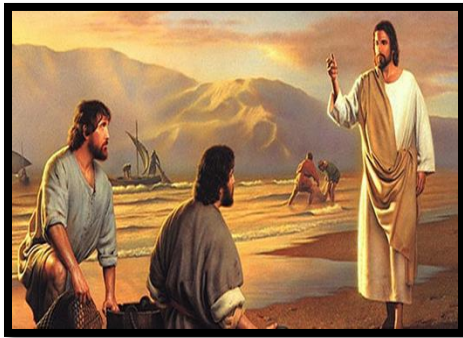


The Journey

Online Sermon:

http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page_id=3567

Before a person can come to know the Lord, God must first seek that person. Remember when the Lord came to you and spoke the words “come follow me.” Most of us were not wise by human standards, not influential, or noble and saw the cross as either pure foolishness or merely one way amongst many to live our life (1 Corinthians 1:18, 26). Our unrighteousness Romans 3:11-18) left us blind, deaf, and dumb to the matters concerning God (Mark 4:10-12) but thankfully like



the Samaritan woman at the well the words of Christ, “everyone who drinks this water I give them will never thirst, indeed the water I give them will become a spring of living water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:13-14); cut so very deeply into our

souls that by His might and power and through our faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ (John 3:16) we became born again, not of flesh and blood but of the Spirit of God Himself (John 1:12-13)! Having passed from death to life (John 5:24), sealed by the Spirit and given every spiritual blessing in the Lord (Ephesians 1:3, 13-14) our promised new hearts of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26) leaped for joy for we knew that nothing would ever separate us from the love of our Lord (Romans 8:38)! And yet while we revel in unspeakable joy of being in the “eternal

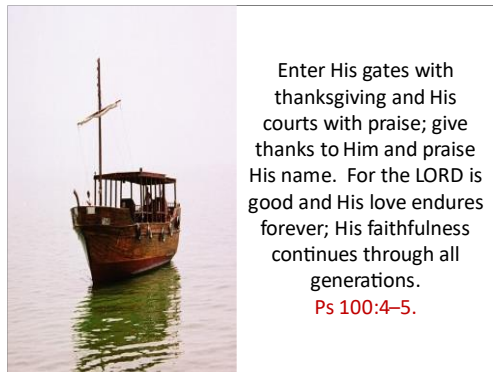
lifeboat” of His grace and mercy; to obey His command to be holy as He is holy (1 Peter 1:16) often leaves us hard pressed on every side, perplexed, and overwhelmed.

When we said we would deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Jesus (Luke 9:23) did we truly know how difficult it would be to attain the full measure of Christ (Ephesians 4:13) when spiritual maturity is often attained by getting into the lifeboats of persecutions and tribulations? And yet our thirst and desire to know Christ compels us to follow Him both through the still and the treacherous waters of life.

Getting into the Lifeboats of Praise and Thanksgiving

When a holy, omnipotent, all-powerful God who created all things seen and unseen (Colossians 1:16) invites you into the lifeboat of praise is it easy to climb aboard? King David wrote, “the heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge” (Psalms 19:1-4). And yet while God’s invisible qualities, i.e. His eternal power and divine nature can be clearly seen (Romans 1:20); then why is it that those who participate in His nature (2 Peter 1:4) have such a difficult time praising His name? I know that God is wholly other and as such our attempts to touch the untouchable are often feeble, but surely those who have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16) and the Spirit who groans for us (Romans 8:26-27) makes praising Him not only attainable but also the delight of our hearts! While none of us are righteous and often

our words must seem like babbling to the Lord (Matthew 6:9), we are more than capable of singing songs of praise that express an attitude of servanthood and love towards Him. Though it be simplistic cannot we sing the words, “I love you Lord, and I lift my voice to worship you, oh my soul, rejoice” with passion and thirst to draw nearer to Him? Is it truly that difficult to sing and

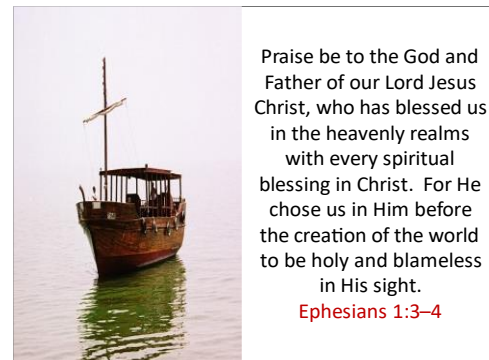


live the words “faithful one, so unchanging. Ageless one, you are the rock of my peace” with thanksgiving in our hearts for whom of us cannot list but a litany of storms that Christ has walked upon its turbulent waters to rescue us the sheep that have wondered away

(Matthew 18:10-12)? Though our knees are getting old whom amongst us cannot wilfully and joyfully bow to the only One who when “we are down and, oh my soul so weary” raises us up to stand upon the unshakeable rock of His glorious and holy mountain and walk “upon the stormy seas”?

And while getting into this lifeboat of praise requires the sacrifice of our “precious time,” surely, we can enter the gates of He who purchased us at the price of His life (1 Corinthians 6:20) with thanksgiving in our hearts (Psalms 100:4) for is not this treasure and pearl in the field (Matthew 13:44-46) our hearts desire and portion, forever (Psalms 16:5)?

One of our favorite lifeboats to be invited into is the one of blessings! “When upon life’s billows you are tempest tossed, when you are discouraged, thinking all is lost, count your blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord has done.” The fact that we were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), a little lower than then angels and crowned with honor and glory (Psalms 8:5) are blessings of



infinite value. God has blessed us not only with a beautiful love letter from Him but also here in North America the freedom to read, meditate and apply it and let our light shine so that our deeds might point to God the Father in heaven

(Psalms 1:2; Matthew 5:16). God has “chosen us before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight” (Ephesians 1:4) and “justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24). We are to give thanks unto the Father, which hath made us partakers of the inheritance of the saints which is incorruptible, undefiled, and will not fade away (Colossians 1:12; 1 Peter 1:4). Praise be that we have but one mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ, who enables us to boldly come before the Father’s throne and though we deserve condemnation by His stripes we are healed, sanctified and acceptable in the Father’s sight (1 Timothy 2:5; Isaiah 53:5; Hebrews 4:16)! Whom amongst us are not thrilled beyond words that Christ sent an advocate, who is not only our Comforter but also the Spirit of truth that enables and leads us in the way everlasting (John 14:15-21)? Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake for not only will they be comforted but also “**theirs is the kingdom of heaven**” (2

Corinthians 1:4; Matthew 5:10). Isn't it truly wonderful that we need not worry about food, water or clothing but instead are to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto us as well" (Matthew 6:33)?

And finally, praise be to God that we have been given spiritual gifts to perform divine tasks (1 Corinthians 12) and miracles in Jesus' name far greater than He did while on this earth (John 14:12)! Closeness and the renewal of our minds back into the image He created us is joyfully done in the lifeboats of praise and counting our blessings!

Getting into the Lifeboats of Persecution and Tribulations

While one prefers to attain the full measure of Christ by the still waters of praise and blessings, spiritual maturity is often best attained through some of the darkest of storms in life. Was it not when the armies of Egypt were about to overtake and enslave Israel that they learned the true value in being still and knowing the awesome might and power of God (Exodus 14)? Was it not in the storm of facing certain death at the hands of Sennacherib king of Assyria that Israel's faith grew when the angel of the Lord arrived and annihilated all their fighting men and commanders (2 Chronicles 32:32)? Living in a fallen world that is not our home means facing many storms in life. God's holy word promises us that being a light unto the nations invites persecution because the world does not like God's light shining upon them and exposing their darkness (John 15:18; 3:20)! And while we are very unlikely to be like Apostle Paul and be beaten with rods, pelted with stones, shipwrecked, and endangered of

loosing our lives to unbelievers (2 Corinthians 11:16-33); to be rejected and ostracized by the world on the broad path can cut deep wounds into our hearts. But the most difficult persecution we face everyday comes from the fiery darts of Satan for our struggle is "against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6:12).



For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.
Ephesians 6:12

Apostle Peter warns us that our enemy the Devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8). And yet is it not in the storms of persecution that we learn how important it is to

put on the belt of truth and with the shield of faith and our feet fitted with the readiness of the Gospel of peace we are able to avoid the fiery darts of evil, even from he who is the "ruler of the kingdom of the air" (Ephesians 6:13-17, 2:2)? Is it not also in persecution that our ability to love our enemies is perfected? And is it not in our "weakness" in the storm that we are made strong (2 Corinthians 12:10) when we stand upon the rock our salvation and under the wings of our Creator?

Praise be to God, persevering through persecution deepens our faith because often it involves a formidable enemy that cannot be overcome without divine aid from, He who is greater than he who is in this world (John 16:33; 1 John 4:4)!

And finally, while no one likes to get into the lifeboat of trials and tribulations, is it not in the deepest, darkest of valleys that we are more likely to surrender control and embrace His ways for our lives? While it would not have been easy to be mocked while building the ark which took about a century to build imagine how Noah, though he was already considered righteous (Genesis 6:9), grew to trust God even more, especially



Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.
James 1:2-4

when the floodgates of heaven opened wide! With the memory of having lost his sons and daughters, all his wealth, and sitting in ashes with “painful sores from the soles of his feet to

the crown of his head” and then later coming out the other side of such a tremendous storm how unshakeable would have been Job’s trust in the Lord (Job 2)? Was it not in Egyptian oppression that the children of Israel cried to God, and He not only heard them but sent them Moses (Exodus 3)? During the decade or so when King Saul tried to kill David, did he not David write some of the most beautiful Psalms in the Bible because he truly was a “man after God’s own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14)? James tells us to “consider it pure joy, my brothers, and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and lack anything (James 1:2-4). Ironically it is much harder to praise God in the good times than in the bad ones for it is precisely in the storms that cannot be endured by human effort that God’s own are most likely to

seek their Redeemer. When the winds of adversity rock our lifeboat with unsurmountable waves that threaten to drown one’s easy life in a sea of pain and suffering, we are reminded of our frailty and utter dependence on God for we rely on Him for not only our daily bread but also every breath we take (Isaiah 42:5).

Persevering through storms not only increases our faith that with God’s help we can strive and survive anything but also fills our hearts with thanksgiving that His grace, mercy, and comfort is always available to those who call upon His name in truth (Psalms 145:18)!

Conclusion

While it is true that before a person can come to know the Lord, God must first seek that person; this does not absolve the believer from the responsibility to follow Jesus no matter where He leads. In our lives here on earth the Good Shepherd will ask us to enter different kinds of lifeboats that when sailed will lead to getting closer and attaining the fullness of Him. When a holy, omnipotent, all-powerful God who created all things seen and unseen asks you to enter the lifeboat of praising His glorious and wonderful name this can seem like a daunting and impossible task. And yet while we often do not know the words to say we do not need to fear that our inadequacies mean our praise will not reach God because when our words are like babbling brooks of the lost the Spirit intervenes and makes them a sweet fragrance unto Him! Then there is the lifeboat of blessings that seems easy to enter but demands much! Those who have been created in God’s image and a little lower than the

angels have been given every spiritual blessing in Christ not to be hid under a bushel but utilized for the glory of God the Father in heaven. Is it precisely by counting our blessings that we can in faith seek first the kingdom of God and know beyond doubt that He always does good to those who love Him! While one prefers entering the lifeboats of praise and blessings, unspeakable joy and spiritual maturity are often best attained through some of the darkest of storms. Without entering the lifeboat of persecution, one cannot say one is truly God's own for if the world hated Jesus, they would hate you too as well. It is in the storms of persecution that one learns how important it is to put on the belt of truth and with the shield of faith and to have our feet fitted with the readiness of the Gospel of peace so that we can avoid the fiery darts of evil, even from he who is the "ruler of the kingdom of the air!" And finally, James tells us that to be invited into the lifeboat of trials and tribulations should be a source of great joy for it is in our utter reliance on God that faith grows, and spiritual maturity is attained. So, no matter what lifeboat is before us may our hearts desire be: where He leads me, I will follow with rejoicing and thanksgiving in my heart!