

Bible Challenge November 13-19, 2016

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

"God loves us all, both big and small," a child's verse declares. The sins of the world are covered. We are able to stand tall before God our righteous judge because in the person of Jesus "salvation has come to this house"—to our house today. In Christ Jesus God seeks us out to save us.

DAY ONE: Isaiah 1:10-18

Isaiah announces God's displeasure with the offerings and sacrifices of a people who are without compassion. He urges them instead to do justice and defend the oppressed. Indeed, if they repent, the Lord promises, they will be made as clean as new-fallen snow.

¹⁰Hear the word of the LORD,
you rulers of Sodom!
Listen to the teaching of our God,
you people of Gomorrah!
¹¹What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?
says the LORD;
I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams
and the fat of fed beasts;
I do not delight in the blood of bulls,
or of lambs, or of goats.
¹²When you come to appear before me,
who asked this from your hand?
Trample my courts no more;
¹³bringing offerings is futile;
incense is an abomination to me.
New moon and sabbath and calling of convocation—
I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity.
¹⁴Your new moons and your appointed festivals
my soul hates;
they have become a burden to me,
I am weary of bearing them.
¹⁵When you stretch out your hands,
I will hide my eyes from you;
even though you make many prayers,
I will not listen;
your hands are full of blood.
¹⁶Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;
remove the evil of your doings
from before my eyes;
cease to do evil,
¹⁷learn to do good;
seek justice,
rescue the oppressed,
defend the orphan,
plead for the widow.

¹⁸Come now, let us argue it out,
says the LORD:
though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be like snow;
though they are red like crimson,
they shall become like wool.

Adventure Challenge: Isaiah 1:1-20 (or all of Isaiah 1.)

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Research Sodom and Gomorrah; why, in light of verse 18, it is so significant that Isaiah is calling the people of Jerusalem people of Sodom and Gomorrah?

Option B: Scholars generally attribute Isaiah Chapters 1 – 39 to First Isaiah; research who this is and what is the historical and religious context for his message.

DAY TWO: Psalm 32: 1-7

The psalmist celebrates the benefit of confession as a path to restoration.

¹Happy are they whose transgressions are forgiven,
and whose sin is put away!
²Happy are they to whom the LORD imputes no guilt,
and in whose spirit there is no guile!
³While I held my tongue, my bones withered away,
because of my groaning all day long.
⁴For your hand was heavy upon me day and night;
my moisture was dried up as in the heat of summer.
⁵Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and did not conceal my guilt.
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD."
Then you forgave me the guilt of my sin.
⁶Therefore all the faithful will make their prayers to you in time of trouble;
when the great waters overflow, they shall not reach them.
⁷You are my hiding-place; you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with shouts of deliverance.

Adventure Challenge: Psalm 32.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Contrast this psalm (especially the opening lines) with Luke 6:20-23, the Gospel reading last week. (The words *happy* and *blessed* are roughly synonyms.)

Option B: Research *confession* as a social, legal, and religious concept or practice.

DAY THREE: 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12

This letter of Paul begins with a typical salutation, blessing, and words of praise for what God is accomplishing among the recipients. By remaining faithful and growing spiritually during hardship, the Thessalonian Christians have become witnesses to the glory of God.

¹Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,
To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:
²Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
³We must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of everyone of you for one another is increasing. ⁴Therefore we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith during all your persecutions and the afflictions that you are enduring.
¹¹To this end we always pray for you, asking that our God will make you worthy of his call and will fulfill by his power every good resolve and work of faith, ¹²so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Adventure Challenge: 2Thessalonians 1 (or all of 2 Thessalonians, Chapters 1-3).

Explorer Challenge: *Option One:* Research Silvanus and Timothy to find what is known about them.
Option B: Verse 4 mentions *persecutions* and *afflictions* that the recipients of this letter are enduring. Research what is known (not known) about the people to whom this letter was written.

DAY FOUR: Luke 19:1-10

Jesus encounters Zacchaeus, a rich man who is also a lost sinner. Moved by Jesus' acceptance of him, Zacchaeus becomes a model of discipleship. In immediate response to being restored to God's people, Zacchaeus ministers to the poor and seeks reconciliation with those whom he has wronged.

¹[Jesus] entered Jericho and was passing through it. ²A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. ³He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. ⁴So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. ⁵When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today." ⁶So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. ⁷All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." ⁸Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." ⁹Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."

Adventure Challenge: Luke 19.

Explorer Challenge: Use a concordance to see how and how often tax collectors appear in Luke's gospel.

DAY FIVE:

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Merciful God, gracious and benevolent, through your Son you invite all the world to a meal of mercy. Grant that we may eagerly follow his call, and bring us with all your saints into your life of justice and joy, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Today salvation has come to this house, for the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost. (*Luke 19:9, 10*)

Explorer Challenge: Option A: Spend a few moments imagining what "a meal of mercy" for "all the world" might look like.

Option B: Remember a time when you were invited by an important person to participate in a meal, one for which you may not have felt worthy.

Option C: Meditate on Isaiah's description of the Lord's refusal to attend a festival, preferring a "meal of mercy."