

Introduction: As we are on the brink of significant family time and holidays surrounding Thanksgiving and Christmas, we face some decidedly lonely celebrations of these important days, given the COVID pandemic. But may God give us grace to appreciate the Christ-centered purpose of *all* our celebrations. May God give us a great appreciation for the Christ-centered message of the Bible and how our lives, just like the prophets of old, are entirely choreographed by God to bring Glory to His Son Jesus. May we grow this year, as the Bible verse at the top of our church website puts it, to see “Christ in all the Scriptures.”

Monday: read Luke 24:25-27 and 2 Corinthians 4:6. Vigorous, living faith seeks to attain greater conformity to the Word of God in every area of life and takes ‘New Year’s resolutions’ in one form or another. Let us resolve, at the start of 2021, to seek greater light in our understanding of the Scriptures and their connection to Christ. This light was needed, for example, in the lives of those two disciples on the Emmaus road who despaired after the death of Jesus on the Cross. Jesus had to rebuke their slowness to believe “all the prophets had spoken” (Luke 24:25) about His victory over the grave and His glory to come. Jesus then progressively opened their eyes as they walked along to all that rich Bible teaching about Himself. How much were these men like us in our tendency to let slip the light and glory of the Word of God, so easily forgetting the very comforts of Scripture which gave us hope just yesterday! May the Lord Jesus walk with us by His Spirit, “making our hearts to burn” (Luke 24:32) with the words of His Holy Book.

Meditate and Pray: Thank Jesus for His day-to-day commitment to shine more and more of His Word’s life-changing light and power into our lives. It is the same Spirit of Christ who revived these disciples’ flagging faith that will work to renew us in the hope of the Gospel no matter what we face in 2013. Let us also thank God the Father that He has shone His life-giving, Gospel light into our hearts to make us once and for all a people who “see” by faith (2 Cor. 4:6)! What a life-changing ‘new creation’ we are now! As R.A. Finlayson put it:

“Is it not true then, that we, who have been saved by grace, have felt the creative power of God? Is it not true that the God who laid the foundations of that first creation, and brought light out of primeval darkness, is the God Who has shone into our hearts, and laid the foundations of the new Creation which sin shall not mar, and the flesh and the Devil cannot destroy? Yes, our dealings have been with the Creator-God Who made Himself known savingly and redeemingly to us in Jesus Christ His Son.”

Tuesday: read 2 Samuel 7:12-17 and Hebrews 12:4-7. We often associate this time of year with prophecies of the Birth of Christ, which is right and proper as we enjoy celebrating in word and song this season of the joyful birth of our Savior. But many of the most powerful words of OT prophecy are about the chastening of David’s house and even David’s sons. For example, in David’s house in particular, right here in 2 Samuel 7:12ff, God gives a prophetic word which will ring true through all the years of the Kings of Judah. What is it? See verse 14 where God says of David’s offspring: *“I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men.”*

Now, pause and consider how many times in David’s life alone this prophecy comes true. How are we to understand, for example, the painful chastisement of David because of his sin with Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 12:11: “Out of your own house I am going to bring calamity upon you.”? Surely God kept true to his word in all the chastisements which resulted from this dark hour of sin, and in the end, used such trials as tokens of His love for David.

Meditate and Pray: Thank God right now that He arranges every detail of His response to our sins and mistakes by chastening us when we do wrong. Whether David’s sin or ours, God brings consequences into our lives from those sins, as predicted in His Word: *“When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men.”* Let us especially thank God that all such chastening in our lives is driven only by God’s love for us. As Hebrews 12:6 says: *“The Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son.”*

Wednesday: read 2 Samuel 7:14 and Isaiah 53:3-6. The world cannot accept that God's chastisements in the lives of His followers can be for any good purpose at all, let alone be an evidence of God's love for His children. But David and Solomon, though painfully chastised for their wrong-doing, do in fact experience great mercy even when God causes "calamity to arise from their own households." How do I know such chastisements were loving? Because, compared to what David and Solomon *deserved*, the stripes which they endured for their sin were but gentle strokes of love. Let us never forget that there is only One Man who truly suffered the punishment for what David's and Solomon's sins deserved at God's Hand. There is only One Man about whom we can say: "The punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds (literally 'stripes') we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5). Christ is truly "The Chastised One" predicted in the prophets.

Meditate and Pray: Thank God the Father now for His plan to chastise His own Son in your place, so that your chastisements from the Hand of God can never be a token of final judgment, but, rather, signs of God's unchanging love for you. Thank God for the truth of Isaiah 53:6: "*All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*"

Thursday: read 2 Samuel 7:14; Isaiah 53:3-6 and Luke 12:4-7. Notice that God is careful to distinguish in the verses before us between the "rod of men" (2 Sam. 7:14) which He will use to lovingly chastise both David and us, and the "Rod of God" which He will use on the back of His own Son. Two times in Isaiah 53:4 & 8, God is said to "strike" His Son for "the transgressions of His people" (Isaiah 53:8). This "smiting" of the Son of God is fearful: it is the full power of the Rod of the "One who is able to throw into hell" (Luke 12:5) inflicted on the sinless Son of God in our place. It is the darkness of the Cross and the agonies which caused the Almighty Son of God to cry, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"

Meditate and Pray: I therefore have a question for us as we begin a New Year. *If it is true that God in love chastens us with the "rods of men," but spares us from the truly fearful punishment of His own Rod, then let us resolve to fear men and their "rods" far less in 2013. Why should we fear those whom God will use to positively discipline us? Let us be free from the fear of men and controlled by the positive "Fear God!" Ask God to give you the poise of fearing only Him in 2013, and a thankful heart when the "rods of men" are used by Him for your chastening. Ask God also to help you to cherish the rebukes of the godly, as the Psalmist says, Psalm 141:5: "Let a righteous man strike me – it is a kindness; let him rebuke me – it is oil on my head."*

Friday: read Psalm 118:13-21. Let us conclude this week with some comforting words of the Reformer John Calvin who highlights the joy which the Psalmist felt in Psalm 118:18 at being forgiven and spared by God after painful but loving chastisement.

"This ought to give us courage, absolutely every time that we offend God, to return boldly to him, knowing for sure that we shall find him ready to grant us mercy. It says that God is 'patient' and long-suffering (Psalm 103:8), and even that he is so good that as soon as he sees poor creatures degraded by their offenses, his only desire is to grant them pardon and have communion with them. Since it is this way, he does not wait for us to come to him, but he takes the pains of coming to seek us, that we may be near his grace. What a shame if we disdain to meet with him, when on his part, that is all he seeks! Not that he needs it, but it is for our salvation; it is for us that he suspends his rights; for he well knows that if we had to make payment, we would continue to be overwhelmed. Now when God thus exhorts poor sinners to repentance, it shows us that he always keeps the door open, to make us find favor with him and to obtain pardon. ... God will not utilize his divine power and strength to chastise us severely, because that would destroy more than 100,000 worlds! For who could survive before him if he employed his wrath? ... He will not forget his mercy: this fact is the true salt which gives savor to all the correction that he sends us, that we know that he is not removing his mercy from us." John Calvin. August 26, 1562 sermon on 2 Samuel 12:13-14.