

Bible Challenge February 5 - 11, 2017

Advent's weekly Bible Challenge is based upon the readings assigned for each Sunday. The Basic challenge is to re-read the texts that were read on Sunday morning and included in the Sunday bulletin. The Adventure and Explorer challenges are suggestions of different ways to deepen your knowledge of the Bible. The challenge is organized as one reading for each of five days, but find a pace or style that fits your schedule.

INTRODUCTION

Light shines in the darkness for the upright, the psalmist sings. Isaiah declares that when we loose the bonds of injustice and share our bread with the hungry, the light breaks forth like the dawn. In another passage from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus, the light of the world, calls his followers to let the light of their good works shine before others. Through baptism we are sent into the world to shine with the light of Christ.

DAY ONE: Isaiah 58:1-9a [9b-12]

Shortly after the return of Israel from exile in Babylon, the people were troubled by the ineffectiveness of their fasts. God reminds them that outward observance is no substitute for genuine fasting that results in acts of justice, such as feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, and clothing the naked.

¹Shout out, do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet! Announce to my people their rebellion, to the house of Jacob their sins. ²Yet day after day they seek me and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments, they delight to draw near to God. ³"Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?" Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers. ⁴Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high. ⁵Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? ⁶Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? ⁷Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? ⁸Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. ^{9a}Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am. [^{9b}If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, ¹⁰if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. ¹¹The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. ¹²Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.]

Adventure Challenge: Isaiah 58.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Research *sackcloth* and *sackcloth and ashes*.

Option B. Compare this statement about God's judgment of religious ritual with that in Isaiah 1, especially verses 10 – 17 or with that in Matthew 23:23-28.

DAY TWO: Psalm 112:1-9 [10]

Light shines in the darkness for the upright; the righteous are merciful and full of compassion.

- ¹Hallelujah! Happy are they who fear the LORD
and have great delight in God's commandments!
- ²Their descendants will be mighty in the land;
the generation of the upright will be blessed.
- ³Wealth and riches will be in their house,
and their righteousness will last forever.
- ⁴Light shines in the darkness for the upright;
the righteous are merciful and full of compassion.
- ⁵It is good for them to be generous in lending
and to manage their affairs with justice.
- ⁶For they will never be shaken;
the righteous will be kept in everlasting remembrance.
- ⁷They will not be afraid of any evil rumors;
their heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD.
- ⁸Their heart is established and will not shrink,
until they see their desire upon their enemies.
- ⁹They have given freely to the poor,
and their righteousness stands fast forever;
they will hold up their head with honor.
- [¹⁰The wicked will see it and be angry;

they will gnash their teeth and pine away;
the desires of the wicked will perish.]

Adventure Challenge: Psalm 112.

Explorer Challenge: Compare Psalm 112 with Psalm 1; both begin with contain the phrase *Happy are they*, but note the subtle difference in focus.

DAY THREE: 1 Corinthians 2:1-12 [13-16]

Though people such as the Corinthians are enamored with human philosophy and wisdom, Paul continuously presents God's hidden wisdom which is Jesus Christ crucified. True spiritual maturity involves judging ourselves and others in light of God's revelation in the cross.

¹When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. ²For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. ³And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. ⁴My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God. ⁶Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. ⁷But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. ⁸None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him"—¹⁰these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. ¹¹For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. ¹²Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. [¹³And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual. ¹⁴Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny. ¹⁶"For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.]

Adventure Challenge: 1 Corinthians 2.

Explorer Challenge: Research the meanings of *spirit* and *spiritual*, two words that are key to this passage, but that can have different meanings in English. Which meaning(s) is Paul using in this passage? It may help to note what Paul contrasts to *spirit* or *spiritual*?

DAY FOUR: Matthew 5:13-20

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus encourages his followers to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, doing good works and keeping God's commandments.

[Jesus said:] ¹³"You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. ¹⁴You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. ¹⁷Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. ¹⁸For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter will pass from the law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

Adventure Challenge: Matthew 5. (Alternatively, read the whole Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7.)

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Research *salt*, looking for its importance in culture and religion.

Option B. Re-read the Day One reading from Isaiah 58 to determine how similar Jesus statements are to the message from Isaiah. (Note especially the contrast in verse 20 to the contrasts that Isaiah makes.)

DAY FIVE:

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Lord God, with endless mercy you receive the prayers of all who call upon you. By your Spirit show us the things we ought to do, and give us the grace and power to do them, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Jesus says, I am the light of the world; whoever follows me will have the light of life. (*John 8:12*)

Adventure Challenge: Consider how you are salt and light for the world; note that both are not simply pleasant, but essential for human existence.