Jesus are important, that we should not put those things off while we spend our time doing things that may be urgent, but of lesser importance. Remembering our end, helps us keep that which is urgent in our life in perspective and elevate that which has lasting importance. Consider that which drives your life right now. If you knew you had a few months to live would it still have that same importance? Are there more important things to do that you've been putting off?

Friday, February 26, 2010

Daily theme: Life with Jesus means that we both remember the past and stay current him.

Questions

Read Revelation 3:2-3

1. What instructions did Jesus give to the church at Sardis?
2. In what ways might Christians need to "wake up"?

Consider

Twice in these two verses, Jesus instructed the church in Sardis to wake up. They were to remember what they had received and strengthen that which was still alive in their midst. While we do not know the details of what had taken place in Sardis, we can understand what might have happened. It is not uncommon for