

GOODNESS AND MERCY FOLLOW US

- A. Introduction: For the past several months I've been encouraging you to become a regular systematic reader of the New Testament. If you commit to this kind of reading you will be a different person a year from now.
1. The Bible is a book from God. Every word is God breathed or inspired by Him. It is a supernatural book that produces growth and change in those who read it. II Tim 3:16; I Thess 2:13
 - a. Regular reading means that you read for 15-20 minutes every day or as close to that as possible. Systematic reading means that you read each book from start to finish in as short a time as possible.
 - b. The purpose of this type of reading is to become familiar with the New Testament. Understanding comes with familiarity and familiarity comes with regular repeated reading.
 2. Regular reading changes your perspective or the way you see things. Perspective is the power to see or think of things in their true relationship to each other (*Webster's Dictionary*).
 - a. Regular Bible reading gives you an eternal perspective. You recognize that there is more to life than just this life, and that the greater and better part is ahead, in the life after this life. Rom 8:18
 1. This eternal perspective changes how you see life's hardships. You recognize that everything you see is temporary and subject to change by God's power either in this life or the life to come. You realize that in comparison to what is ahead even a lifetime of suffering is miniscule.
 2. This perspective doesn't take away the pain of life in a fallen world, but it lightens the load because it gives you hope. There's restoration, restitution, and reunion in the life to come
 - b. In the context of the many hardships he faced in his life, Paul the apostle wrote: II Cor 4:17-18— For our present troubles are quite small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us an immeasurably great glory that will last forever (NLT).
 3. To fully benefit from this eternal perspective you must understand the big picture or the overall plan of God. God created human beings to become His sons and daughters through faith in Christ and made the earth to be a home for Himself and His family. Both the family and the family home have been damaged by sin, going back to Adam, the first man. Eph 1:4-5; Isa 45:18; Rom 5:12; Rom 8:20; etc.
 - a. Jesus came to earth two thousand years ago to pay the price for sin so that all who put faith in Him can be transformed into sons and daughters of God through faith in Him. John 1:12-13
 1. Jesus will come again (in the not too distant future) to cleanse this planet of corruption and death and restore it to a fit forever home for God and His family. This earth will be renewed and transformed into what the Bible calls the new earth. Isa 65:17; Rev 21-22; etc.
 2. Then all who, throughout human history, have put faith in the revelation of Jesus given to their generation will be reunited with their bodies raised from the dead to live on earth forever with the Lord. Life on earth will finally be all that we long for it to be. Rev 21:1-5
 - b. You must also understand come basic facts about this present life. In this sin damaged world, there is no such thing as a problem free, pain free life. John 16:33; Matt 6:19
 1. God's main purpose in the earth now is not to make this life the highlight of our existence. His purpose is to bring people to saving knowledge of Jesus so they can have life after this life.
 - A. God is not behind the hardships of life. Jesus, who is God and shows us God, made this clear. He said: If you've seen me, you've seen the Father because I only do what I see the Father do (John 14:9-10; John 5:19). If Jesus didn't do it, then God doesn't do it.
 - B. For a more complete discussion of this and the "yes, but what about questions" that are raised by these statements read my book *God Is Good And Good Means Good*.
 2. Almighty God doesn't cause life's troubles and hardships, but He is able to use them and cause them to serve His ultimate purpose for a family with whom He can live forever on earth.
 4. Last week we began to look at how God uses the harsh realities of life in a fallen world as He furthers His plan for a family on a restored earth. This information helps us develop the perspective we need to

effectively deal with life's challenges. We have more to say tonight.

- B. Although I've encouraged you to read the New Testament, this doesn't mean that the Old Testament is unimportant. We start our regular reading with the New Testament for a number of reasons—one of which is because the Old is easier to understand after you are familiar with the New Testament.
1. The men who wrote the New Testament (like Paul) got their perspective or view of reality from the Old Testament. Their perspective was further expanded by their interaction with Jesus.
 - a. Paul made this statement about the Old Testament: Whatever was written beforehand is meant to instruct us on how to live. The scriptures impart to us encouragement and inspiration so that we can live in hope and endure all things (Rom 15:4, TPT).
 1. The Old Testament is a historical record of real people who got real help from God. Their stories instruct and encourage us. Don't dismiss them as Bible stories. They're testimonials
 2. If you saw someone on TV or facebook talking about how they survived a difficult situation, and it sounds like what you're going through, you'd listen to what they say, hoping for encouragement and insight on how to deal with your circumstances.
 - b. These Old Testament accounts encourage us because they show us how God works in the midst of a fallen world and how He uses the harsh realities of life in a damaged world as He gathers His family.
 1. These stories give us hope because we can read the end result of the story, and we see that everything turned out right for God's people—some in this life and some in the life to come.
 2. These accounts reveal that God is able to use human choices (even wicked and harmful choices) and cause them to serve His purposes. They show us that God is able to bring genuine good out of real evil. They assure us that the Lord gets His people through until He gets them out.
 - c. Last week we looked at what happened to Joseph (Gen 37-50). Joseph's brothers carried out great evil against him. But the Lord brought tremendous good out of it (both temporal and eternal), and ultimately delivered Joseph and restored to him what he lost.
 1. We pointed out that Joseph's story is a spectacular example of how God uses human choice and causes it to serve His purposes for a family as He provides for His people in this life.
 2. For an in depth discussion of Joseph's story and related issues such as God's sovereignty, free will, and human suffering read my book: *Why Did This Happen? What is God Doing?*.
 2. Talk of an eternal perspective and the life after this life can make it seem as though there is no help in this life. However, many of these Old Testament accounts also show us how God helped people in this life in impossible circumstances. And, we see that the help came in ways no one could have imagined.
 - a. We've made several references to an incident in Dan 3 that illustrates some of our key points. In 586 BC the Babylonian Empire conquered Israel and took most of the population back to Babylon (modern day Iraq) as captives.
 1. During this period, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon issued a decree that everyone in his kingdom must bow in to an idol he had built. Refusal to do so resulted in being burned alive.
 2. Three Hebrew princes—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—refused to comply. Their view of reality was that God would save them from the fire. But, they told the king, even if He doesn't we won't bow down to your idol. Dan 3:16-18
 3. You can't respond like this without an eternal perspective. These men knew that there is something more important than this life—a God in Heaven to whom they were accountable. They also knew that if they stayed faithful to Him, they'd have life after this life. Dan 12:2
 - b. The men were tied up and thrown into the furnace. When the king looked into the furnace he saw the men loosed, walking around in the fire with a fourth person—Preincarnate Jesus. Dan 3:23-27
 1. Nebuchadnezzar himself called them out of the fire. No harm had come to them—they didn't even smell like smoke. Following the incident the king issued a decree banning anyone from

speaking against the God who delivered the three men. This incident was part of a process whereby Nebuchadnezzar became a believer as God revealed Himself to the king. Dan 3:28-30

2. When the king had a dream he didn't understand, Daniel (another Hebrew prince) interpreted it as a description of what would happen to the king. Just as Daniel said, Nebuchadnezzar lost his mind and lived like an animal for a time. When his sanity returned, he acknowledged God as the True God. Dan 4:34-37
 - c. God rescued the three Hebrew men, but it was in a way that no one could have imagined. The entire incident worked for their good (promotion to higher positions in Babylon), and it produced eternal results. An idol worshipping king became a believer and testified to his entire kingdom.
- C. Many Old Testament accounts show us how God gives present provision at the same time He works out eternal results. These accounts can help us deal with the fears we all face in the hard times.
1. Fear is a natural emotional response when you're threatened by something potentially hurtful or harmful—and when you don't have the power or resources to overcome the challenge. This emotional response is compounded by the tormenting fear of: What if this doesn't turn out the way I want it to?
 - a. Yet, God tells us to fear not (Isa 43:1-3; etc.) You can't stop the feeling from rising up. But you can get to the point where fear doesn't torment you or move you to act in an ungodly way.
 - b. The ability to deal with fear comes out of your perspective—your view of reality. I will not fear because nothing can come against me that's bigger than God and nothing can permanently harm me.
 2. David is another Old Testament figure whose record shows us that God provides for those who belong to Him as He works out His plan to have a forever family in the midst of life's challenges.
 - a. Consider a statement David made. It gives us insight into how he dealt with fear. Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil because you are with me. Ps 23:4
 1. Don't hear this religiously. This is a statement made under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit by a real person who got real help from God in the midst of a lot of really difficult circumstances.
 2. This isn't a funeral psalm. The valley of the shadow of death is this life. Because of Adam's sin, a curse of corruption and death has infused this world and it hangs over everything.
 - b. The language David uses expresses the idea of the darkest valley where there is not much light. Israel has plenty of hills and valleys, so David and his audience were familiar with the imagery used.
 1. David fought a number of actual battles in literal valleys. He fought Goliath, the Philistine giant, in the Valley of Elah, a broad valley 18 miles WSW of Jerusalem. I Sam 17:1-3
 2. David faced was an impossible circumstance. Goliath was 7-9 feet tall. He wore a 200 pound coat of mail. His spear shaft was several inches thick and had an iron tip that weighed 25 lbs. An armor bearer walked ahead of him carrying a huge shield. Goliath had been in the army since boyhood. The entire Israeli army was afraid to fight him.
 3. David was a teenager with no military experience who grew up tending sheep. When offered some armor before the battle, David refused it taking only a staff, a sling, and five stones into battle. He came against Goliath in the name of the Lord—with His authority and power.
 - c. David downed the giant with his slingshot and cut off Goliath's head with the man's sword. The instrument brought on to the field to kill David became the instrument of his deliverance.
 3. In Ps 23 we get insight into David's view of reality and why he could declare that he feared no evil.
 - a. David knew that God was with him and God with him all he needed. God is omnipresent or present everywhere at once. Wherever you go, there He is. David also wrote these words:
 1. Ps 139:7-12—I can never get away from your presence! If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I do down to the place of the dead, you are there...your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me...even in darkness I cannot hide from you (NLT).
 2. Ps 42:5—Why am I discouraged? Why so sad? I will put my hope in God! I will praise him

NLT)...my present Salvation (Spurrel). The Hebrew used here literally says: Your presence is salvation. David's point was: Wherever I am, there You are—and You are my salvation. Nothing can come against me that is bigger than You with me and for me.

- b. Sheep were raised throughout Israel. David himself was a shepherd. In this psalm he compared God's care of him (and His people) to that of a good shepherd. David used imagery that he and those who heard this psalm would have recognized.
 1. Ps 23:4—Your rod and staff comfort me. A rod was a defensive stick carried by shepherds. A staff (crook or a stool) was a support to rest on, and an instrument to rescue sheep stuck in brush or rock. Your strength and support are indeed my comfort (Harrison)
 2. Ps 23:5—You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies. A good shepherd made sure his flock had provision and kept predators away from them while they grazed. This is provision and protection in the face of an enemy.
 - c. Did David feel afraid when he went up against Goliath? How could he not? It's natural to feel fear when you face trouble. We know how David dealt with fear from other psalms he wrote.
 1. David wrote Ps 56 when he was being pursued by enemies intent on killing him. He stated that when he was afraid, he put his trust in God and praised (literally boasted in) His Word. v3-4
 2. David said: I will not fear. He exercised his will and put his attention on the way things really are according to God's Word. This isn't a feeling, but a perspective or a view of reality.
 3. Ps 56:3-4—But in the day that I'm afraid, I lay all my fears before you and trust you will all my heart. What harm could a man bring to me? With God on my side, I will not be afraid of what comes. The roaring praises of God fill my heart as I trust in his promises (TPT).
 4. One of the most important things that reading the Bible does for us is show us unseen realities.
 - a. Remember, there are two kinds of unseen things: things that are with us but imperceptible to our five senses (God and His kingdom of power) and things that aren't here yet because they're future.
 - b. David saw both. He knew that God was with him in this life and he knew that he would live with the Lord forever in His home. Ps 23:6
 1. Note that David could look back and see that God's goodness and mercy had followed him all the days of his life—God with him and for him, protecting and providing.
 2. These Old Testament accounts were written in part to show us this unseen reality—goodness and mercy are with us now. What if that became your perspective, your view of reality?
 - c. These accounts show us real people who got real help from God. They show us how God uses life's hardships and causes them to serve His purposes. They show us that all loss and pain are temporary and that all will be made right—some in this life and some in the life to come.
- D. Conclusion: The key scripture in our discussion of an eternal perspective is II Cor 4:17-18. Paul called his many hardships and challenges momentary and light. Note the end of his statement: For our present troubles are quite small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us an immeasurably great glory that will last forever (NLT), while we look not at things which are seen but at things which are not seen (KJV).
1. It's not what you see. It's how you see what you see—your perspective. Paul was able to call his many hardships momentary and light because he considered them in terms of unseen realities.
 - a. I don't know what you need to see or change to be fearless and hopeful in this sin damaged world. You may not know either. But God knows, and through His supernatural book He can work the necessary changes in you—if you will read it.
 - b. Ps 119:92-93—If your law hadn't sustained me with joy, I would have died in my misery. I will never forget your commandments, for you have used them to restore my joy and my health (NLT).
 2. Please begin to read the New Testament regularly and systematically. It will change your life! Much more next week!