

Introduction: As background perspective on the Parables, it is a blessing to take advantage of the profound grasp on God's grace which Christian author and Reformed Pastor Dane Ortlund gives us in his writings. This is especially fitting since our recent Adult's Sunday School class has focused on Ortlund's book, *Gentle and Lowly*.

Mon/Tues: Read Matthew 11:25-30 and Matthew 9:35-38.

Re-Humanizing

We are to rejoice with Jesus in the world-wide scope of His invitation to people of all tribes and nations to "come unto Him" and receive the rest of salvation by His gracious, saving work (Matthew 11:28-30).

We are also to "pray the Lord of the harvest" to send forth workers throughout the world to bring this message of rest for the weary. Revival is what we pray for in terms of Christ's ingathering of lost souls. Listen to Dane Ortlund's ideas on revival from the famous New England preacher and theologian Jonathan Edwards:

Revival is not what you think it is. When evangelicals today hear the word "revival," we generally picture tears, loudness, animated preaching, exuberance, humiliating confession of sin, and so on. Some of these things may be present in revival, perhaps, but Jonathan Edwards came to long for revival because he saw that it is not a move from the ordinary to the extraordinary so much as a move from the sub-ordinary to the ordinary. We become human again. We breathe once more.

Edwards witnessed two revivals. One was local, contained to New England, in the mid-1730s. The other, six years later, was transatlantic and became known as the Great Awakening. Edwards made the fascinating observation that, in the first revival, God's people tended "to talk with too much of an air of lightness, and something of laughter," whereas in the second revival "they seem to have no disposition to it, but to rejoice with a more solemn, reverential, humble joy." The first revival's joy was real but frothy. The second revival's joy was deeper and more calm.

Simply put, revival isn't weird; true revival is rehumanizing. It re-centralizes not the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit so much as the ordinary fruit of the Spirit.

Weds/Thurs: Read 2 Corinthians 5:11-21.

Freedom in New Birth

Here are some further thoughts via Dane Ortlund from the writing of Jonathan Edwards, the great 18th century colonial preacher. Ortlund begins by addressing our view of Edwards in order to correct the common misperception that Edwards was a harsh, vindictive Puritan.

For many of us, Jonathan Edwards is a skinny white guy who never smiled, except when talking about hell. If we know anything more, it's that he wrote a lot of really dense books in which he talked a lot about the glory of God and that he was part of the Great Awakening. And that's about it. But there are riches to be mined in Jonathan Edwards far beyond what you may have been exposed to. Here are key things Edwards teaches us about the Christian life—your Christian life.

First, if you're a Christian, you don't realize how radically different and freshly empowered you now are. When sinners repent and believe for the first time, it often feels as if nothing much has happened, and it often looks as if nothing much has happened. Our wrinkles don't go away. Our Myers-Briggs personality profile doesn't change. Our IQ isn't improved. Our driver's license photo looks the same after conversion as before, just a few years older and grayer. Similarly, a foreigner who has just attained citizenship in their country of residence will not feel or look much different, upon receiving

formal declaration of citizenship. Yet they now belong to an entirely new nation. More than this, they now have all the rights and privileges that belong to citizens of that nation.

Edwards teaches us that the quiet, seemingly innocuous change that takes place in the new birth is of eternal—even cosmic—significance. A fallen sinner has just become an invincible heir of the universe. The Holy Spirit has just taken up permanent residence in the temple of this soul. In new birth, Edwards writes, the Christian “is a new creature, he is just as if he were not the same, but were born again, created over a second time.”

For a Christian to wallow in sin and misery is for a butterfly to crawl miserably along the branch as if it were still a caterpillar.

Friday: Read Romans 7:14-25

Dregs of Old Man Never Completely Gone

We are always to appreciate balance when we find it in a Christian writer. For example, though we rejoiced with Dane Ortlund yesterday as he emphasized the glories of the new creation for born-again Christians, we are also to heed his warning about our ongoing struggle with the remnants of sin which war against our new life in Christ. This is how Ortlund puts it:

Even if you’re a Christian, you don’t realize how radically fallen and blindly dysfunctional you remain. If we understate the positive change in new birth, we also tend to understate the fallenness that remains. But Edwards knew of the strange dysfunctions that remain among all of us, including true believers. He saw it in himself.

Edwards spoke frequently, for example, of the lurking dangers of pride: “It is a sin that has, as it were, many lives. If you kill it, it will live still. If you suppress it in one shape, it rises in another. If you think it is all gone, it is there still. Like the coats of an onion, if you pull one form of it off, there is another underneath.”

We often don’t feel the weight of our sin. Why? Because of our sin. The disease is itself what prevents us from detecting the disease.

How do we get out? One answer: (And here Pastor Carl modifies Ortlund’s exhortation) Read frequently the words of Jesus in the Gospels. Ortlund, of course, would agree. The student who frequently studies Christ’s words in the Gospels will be profoundly impacted. Such a study will re-sharpen your blunted conscience and re-sensitize your heart to its fallenness.

Saturday: Read Galatians 5:16-23

Godliness Quiet but Radical

The quiet work of the Holy Spirit in our lives as born-again Christians means that we will increase in those *hallmark* fruits of love, kindness, patience, and gentleness, along with the other fruits of the Spirit. Ortlund highlights what Jonathan Edwards emphasized in terms of the gentle grace of God which is to mark our lives, witness, and behavior:

Authentic discipleship to Jesus Christ calms and gentle-izes (not radicalizes and excites) Christians. For example, take this Edwards’ sermon that nicely sums up the core of Edwards’ ministry, entitled *The Spirit of the True Saints Is a Spirit of Divine Love*, based on 1 John 4:16. There we read statements like:

The very nature of God is love. If it should be enquired what God is, it might be answered that he is an infinite and incomprehensible fountain of love.

God in Christ allows such little, poor creatures as you are to come to him, to love communion with him, and to maintain a communication of love with him. You may go to God and tell him how you love him and open your heart and he will accept of it.

That, more than anything else, is the pulsating core of Edwards' ministry. Radical godliness is not obnoxious, showy, or boisterous. It is quiet, gentle, and serene.

Sunday: Read John 14:19; Romans 8:11 and Galatians 2:20. The ultimate hope that Christ by His Spirit will work along with Our Father in heaven to produce the character and image of Christ in us as believers is that Christ is emphasized as the source of all our spiritual life and growth. Without Him, we can do (and be) nothing in terms of Christian living and growth in grace and holiness. Here is how the Puritan John Owen put it:

Christ is the head of all the saints. He is a living head, and so He tells us that "because He lives we shall live also" (Jn. 14:19). He communicates spiritual life to all that are His. This life He gives as a new birth by His Spirit (Rom. 8:11) and by daily supplies that we might persevere in living for Him.

From these two, His quickening of us, and continually giving out supplies of life unto us, He is said to live in us: Galatians 2:20, "I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me." What Paul is saying is that the spiritual life which we have is not our own; not from myself was it drawn forth, not by myself is it maintained, but it is merely and solely the work of Christ: so that it is not I that live, but He lives in me, the whole of my life being from Him alone. (John Owen, Works, Vol. 6 pg. 286)