

01/02/2017

What Is Your Life... A Preparation

"What is your life?" (Jas.4:14)... "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (Jn.14:6).

Life is a series of preparations, isn't it? We wake up each morning and prepare for the day ahead of us. Whether it is about what we will wear, what we will eat, or what activities we will participate in, there is always some kind of preparation going on. Let's face it, life should be all about preparation and service. When we look at the whole panorama of life, it is a period of time spent in preparing to one day meet God.

This was true also in Old Testament times when the Israelites through Amos were commanded; *"Therefore this is what I will do to you, Israel, and because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel" (4:11)*. We are all in that same mode today, as the apostle Paul writes these words; *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Cor.5:10)*. The *things done while in the body* is all about our preparation... Before a Broadway Show actually is viewed by the public, there are many "dress rehearsals" that get the performers ready to do the real thing in front of an audience. Each day for us is a dress rehearsal, except it's for real, with God as our audience. Perhaps the very best aspect of all this is that God lets us know exactly what we must do to be prepared to meet Him one day. As Jesus states in today's verse, *No one comes to the Father except through Me...* Paul cuts through all the red tape when he says this; *"For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain..." (Phil.1:21)*. Let's just remember to live each moment of every day knowing that we are preparing to meet the Lord...

Have a great start to your week.... Begin it with a RAK or two... Love mark Phil.4:11

01/03/2017

What Is Your Life? A Life Of Building

"Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is Your life?" (Jas.4:14) "By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds..." (1 Cor.3:10).

In the 3rd chapter of 1st Corinthians, the apostle Paul is very succinct about the divisions in the church that were caused by jealousy and quarreling. He had to get them back to their roots in order to solve the problem(s), so he reminded them of this: *"I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow..."* (Vs.6), Apollos *watered*, as he worked with the new Christians in the church that Paul had got going, but Paul was quick to point this out... *"For we are all God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building..."* (Vs. 9). We could stop here and the point would be made, but Paul knew the real importance of this teaching, so he went on... As we look at today's verse, we see the crux of Paul's message. Our building must be built on a foolproof foundation. I spent several years at Harding University, (college then) and each day I walked by the Bible Building. Inscribed on it was this verse: (KJV) *"For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Christ Jesus."* (Vs.11). Since our life is a period of building, we must conscientiously build on the rock that is Jesus Christ. With our foundation firmly in place, our building must reflect Christ's teachings each and every day. We are told that our building will be tested.... *"If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or straw, his work will be tested for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward..."* (Vs.12-14). Finally, Paul reminds us that *our building (body) is God's temple, and God's Spirit lives within us.* (Vs.16). Our life is one of constant growth because we are building on Jesus' foundation. This building is always being looked at, and folks should see that we built it the right way...

Have a great day.... Do good and give God the credit.... Love mark Phil.4:11

01/04/2017

What is Your Life - A Multiplicity Of Choices

"Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life?" (Jas.4:14). "But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in the land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (Josh.24:15).

It is reputed that Napoleon Bonaparte once said this: "In every battle, there is a crisis, 10 or 15 minutes only, on which the outcome depends. To make proper use of this short space of time means victory; its neglect, defeat." I'm not sure this is true of every battle, but I get it... If we equate our life as a kind of battle, a decision or two may often decide a destiny. Humans are different from the other organisms that inhabit the earth in many ways. Perhaps the biggest way is the ability to make rational decisions. Decisions

that not only affect us in the present, but that will impact our futures. Today's verse is a monumental one for the Israelite people. After escaping the Egyptians and wandering somewhat aimlessly for 40 years, they have crossed the Jordan River and are in the land promised to them by God... They now face a decision that will impact them and their families for the rest of their lives... Will they serve the God who has brought them to this point, or the gods of the land's inhabitants. Joshua's words echo down through the corridors of time, right to this very moment... "Then choose this day whom you will serve." Decisions face us each day, but no other has the magnitude of this one. We have the words of the writer of the Book of Hebrews in 10:24-25 about building one another up and meeting together. But perhaps the most convincing words come from the mouth of Jesus Himself... "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well..." (Matt.6:33). Our most important decisions concern right and wrong, truth and error, God or Satan... Life is a multiplicity of choices. lets choose well...

Have a wonderful day.... Make your little part of the world better.... Love mark Phil.4:11

01/06/2017

What I Your Life - Like A Vapor

"Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes" (Jas.1:14).

As we finish this short series of devotionals about what our lives are like, we allow James himself to give us some final insight in the rest of verse 14. It is interesting to research a bit about this word mist... I Chronicles 29:15 calls it a shadow, while the Book of Job applies the words breath (7:7) and cloud (7:9)... The psalmist uses the term evening shadow in 102:1. Whichever terminology is applied, I think the message comes across to us in a crystal clear manner. Life is brief. You are like a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes... Is the Bible being just a bit maudlin in its view about the brevity of life? I think not... That in the grand scheme of things the amount of time we have on earth is fleeting is just what it is. This doesn't mean that we should throw up our hands in frustration... It only tells us that we should live in the moment and savor what we have. Amusement parks make lots of money on the premise that we will like to be titillated for short periods of time. Many of the most pleasurable things we do in life do not last very long, but we don't stop doing them, do we? A recurring theme in the "Back To The Future" movies is that one's future is not prerecorded. I believe that the message for us is this: We must live in the moment, but with eager anticipation of what lies ahead. If we go back to that amusement park, how long are folks willing to stay in a long line for that momentary thrill? The Bible is all about getting us to live our lives the way the Lord wants us to, showing us that this is where true happiness lies. Let me finish with the words of the Psalmist..."So teach us to number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom..." (90:12). Wake up each morning saying that life is good...

Have a great day... T G I F Today God Is First.... Love mark Phil.4:11

01/07/2017

Saturday Quiz - Author, Author

Today's quiz is a bit different. I'm going to test your knowledge of authorship. Many of the books in the Bible are attributed to a specific person. Your task is to identify what person. If the Bible is sketchy on authorship, you may respond "anon..." As always, have fun...

- _____ 1. Exodus
- _____ 2. Revelation
- _____ 3. Hebrews
- _____ 4. Proverbs
- _____ 5. I & II Chronicles
- _____ 6. Lamentations
- _____ 7. Song of Songs
- _____ 8. Numbers
- _____ 9. Acts
- _____ 10. Jude
- _____ 11. Psalms
- _____ 12. Joshua
- _____ 13. Philemon
- _____ 14. Nehemiah
- _____ 15. Ecclesiastes

Answers to choose from: Matthew, Luke, John, Ezra, Anon, Moses, David, Solomon, Peter, Paul, Andrew, Clydeous, Jeremiah, James, Jude, Samuel, Nehemiah, Mark, Eli

Have a great weekend and a glorifying and uplifting day of worship on His day..... Love mark Phil.4:11

01/09/2017

Who Is Wise

"Who is wise and understanding among you?" (Jas.3:13).

Man's interest in wisdom goes back as far as we can date. James 3:13-18 gives us some good insight into this issue and it would be beneficial for us to read and meditate on it. The dictionary defines wisdom as the ability to discern or judge what is true, right or lasting.... insight. Some of its synonyms are: sagacity, intelligence, common sense, perception, foresight, reason, or clear-sightedness. There are many more... Wisdom is closely linked to knowledge, but for us as Christians, perhaps we ought to look at spiritual wisdom... If we go back to James, we may be able to get a better biblical handle on this spiritual wisdom..."But the wisdom (spiritual wisdom) that comes from heaven is first of all pure;" (3:17). There are so many things out there that man equates to wisdom. I think it would be good for us to sift through a lot of these to get right down to what biblical wisdom, hence spiritual wisdom really is. I think we must do this so that we can be constant seekers of this precious virtue. King Solomon, who asked the Lord for wisdom, wrote this in the Book of Proverbs; "Does not wisdom call out? Does not understanding raise her voice?" (8:1). As a matter of fact, Proverbs is a treasure trove about wisdom and the desire to acquire it..."Get wisdom, get understanding... Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you...Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom..." Those verses are from chapter four alone. (5-7). This week, I would like to take a closer look at the spiritual virtue of wisdom. The person who has it is definitely described and identified in the scriptures, so we know where to begin and refine our search. I hope we all gain from this study...

Have a great start to your week... Begin it with a RAK or two... Love mark Phil.4:11

01/10/2017

Being A Wise Person - Live A Good Life

"Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by living his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom..." (Jas.3:13).

As we take a look this week at what it takes to be a wise person, we don't even have to leave Jas.3:13. My premise for the week revolves around the first part of the verse... "Who is wise and understanding among you." The question is so important because it plumbs the very depth of our lives. We all want to have the wherewithal to make good decisions in our lives. The making of these good decisions certainly revolves around wisdom. Early in his reign, God appeared to Solomon in the night and posed this question; "Ask for whatever you want me to give you" (2 Chron.1:7). Here is Solomon's answer; "Give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may lead this people, for who is able to govern this great people of yours?" (Vs.10). Was God impressed with this request? "Since this is your heart's desire and you have not asked for wealth, riches or honor, nor for the death of your enemies, and since you have not asked for a long life but for wisdom and knowledge to govern my people over whom I have made you king, therefore wisdom and knowledge will be given to you..." (Vs.11-12) You bet He was!!!! If we take a look at the 2nd part of today's verse, James hits a home run about what it means to both attain wisdom and use it properly...

"Let him show it by living his good life, by deeds done in humility that comes from wisdom." James points out that true wisdom comes from above, and it is wise to be good and foolish to be bad... There are many smart people out there in the world that are just brimming with knowledge. Knowledge that is proud and conceited will not do the good things or live the good life it is supposed. I find the key word written by James about the good life one is to live, to be humility. I will finish this devotional with words from the apostle Paul. "Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a "fool" so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: 'He catches the wise in their craftiness', and again, 'The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile...' " (1 Cor.3:18-20). The person who gets wisdom from above, lives a good life shown by deeds done in humility...

Have a great day... Do good and give God the credit (that shows wisdom) Love mark Phil.4:11

01/11/2017

Who Is A Wise Person - Listens To Counsel

"Who is wise and understanding among you? (Jas.3:13). "The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice" (Prov.12:15).

As we continue our study of what constitutes a wise person, we come to an aspect of wisdom that is often overlooked. It is overlooked for the most part because of a lack of humility that many folks have. I hearken back to my youth for a couple of gems about wisdom. My dad used to say this; "Never wise up a fool, because then he will try to make a fool out of you..." Perhaps a convoluted way to look at things, but I got the idea. A cousin of mine, though not a close one, said this; "When I'm right, I'm right... When I'm wrong, I'm right!" Perhaps you know from this why I was not very close to her. Lastly we look at the wisdom of Abraham Lincoln... Lincoln had one of the most diverse cabinets of all the presidents that preceded him, and he used these two rationales.... (1) "Keep you friends close, and your enemies closer..." (1) "I would rather have my enemies urinating out of my tent than into it..." (the original language was a bit "saltier"). Lincoln knew the benefits of getting wise counsel, even if it came from people he did not always agree with. As Christians, we must not put ourselves out on an island because that would make us foolish. Remember, we are studying about who is the wise person... No one can really tell a fool anything, as he or she must learn everything the hard way. Of course, we would be foolish not to use our Bibles as sources of wisdom, as Paul wrote to Timothy; "All scripture is God-breathed, and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work..." (2 Tim.3:16-17). There are so many important decisions we must make each day, so lets not be so foolish that we do not seek wise counsel. I'll leave you with several scriptures from the Book of Proverbs to read and meditate upon today. I think it would be wise of us to do this... Proverbs 11:14, 13:10, 19:20, 24:6, 27:9, 15:31-33. Perhaps you will find a few that you would like to share with me...

Have a great day... Make your little part of the world better.... Love mark Phil.4:11

01/12/2017

Who Is A Wise Person - One Who Holds His Tongue

"Who is wise and understanding among you?" (Jas.3:13). "When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise" (Prov.10:19).

How often has the proclivity to speak before we thought gotten us into trouble? I don't think that I can even count the times. The Book of Proverbs is filled with advice about speaking too much... "A man of knowledge uses words with restraint... (17:27).... "Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue" (17:28). "A fool utters all his mind..." (29:11) As we continue on with this study about who is a wise person, the things we say certainly have a prominent role. Lets be perfectly candid here... Our words are the way that we communicate our thoughts, so we cannot remain silent. But it is the quality and thoughtfulness of these words that mark the type of person we are, so it makes sense to choose them with care. It is clear that the words we choose to say lets folks around us know what we think. With this in mind it would seem that judicious thought should go into their choice... The Bible lets us know in very precise terms what the choice of good words can prevent... There's not enough space for me to write out all the verses, so its up to you to check them out... The wise man refrains from: cursing. (Ex.20:7), filthy language (Col.3:8), hasty words (Jas.1:19), Deceitful words (Jer.9:8), Falsely flattering words (Prov.26:28), and gossip (Lev.19:16). Slandorous words and gossip are a bane to our society, and especially to our church...There is an old story about a preacher who asked a woman to do a strange thing. On a very windy day, he told her to go down the street and release a handful of feathers. When she came back he told her to retrace her steps and gather all the feathers that had been scattered... The woman replied that this would be utterly impossible because the wind had scattered them in all directions. The point was made! The scattered feathers are like words of slander and gossip.... It is impossible to call them back. Let me finish with the words of the apostle Peter; "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech" (1 Pet.3:10). Lets all show our wisdom by carefully choosing our words...

Have a wonderful day.... Let His light shine through each of us.... Love mark Phil.4:11

01/13/2017

Who Is A Wise Person - The One Who Fears Evil

"Who is wise and understanding among you?" (Jas.3:13). "A wise man fears the Lord and shuns evil, but a fool is hot-headed and reckless" (Prov.14:16).

Have you ever heard someone say this? "I'll try anything once." Have you ever said it? The most deceitful and powerful thing we deal with today is sin. It would seem, according to today's verse, that its always been that way. It would also seem that the man the proverbial writer is speaking about in today's verse might be one of those, I'll try anything once folks. To me, here's the thing... A person truly needs wisdom so that he or she can discern between good and evil. Some evils out there are clear-cut and to avoid

them takes little effort. Those "wolf in sheep's clothing" things are the problem. By those I mean the things that appear good on the outside and lure us in, only to find the true evil on the inside...The great thing about belonging to a community of believers is the help and encouragement we can get from them to help us avoid the pitfalls of sin... "But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness" (Heb.3:13). Obviously we have God's Word to lay out the guidelines for pure living, but it is comforting to know that there are those who care enough to encourage us along the way... Are we one of those encouragers? There are no magic rules out there that will guarantee us the elixir of discernment, but here are a couple of verses that come close... As the apostle Paul closes out his 1st letter to the church at Thessalonica, he writes this; "But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil" (5:21-22). Lets face it.... Sin offers one thing, but gives something else. We should always be cautious of evil. Lets not be that fool who says they'll try anything once...

Have a great day... T G I F Thank God I'm Forgiven.... Love mark Phil.4:11

01/14/2017

Quiz About Messianic Prophecies

Today's quiz is about prophecies from the OT which were fulfilled in Jesus' life. For each prophecy listed, you are to name to OT book that contains the prophecy of the event. As always, have fun...

- _____ 1. Casting lots for Jesus' robes. (a) Psalms, (b) Isaiah, (c) Micah, (d) Malachi.
- _____ 2. Jesus' crucifixion between two (2) thieves.(transgressors) (a) Psalms, (b) Isaiah, (c) Zechariah, (d) Micah.
- _____ 3. The 30 pieces of silver. (a) Psalms, (b) Isaiah, (c) Zechariah, (d) Micah.
- _____ 4. The virgin birth. (a) Psalms, (b) Isaiah, (c) Malachi, (d) Hosea.
- _____ 5. Jesus' birth in Bethlehem. (a) Psalms, (b) Isaiah, (c) Jeremiah, (d) Micah.
- _____ 6. The piercing of Jesus' side with a spear. (a) Psalms, (b) Zechariah, (c) Hosea, (d) Malachi.
- _____ 7. None of Jesus' bones would be broken. (a) Psalms, (b) Isaiah, (c) Malachi, (d) Obadiah.
- _____ 8. Betrayal by a close companion. (a) Psalms, (b) Hosea, (c) Malachi, (d) Micah.
- _____ 9. Jesus entry into Jerusalem on a donkey. (a) Psalms, (b) Isaiah, (c) Zechariah, (d) Micah.
- _____ 10. Giving Jesus vinegar to drink. (a) Psalms, (b) Isaiah, (c) Hosea, (d) Micah.
- _____ 11. Jesus, Mary and Joseph leaving Egypt and returning to Galilee. (a) Psalms, (b) Isaiah, (c) Hosea, (d) Obadiah.
- _____ 12. Jesus speaking in parables. (a) Psalms, (b) Isaiah, (c) Zechariah, (d) Micah.

Have a great weekend and an uplifting and glorifying day of worship on His day.... Love mark Phil.4:11

01/16/2017

Who Is A Wise Person - One Who Cares About Souls

"Who is wise and understanding among you?" (Jas.3:13). "The desire of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise" (Prov.11:30).

Jesus put the value of one's soul in bold perspective when he taught us with these words... "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul?" (Mk.8:36). Even if Jesus stopped with these words the value of the soul would be shown, but He continued on... "Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Vs. 37). Jesus is saying this because He wants us to know that our souls are the most valuable things we possess. The writer of the Book of Ecclesiastes puts it this way; "And the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it" (12:7). Everything else perishes, but the spirit (soul) survives...In the Tate Gallery in London there is one of the last and most notable paintings of the artist Frederick Watts. It depicts a shrouded figure on a bier in the middle of a room and on a table nearby is an open book, and against the table leans a silent lyre. In one corner of the room is the rich mantle of a nobleman, and in the other corner a lance, shield and several pieces of armor with roses strewn over them to show that the rich arts and tastes of the world were mingled with the sterner duties of life. But now it is all over! The still form cannot read the book or play the lyre, don the mantle, nor catch the fragrance of the roses. All is over, and on the wall in the background are these words; "What I spent I had. What I saved I lost. What I gave I have." What we give of our time, money, enthusiasm, tears and labors to the salvation of souls is ours, and ours forever. Everything else perishes. It is understandable that Jesus commanded us to preach the gospel to every creature (Matt.28:18-20; Mk.16:15). The words we speak about the Lord, and the actions that reflect those words, are what will let those around us know about the concern we have for their souls... It is just another aspect of our desire to be wise people...

Have a great start to your week... Begin it with a RAK or two.... Love mark Phil.4:11

01/17/2017

Who Is A Wise Person - One Who Hears And Obeys The Lord

"Who is wise and understanding among you?" (Jas.3:13). "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, and streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rains came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against the house, and it fell with a great crash" (Matt.7:24-28).

When the writer of the Book of Ecclesiastes sums up all he has written, this is the conclusion that is drawn...."Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man" (12:13). God has

been calling folks to Him as long as words have been written. Not only are the words to be read, but they are to be obeyed and put into practice. If you are close to my generation, you probably sang children's songs when you were young. One of my favorites, both to sing and lead was about the Wise Man, who built his house upon the rock...It came complete with many motions that kids seem to like... After the foolish man's house crashed, we always sang this verse; "Sooooooooooo, Build your house on the Lord Jesus Christ, build your house on the Lord Jesus Christ; So build your house on the Lord Jesus Christ, and the blessings will come down...." It came with motions too. We are never too young to be taught about what we must hear and obey. Many folks in the world spend entirely too much time in self-satisfaction, rather than God-satisfaction... James also gives us this tidbit of good information; "Do not merely listen to the Word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says" (1:22). A story is told of a skeptical soap-maker who said to a preacher; "The gospel you teach has not done much good in the world, because I see a lot of wicked people." About that time, they saw some kids playing in the mud, who bore evidence of it. The preacher said; "Your soap has not done much good, because there are still a lot of dirty people...." The soap-maker replied, "Well, soap only cleans those who use it." This was the perfect opening for the preacher, as he said; "You are exactly right. So it is with the gospel. It blesses only those who obey and use it..." Lets all be counted among those who realize the importance of both hearing the Word and obeying it. It would be wise for us to read and meditate on James 1:22-25 today...

Have a great day... Do good and give God the credit.... Love mark Phil.4:11

01/18/2017

Who Is A Wise Person? One Who Cultivates Relationships

"Who is wise and understanding among you?" (Jas.3:13). "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Phil.2:4).

Have you ever been around people whose conversation is always about themselves? How much fun is that, and how much time do you spend with them? As we continue on our quest to be as wise as we can be, we naturally come to relationships. I believe that a wise person sees the importance of solid relationships and does everything possible to cultivate them. As we look at today's verse, the apostle Paul is putting an emphasis on how we are to really interact with others. If we look at other folks as mere subsidiaries of a larger picture, we're missing the point. Paul says that a wise person looks at others in a special kind of way. By showing a genuine interest in others, relationships grow and mature. When others realize that we are truly interested in them, friendships ensue. We cannot hope to have a positive influence on others, if we do not make a real attempt to get to know them. I believe that the best congregations of Christians are those in which the members take Phil.2:4 seriously. One of the things that I love most about our community of believers in Northfield, is their reluctance to quickly walk out the building after services. At the close of services, I go to the front door to speak with as many of our members and visitors as possible. The greatest joy I have is watching folks in front of me gathering in small pockets, interacting with one another. Why do they do this? I think that it is all about their cultivating relationships with one another. After a couple of minutes at the front door, I realize that if I'm going to enjoy the fellowshiping, that I must move forward into the group. I truly believe that the wise and understanding person looks not only on their own interests, but also on the interests of others... How are you doing with that?

Have a wonderful day.... Make your little part of the world better... Love mark Phil.4:11

01/19/2017

Who Is A Wise Person? One Who Is Prepared

"Who is wise and understanding among you?" (Jas.3:13). "At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming and they all became drowsy and fell asleep...." (Matt.25:1-5).

I am sure that all of you know the rest of this parable. When they woke up, they all trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones asked the wise for some of their oil, but the wise replied that there might not be enough for all of them. While they went off to buy more oil, the bridegroom came and they missed their opportunity to attend the feast... Bottom line? "Therefore keep watch, (be prepared) because you do not know the day or the hour..." (Vs. 13). As we finish this series about who is a wise person, I think this last piece of advice is predictable. The wise person is prepared, while the foolish are often not. There is a wonderful movie out there (1999) entitled "Blast From The Past." An eccentric scientist during the cold war (50s to 60s) secretly builds a fallout shelter under his home. When a fighter plane spins out of control and crashes into his house, he thinks this is the beginning of the end, so he takes his pregnant wife underground. It is a very funny movie, and you will not get a further spoiler alert from me. In the 50s and 60s, many folks, in preparation for a nuclear attack built these shelters. I apologize if that was a convoluted way to get to my message of preparation today. Wise people live in the moment, but always look to the future. The Book of Proverbs uses the ants as an example about preparation for us... "The ants are not a strong people, but they prepare their food in the summer..." (30:25). The wise person anticipates the storm and builds his house upon the rock (Matt.7:24-27). The wise person anticipates the coming of the bridegroom and fills his vessel with oil (Matt.25:1-13). Just as we do not know when Jesus will return, we do not know the day of our departure from this earth. The wise person makes preparation now rather than waiting for tomorrow which may not come. I hope we have all gained a bit of wisdom through this series about who is wise and understanding among you...We can eagerly anticipate the big reunion in heaven...

Have a great day.... Let His light shine through you.... Love mark Phil.4:11

01/20/2017

A Wonderful Gift - Christianity

"But the gift is not like a trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!" (Rom.5:15).

Our 6 month old grandson spent part of his 1st Christmas at our home. There was that special time of opening presents, as all saw what others had given to them. Little Mark wasn't able to discern much about each gift that was opened before him, but he sure like playing with the wrapping paper... For all of us, getting all that wrapping paper off the gift is one of the processes that must be gone through to get to

the gift. It is fortunate for us that Christianity, a gift, does not come to us hidden from view in a box covered with festive paper and a bow. It doesn't have a label on it which shows its exclusivity... The gift of Christianity was ushered into being by a loving God through His Son, in plain view for anyone to accept it. Over the years, we all remember gifts we have received, and the temporary joy they gave us. Christianity is truly the gift that keeps on giving. This gift of being a special child of God is almost too good to be true. We are not usually capricious in our gift buying and giving when it comes to people that we care for. We want them to know that they are special to us, because of who they are..."You see, at just the right time, when we were powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.... But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom.5:6 & 8). Long before God created the world... Long before Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden... Long before Jesus was born in Bethlehem... Long before Israel rejected the Messiah... Long before all these great things, God decided to give us this great and glorious gift. No boxes, wrapping paper, bows or tape. The wonderful gift of Christianity and all that comes with it. The opportunity spend eternity with Him and all of the others who also accept the gift...

Have a great day... T G I F Today God Is First.... Love mark Phil.4:11

01/21/2017

Famous Last Words

Today's quiz will test your knowledge of the last words of some people in the Bible. I will quote a phrase, and you must name the person who said it as their last words. That's all I have to say about that.... As always, have fun....

- _____ 1. "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.... Do not hold this sin against them!" (a) Peter, (b) Jesus, (c) Stephen, (d) James.
- _____ 2. "There they buried Abraham and his wife Sarah, there they buried Isaac and his wife Rebekah, and there I buried Leah ----" (a) Joseph, (b) Jacob, (c) Lot, (d) Clydeous.
- _____ 3. "So the man of God was angry with him and said, 'you should have struck him 5 or 6 times, then you would have struck Aram until you would have destroyed it. But now you shall strike Aram only 3 times.' " (a) Elisha, (b) Elijah, (c) Azariah, (d) Jeroboam.
- _____ 4. "Draw you sword and pierce me through with it, otherwise these uncircumcised will come and pierce me through and make sport of me."(a) David, (b) Saul, (c) Hezekiah, (d) Joash.
- _____ 5. "God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones up from here." (a) Jacob, (b) Joseph, (c) Moses, (d) Joshua.
- _____ 6. "Blessed are you, O Israel; Who is like you, a people saved by the Lord, who is your help and the sword of your majesty! So your enemies will cringe before you, and you will tread upon their high places." (a) Moses, (b) Aaron, (c) Joshua, (d) Caleb.

_____ 7. "Behold, this stone shall be for a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of the Lord which He spoke to us; thus it shall be for a witness against you, so that you may not deny your Lord." (a) Moses, (b) Aaron, (c) Joshua, (d) Caleb.

_____ 8. "O Lord God, please remember me and please strengthen me just this time, O God, that I may be once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes." (a) David, (b) Saul, (c) Gideon, (d) Samson.

_____ 9. "Now therefore, do not let him go unpunished, for you are a wise man; and you will know what you ought to do to him, and you will bring his gray hair down to Sheol with blood." (a) David, (b) Solomon, (c) Hezekiah, (d) Ahab.

_____ 10. "How did things go, my son?" (a) Nathan, (b) Eli, (c) Samuel, (d) Saul.

Have a great weekend and an uplifting and glorifying day of worship on His day.... Love mark Phil.4:11

01/23/2017

A Wonderful Gift - Variety

"I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who makes it grow" (1 Cor.3:6-7).

There has been an age old debate between Christians about the size of churches. There are some who like the dynamics within a small congregation, and those that feel more comfortable in a large one. The debate will go on forever, but lets get one thing straight. Jesus commanded that we attempt to make disciples of all nations and subsequently, the church was established. If we are to take Jesus' words to heart, churches ought to grow. In today's verses, Paul outlines the process of church growth. There is one thing that absolutely no one can argue about... SOULS ARE VALUABLE! When new folks are added to a congregation, all of us need to rejoice with the angels that God deemed to bless that group. I would say that church growth is a gift from God and is to be embraced. I guess that there are some that oppose growth because of the unknown, while others embrace it because of the excitement of the unknown. If we look at growth as a gift from God, words in the Epistle of James come into play... "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.." (1:17). I guess that church growth boils down to a faith/fear thing. When the nation of Israel was about to take the land promised to them, (Num.13) they sent out 12 spies. 10 of them came back with dire news saying they could not defeat those in the land. 2 of them, Joshua and Caleb, had a different take on it, saying they could overcome any obstacle facing them. Israel faced a faith/fear moment and made the wrong choice. I believe that new people add new blessings to our lives. They may offer new experiences, new ideas and new opportunities. Perhaps we should look at it this way; When God adds new people, He is sending some of His very best blessings...

Have a great start to your week... Begin it with a RAK or two... Love mark Phil.4:11

01/24/2017
A Wonderful Gift - Vulnerability

"Therefore confess your sins to each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective" (Jas.5:16).

Achilles had his heel, and for Superman there is that dreaded Kryptonite. Even the superheroes of lore and comics each have some sort of weakness that gives them a certain vulnerability. Even as we search the scriptures, we find that those we considered to be great were vulnerable. It is against this backdrop that I present to you today another of God's "gifts.." You might think that this one is kind of a questionable gift, but please bear with me... I believe that we actually hate the idea of being vulnerable. It is this fear, that if not realized, can become an issue that stunts our Christian growth and our relationships with others. Here is a stark truth that we must confront! If we never learn to be vulnerable, we will never allow ourselves to reach our full potential. It is unimaginable for us to read the Bible without being exposed to vulnerable people... Even those we consider to be people of faith had their vulnerabilities, including Moses, David, Solomon, Jonah, Paul and others. I could go on and on. It might be interesting to note here that the Bible does not try to hide their vulnerability, because if it did, we could not learn from their mistakes. Vulnerable folks are authentic! Is admitting to vulnerability an easy thing? Of course not! It requires that we put aside every iota of pride that we have. Folks that won't fess up to their vulnerability are hiding behind a mask. There are things that tempt me that may not tempt you, and conversely, things that tempt you that don't affect me... Resisting the temptation of a certain sin starts with admitting we have a problem with it. Unfortunately, we may feel that others will think less of us if they know our struggles. We might be afraid that they will see the real us! Make no mistake... Vulnerable people are okay with accepting their mistakes and admitting when they are wrong. Bottom line? Jesus died because people are vulnerable, and we are forgiven because of His love, grace and mercy. Realizing that we have weaknesses, allows us to go straight to the Lord for help...

Have a great day... Do good and give God the credit.... Love mark Phil.4:11

01/26/2017
A Wonderful Gift - Opportunity Part 2

"A gift opens the way for the giver and ushers him into the presence of the great" (Prov.18:16).

As we take a look at the next five opportunities that are gifted to us, we come to prayer. The scriptures are filled with examples, suggestions and admonitions to accept our great opportunity to pray. Here are a few of them; "the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much," (Jas.5:16) "But in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God," (Phil.4:6). "Pray without ceasing." (1 Thess.5:17). I looked in the index of our hymn book and found 43 songs listed under the topic of prayer. We even sing about the gift of prayer. It is interesting to me that the next opportunity gifted to us is embraced in the model prayer that Jesus gave to His disciples... "and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." (Matt.6:12) The only comment that Jesus gave following the prayer was this; "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Vs.14-15). God has given us the wonderful gift of the opportunity to forgive, so let's all take advantage of it... Next on the list of opportunities is the gift

of our Christian example. When Jesus told us that we are the salt of the earth and light of the world, He was not joking around. This teaching comes full cycle in Phil.2:15; "So that you may become blameless and pure children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine out as stars in the universe." Its that old. "I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day" thing. I have saved the very best of our gifted opportunities for last... "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son," "A new commandment I give you, that you love one another.... by this, all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another," "Now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love," "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Jn.3:16, Jn.13:34-36, 1 Cor.13:13, Acts 20:35) By the generous giving of His only Son, God showed His love for us. He gives us this wonderful opportunity to show our love through our generosity. Actually, He expects it of us...

Have a great day... Let His light shine through you... Love mark Phil.4:11

01/27/2017

A Wonderful Gift... Longevity

"The length of our days is 70 years ----- or 80 if we have the strength..." (Psa.90:10).

My mom often referred to this verse when she got into her 70s and 80s. The longer she lived, (she made it to 94) the more blessed she thought she was. In the New Testament, James gives us some insight into this. (4:13-15). As one embarks on life's endeavors, many factors play to either lengthen or shorten time that may be unknown, factors rising from one's self or others. "I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits" (1 Cor.16:7). The completion of our plans on earth will come to us as the Lord permits them to. So what is the lesson today when we look at the gift of longevity? I believe wholeheartedly that the Lord constantly reminds us to do the very best we can each moment of each day. There ought to be longevity in our marriages... In a world where we often face ill-treatment, a godly marriage provides the stability to weather it all... Jane and I are blessed that we are able to travel the pathway of life together, enjoying the smooth times, and helping each other survive the bumps... We are blessed with gift of longevity in being able to witness for the Lord every day. Blessed with the time to be the encouragers that we were meant to be. Blessed with having the privilege to witness for the Lord to those who are lost. There is the longevity in friendships we have built over the years. Good friends in the Lord are among the greatest of blessings. Lastly, there is the gift of longevity in faithful surrender to the Lord... The building of this faith over the years allows us to sustain our marriages, strengthen our ability to witness and cultivate wonderful friendships. Lets all use this blessing of the time we have, to do the best for the Lord that we can....

Have a great day... T G I F Today God Is First.... Love mark Phil.4:11

01/28/2017

Who Said That

Today's quiz is another one of those, "who said that's." I will quote some scriptures from the Bible that are

words of famous figures. Your job is to identify that figure. As always, have fun...

- _____ 1. _____ said to him, 'Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; get up and make your bed.' Immediately he got up. (a) Peter, (b) Paul, (c) Andrew, (d) John.
- _____ 2. After you will arise another kingdom inferior to you, then another 3rd kingdom of bronze, which will rule over the earth. (a) Ezekiel, (b) Ezra, (c) Daniel, (d) Shadrach.
- _____ 3. We have found Him of whom Moses and the Law also the Prophets wrote ----- Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. (a) Philip, (b) Andrew, (c) Peter, (d) Nathaniel.
- _____ 4. Do not take any money from them by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages. (a) Jesus, (b) Peter, (c) John the Baptist, (d) Clydeous.
- _____ 5. What I have written I have written. (a) Isaiah, (b) Jeremiah, (c) David, (d) Pilate.
- _____ 6. God has numbered your kingdom and put an end to it. (a) Ezekiel, (b) Nehemiah, (c) Daniel, (d) Ezra.
- _____ 7. But the Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silent before Him. (a) Habakkuk, (b) Zechariah, (c) Amos, (d) Hosea.
- _____ 8. My mother and my brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it. (a) Peter, (b) Paul, (c) Jesus, (d) John.
- _____ 9. Now I will perish one day at the hand of Saul. (a) Stephen, (b) David, (c) Goliath, (d) Achish.
- _____ 10. Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. (a) Zacchaeus, (b) the Centurion, (c) woman at the well, (d) Rubeous.

Have a great weekend and an uplifting and glorifying day of worship on His day.... Love mark Phil.4:11

01/30/2017

High Standards

"You have heard it said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those that persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise and set on the evil and the good. and sends rain on the righteous and unrighteous" (Matt.5:43-45).

Have you heard any of these? "I don't get mad, I get even." "You'll get yours." "Don't try that again." In today's verses, Jesus is teaching a higher standard of living. They are in direct contrast to the practical workings of the law of Moses. In the Law, folks took an "eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth" attitude as their mantra, and threw in loving one's neighbors, but hating their enemies as an extra... Jesus calls us to a higher standard of living. This may be one of the most difficult teachings to live by in the Bible, but Jesus exemplified it in his dying moments when He prayed for His enemies. Stephen, generally thought of as the first Christian martyr, took up the mantle. His enemies stoned him to death for his belief and testimony, and his last words in Acts 6:60 were these; "Lord, do not hold this sin against them..." In today's turbulent world, many think that is virtually impossible to love an enemy... But love has many degrees, and the degree that prompts us to bless an enemy and pray for him is the love that is enjoined upon us... Lest we think that this loving one's enemies is some kind of afterthought that Jesus had, lets take a look at Paul's writings to the Roman church... "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written; 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord. On the contrary; 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head...' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (17-21). It is all about overcoming evil with good... This week, we will take a look at the higher standards we are held to as Christians. Hopefully, it will be both challenging and enlightening...

Have a great start to your week... Begin it with a RAK or two.... Love mark Phil.4:11

01/31/2017

Higher Vs. Lower Standards

"If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the publicans (tax collectors) doing that? And if you greet only your brothers what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?" (Matt.5:46-47).

In 1976, Hanna Barbera, the cartoon guys, came up with a new series called The Laff-A-Lympics. There were a set of villainous characters in the cartoons called the Really, Really Rottens who did their devious best to confound the Scooby Doobies and Yogi Yahooies...This may be a stretch to get to my point, but are there groups of people in the world that we might classify as really, really rottens? There certainly were in Jesus' day. Lets see now.... The Jews disliked the pagans, the Gentiles, the Samaritans, and of course, those dreaded publicans or tax collectors. The Jews considered the publicans to be really, really rotten. It was bad enough that the Jews were under control of the Roman government itself, but to pay

taxes was particularly galling. The Romans farmed out this tax collecting business to locals (Jews) within the province to exact. Needless to say, they were considered to be turncoats and thought to be unscrupulous. It is against this backdrop that Jesus teaches about a higher standard of living. Jesus told the people that even those really, really rotten publicans loved those who loved them. (Vs.46). What Jesus was trying to get across is that there is no real praise in this kind of love. You might want to read Lk.6:27-37 to get more insight. Here it is in a nutshell... Christians are supposed to display a love that separates them from the sinners. When the world can't tell the difference between the good guys and the bad guys, there is something drastically wrong. Christ demands that we unselfishly do good, and tops it off with this; "Without expectation to get anything back..." (Lk.6:35). Let me finish with a story. There was a church member who was in need of a favor from some other church member, that said this; "I wish now I had invited them into my home, but I never thought I would need them for anything..." She was living on the same standard as the sinners... I find it most interesting that Jesus went to the really, really rotten... Why? Because they were the ones who needed help. Christian high standards are supposed to raise the lower standards of the world. How are we doing with this?

Have a wonderful day... Do good and give God the credit.... Love mark Phil.4:11