

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

OLD TESTAMENT – Isaiah 55:6-9

The Compassion of the LORD

6 “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; 7 let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. 8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. 9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

55:6 *Seek the LORD.* See Jer 29:13–14; Hos 3:5; Am 5:4, 6, 14 (contrast the hypocritical seeking of 58:2). (CSB)

The Servant reconciles the sinner to the Lord. (TLSB)

seek. Translates two terms: Hbr *baqash*, “look for”; Hbr *darash*, “care about, examine, inquire.” The Lord is sought in three ways: (1) through calling on His name in prayer, (2) by consulting Him through Urim and Thummim administered by the high priest, and (3) through the study of His Word. A visit to the tabernacle or temple is frequently implied. Unbelievers do not seek God. Believers seek Him in an attitude of repentance, not selfishness. (TLSB – 843)

Yahweh has prepared a victory feast (55:1-2) and has invited all to be incorporated into David’s everlasting feast (55:3). The result is that the guests become his witnesses to the world (55:4-5). Deportees dare not drag their feet into this new life. “Seek Yahweh while he allows himself to be found!” (55:6). (CC)

This exhortation does not imply that hearers are able, on their own, to find Yahweh. Nothing could be further from the truth! Caught in the sin of idolatry, the deportees are blind and deaf (42:19), stubborn rebels from birth (48:8), and they have no righteousness of their own (48:1). The Suffering Servant alone is righteous (53:11), and his death and resurrection declare captives reconciled to Yahweh and righteous (53:5, 11; 54:17). All people are sheep who have gone astray; each has turned to his own way (53:6). The Servant is the Good Shepherd who has come to seek and save the lost, laying down his life for the sheep (Lk. 15:4-7; 19:10; Jn. 10:11-18; 1 Peter 2:25). (CC)

Where is God to be found? Those who “seek” Yahweh can rest assured that they will find him where he promises to be. The Jerusalem temple was the place where he caused his name to dwell (e.g., Deut. 12:5). However, after it was destroyed, where was he located? In light of Yahweh’s advent as Shepherd (40:11) and his return to Zion (52:8), he invites people to seek him where he dwells forever: in Jesus, the Servant, the Son and Heir of David (Is. 9:6-7). He is present in his enduring and efficacious Word (Is. 40:8; 55:10-11). Those who search the Scriptures will find that they testify to Christ (Jn. 5:39). He is the Word incarnate and the new temple. Those who seek him in Scripture, Holy Baptism, and his Supper do find him. The opposite is to lust after idols (cf. 1 Jn. 5:21). He alone gives life, while false gods bring only death. (CC)

When can God be found? The writer to the Hebrews emphasizes that “the day of salvation” (Is. 49:8; cf. 52:6) is “today” (Heb. 3:7-4:7), so do not procrastinate. Gregory of Nyssa asks: “Do you want to know the opportune time to seek the Lord? The simple answer is: all your life.” (CC)

This is proclaimed in the context of the invitation to all who thirst for God (v 1). The call is urgent, for salvation is available now. It is saying “Now, at this present moment, you Israel, are given the offer of salvation, God is turning toward you, the return home, and the new life. He can be found now, now he is near. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 4)

He is near. The Lord has come near through His Word. The kind of “seeking” this chapter calls for is “listening” to the Lord’s Word (cf Jer 29:13–14; Hos 3:5; Am 5:6, 14). (TLSB)

55:7 *wicked forsake.* Though all are invited, there is no room in the kingdom of grace for those who refuse to turn from their wicked ways or for those who think only of their own righteousness and feel insulted by God’s offer to “abundantly pardon” their sins. Let no one presume to come on his or her own terms, because none can comprehend God’s ways and thoughts to save fallen mankind. (TLSB)

The “wicked one/unbeliever” (48:22) can refer to any unrepentant sinner, but the context focuses on an Israelite in exile who is conformed to the way of life in Babylon that he ignores Yahweh’s transforming promises. This person is very comfortable in the pagan empire and does not want to be a part of Yahweh’s homecoming to Zion. He stubbornly insists on following his own way and trusting in own thoughts (55:8-9; see also Prov. 3:5-6; 16:1-3; 21:2). But Yahweh does not give up on such people! The “wicked ones/unbelievers” forfeit peace (48:22), but the suffering of the Servant earn “peace” with God for them (53:5). Thus they are still invited to partake of the divine gifts. (CC)

If they do not, it will not be because Yahweh lacks forgiveness. His absolution is abundant! It is promised (e.g., 40:2; 43:25; 44:22) and delivered (53:11; 54:17). Nehemiah (Neh. 9:17) and Daniel (Dan. 9:9) claim this mercy, as does Paul: “but where sin abounded, grace super-abounded” (Rom. 5:20). (CC)

Genuine repentance means “turning” from “wicked” ways and “evil” thoughts, and turning to God for mercy and pardon. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 4)

return to the LORD. Done only by the Lord’s Word, which accomplishes that which He purposes (cf v 11). (TLSB)

It is time to “turn” to Yahweh. Moses had predicted that Israel would apostatize and suffer God’s Sinaitic curses but finally “turn/repent” (Deut.4:30; 30:1-2) for “Yahweh your God will restore your fortunes” (Deut. 30:3). The multivalence of the verb covers Israel’s repentance from sin and return to Yahweh when he restores their fortunes and allows them to come home to Jerusalem. (CC)

he will abundantly pardon – God’s mercy and pardon are given “freely” as gifts, not based on human repentance, but on God’s mercy. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 4)

He will pardon and have mercy on every penitent sinner, no matter how much sin is “increased” (Rm 5:20). All others remain wicked and unrighteous in His sight. (TLSB)

55:8–9 Seeking to understand all things about the ways of the Lord is futile. His plans and reasons are beyond our understanding (Jb 38:1–40:2; Rm 11:33–36). (TLSB)

These verses apply to exiles who will be at odds with Yahweh’s plan to use Cyrus (45:9-13) and the Servant (53:1-3). Seeking to understand God’s way is futile. Commenting on 55:8, Luther writes:

The thoughts of God are far above all our thoughts. In our heart we would never have gotten the idea of a free forgiveness of sins. Reason does not admit that righteousness is free without merits. (CC)

God calls us to live by faith, not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). His plans and reasons are beyond the comprehension of mortal man (e.g., Ps. 103:11; Job 38:1 40:2; Rom. 11:33-36). He settles accounts in such a strange way. We seek revenge to get even, but the Servant, despised and reviled (Is. 53:2-5), offers forgiveness and love. We hold grudges and withhold grace (see Gen. 27:41), but God takes no pleasure in being vindictive and delights when the wicked repent and live (see Ezek. 18:23). (CC)

These Gospel gifts are fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Peter states: “This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men” (Acts 2:23 ESV; cf. 1 Peter 1:20; Rev. 13:8). If it was senseless to oppose God’s restoring work through Cyrus, how much more foolish is it to disagree with God’s plan of salvation now fully revealed in Jesus Christ. (CC)

55:8 *my thoughts are not your thoughts* – Human thoughts and thinking are dominated by the old nature and inevitably turn not to God, but to self and the satisfaction of human needs and wants. The answers to the problems of human life are not found in human reasoning, but in God’s ways and thoughts. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 4)

The ways and thoughts of humans are wicked and evil by nature. All thoughts that flow from us are nothing like God’s thoughts. The deepest thinkers of the ages cannot achieve the high and lofty ways of God or understand God. Left alone and without God’s Word no human can imagine that God would send a Savior to die for unworthy sinners. God’s grace remains a mystery to human intelligence and research. Yet God does make it known to us in his Word. (PBC)

55:9 *my ways higher*. See Ps 145:3. (CSB)

EPISTLE – Philippians 1:12-14, 19-30

The Advance of the Gospel

12 I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, 13 so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. 14 And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

1:12 *I want you to know* – One of the primary reasons that Paul wrote his epistle to the Philippians was to tell them how things were going for him in Rome. The Philippians were concerned about the apostle. They wondered what would happen to him, and they were concerned about the effect his imprisonment would have on the overall cause of the gospel. Would people continue to respond positively to a message whose best known and more eloquent advocate was now a prisoner of the state? (PBC)

Paul’s first words about his situation are intended to lay the Philippians’ fears and worries to rest. With enthusiastic joy he reports that the Lord has taken all the negative things that happened to him in connection with his imprisonment and trial and used them to advance the cause of the gospel. Paul’s imprisonment and trial have become a tool in God’s hands to remove prejudices and obstacles and to provide a positive atmosphere for a clear and effective proclamation of the gospel in the capital city of the world. In his own life the apostle is now experiencing the truth of the divine promise that has earlier given the Roman believers through him: “We know that in all things God’s works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” That promise remains true for believers of every age, from the greatest apostle to the humblest Christian. (PBC)

brothers – Spiritual responsibility began with the adult men in the churches (Ac 2:5; Eph 6:4). As God’s children, they were “brothers.” (TLSB)

what has happened to me. Paul’s detainment in prison. (CSB)

advance the gospel. Instead of hindering the gospel, Paul’s imprisonment had served to make it known. (CSB)

Without a single word of complaint about himself, he tells them that his bonds have turned out rather for the advance of the Gospel. This is usually understood to mean that Paul wishes to impress upon his readers that his imprisonment has always furthered the cause of the Gospel. But that is not stated here. Paul would say one might have well expected that his imprisonment should have blocked or impeded the course of the Gospel, but under the God it turned out much rather for the advancement. (Stoeckhardt)

Paul’s situation brought him into contact with many people who otherwise might not have known anything about him. Paul had opportunities to proclaim the Gospel before civil and religious leaders in the hearing of soldiers and countless others. As a result, people talked about him and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. (TLSB)

1:13 *imprisonment is for Christ.* It has become apparent to all who know of Paul’s situation that he is imprisoned, not because he is guilty of some crime, but on account of his stand for the gospel. (CSB)

whole imperial guard. A contingent of soldiers, numbering several thousand, many of whom would have had personal contact with Paul or would have been assigned individually to guard him during the course of his imprisonment (see Ac 28:16, 30). (CSB)

A special class of soldier, assigned to specific tasks for the emperor, senators, or other officials of the government. (TLSB)

The mention of the palace guard (its official title was the Praetorian guard) would be of particular interest to the Philippian veterans. This well-known military company was a detachment of elite imperial troops, as the emperor’s bodyguard. (PBC)

Paul doesn’t fill in all the details for us here, but apparently members of the guard were also assigned on a rotation basis to guard prisoners like the apostle, who had come to Rome to appeal their cases to Caesar. As Paul awaited his trial, then received his first hearing, he became acquainted with many of the soldiers of the palace guard. These soldiers gradually began to realize that Paul was no ordinary prisoner, and certainly no criminal. As they observed the apostle and heard him speak to his friends, his secretary, his judges and to them, even these hardened soldiers could not help but become interested in Paul’s case and the cause for which he stood. It became clear to them that Paul was a prisoner solely for his connection with Jesus Christ, not because he had committed any crime. (PBC)

The guard members spoke about Paul and his case to one another, to their families and to others in Rome. As a result, the gospel of Christ and the remarkable ambassador who was willing to suffer imprisonment for the sake of the gospel became “front page,” the talk of all Rome. The mistrust and hostility that many in Rome had harbored toward this “new” religion called Christianity were broken down, as the real issue in Paul’s case became clear, and the gospel message itself became more generally known. Paul’s eloquent defense and confirmation of the gospel at his public hearing likewise served to generate favorable publicity for the gospel throughout the imperial city. (PBC)

all the rest. Anyone else who served the authorities (e.g., slaves). (TL SB)

Authorities arrested Paul because he bore witness to the truth about Jesus Christ, which liberated people. Roman civil rulers and Jewish religious rulers were afraid they would lose control and advantage over their subjects. (TL SB)

We must assume that Paul came to trial in the year 64, a trial which was attended by many citizens of Rome and many soldiers of the palace guard. On this occasion he naturally stood up for the defense and confirmation of the Gospel. At that time it became known that the Apostle was held prisoner only on account of the Gospel of Christ which he preached, and that he was truly an innocent man. (Stoeckhardt)

1:14 brothers. Public ministers, not just any member of the Roman churches. (TL SB)

became confident. The unexpected result of Paul's imprisonment is that others, encouraged by his example, are forcefully proclaiming the gospel. (CSB)

Likely refers to a person of authority and responsibility addressing others in public (preaching). (TL SB)

The believers who were already in Rome before Paul arrived in the city, found new courage to proclaim and confess the gospel. Years earlier a congregation had been founded at Rome. It consisted mostly of Gentile converts. After Paul arrived in the city, large numbers of Jews, including several entire synagogues, were also converted to Christianity. The reaction to Paul's case had produced a positive attitude toward Christianity in Rome, and the Lord was blessing the apostle's testimony of Christ in a marvelous manner. This gave all the believers in Rome fresh courage to identify themselves publicly as Christians and to share the good news of the gospel with others. (PBC)

Through this trial of Paul it came about that many brethren in the Lord, Christians at Rome, who heretofore had hesitated to show their color, gained confidence and courage to stand up for the Gospel. At first the imprisonment of Paul had frightened them, since there could have been a possibility that this preacher of the Gospel had been taken into custody for a crime he had committed. But now through the trial it became evident that there was no moral charge whatsoever against the Apostle and that only for his preaching of Christ he had been accused and made a prisoner, the Christian brothers at Rome became bold to follow the Apostle's noble example in spreading the Gospel of Christ. (Stoeckhardt)

Those who were close to Paul during his imprisonment had several advantages: They could see that Paul's faith was not discouraged, but was bold and lively (e.g, John and Peter in Acts 4:23-32). They could see how God makes things work for good, as Paul goes on to describe. They would have heard more of the Word directly from Paul. (TL SB)

To Live Is Christ

Yes, and I will rejoice, 19 for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, 20 as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. 23 I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. 24 But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again. 27 Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I

may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, 28 and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. 29 For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, 30 engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

1:19 *Spirit of Jesus Christ.* The Holy Spirit is not only the Spirit of God the Father (Ro 8:9, 14; 1Co 2:10–11, 14) but also the Spirit of Christ, the second person of the Trinity (Ac 16:7; Ro 8:9; Gal 4:6). He is sent by the Father (Jn 14:16–17, 26; Gal 4:6) and by the Son (Jn 15:26; 16:7). (CSB)

The Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity, by whom Jesus was conceived in the Virgin Mary, and who came upon Him visibly in His Baptism. Jesus promised the Spirit to His apostles (Jn 14; 16), breathed the Spirit on them to give them authority (Jn 20:21–23), and sent the Spirit to confirm their faith and mission all through the Book of Acts. (TLSB)

deliverance. † Either Paul’s release from prison (see v. 25; 2:24) or, in view of the immediately following verses, the deliverance brought to the believer by death (cf. Ro 8:28). Verse 25 and 2:24, however, seem to point to the former interpretation. (CSB)

Paul confessed that God’s will and presence means that he will be saved. He did not yet know if “salvation” (deliverance) would mean release from prison or from life through martyrdom (delivered eternally). (TLSB)

The English translations have a difficult time trying to catch the real sense of what the apostle is saying here. Dr. Beck probably comes the closest by translating, (These things...) will turn out victoriously for me.” From the moment he became a Christian to the time he wrote these words as a prisoner, the Apostle Paul had one great passion: to glorify Christ. (PBC)

1:20 *eager expectation* – The Apostle looks forward with earnest expectation. (Apokaradokia” is the watching with head erect or outstretched; waiting for something in suspense. What Paul is waiting for with eager expectation and confident hope is that Christ will be glorified in this whole matter. As a prisoner for Christ Paul is not put to shame, for his imprisonment tends to glorify Christ, and again all that tends to the salvation of men. (Stoekhardt)

The first phase of Paul’s trial appears to have gone well. Every indication pointed to a favorable outcome, but he realized that the verdict could still go against him and could even result in his execution. (PBC)

ashamed but that with full courage. The circumstances of imprisonment, with all its attendant suffering and oppression, constitute a real temptation for Paul to abandon the gospel and his resolute service for Christ. (CSB)

my body. Where the exalted Christ dwells by his Spirit and is at work (cf. Ro 8:9–10), and so is exalted by what Paul does. (CSB)

If Paul lived, his body would honor Jesus Christ, because the Gospel was proclaimed through him. If Paul died, he bore witness about life eternal that cannot be taken away. “It is God’s will and clear command that believers should do good works. The Holy Spirit works this in believers, and God is pleased with good works for Christ’s sake” (FC SD IV 38). (TLSB)

whether by life or by death. Whether his service for Christ continues or ends in death. (CSB)

Come what may for Paul, life or death, in both cases Christ will be honored. If he dies, he dies as a martyr for the confirmation of the Gospel, if he lives he will continue to spread the Gospel. There is no thought here with the Apostle as to how a possible martyrdom would tend toward his own glorification, as some think, but Paul is only concerned about what it may do for the living. (Stoeckhardt)

The effect that would have upon the preaching of the Gospel on the part of the others is that it would inflame them with new zeal, courage, and boldness. It will tend to make other Christians bold to stand up for Christ. (Stoeckhardt)

1:21 *to live is Christ.* Christ was the source and secret of Paul's continual joy (even in prison), for Paul's life found all its meaning in Christ. (CSB)

If you live as a Christian, you live by Christ's grace, in His image, to serve as Christ the people around you. If you die, you learn the fullness of what you had known in part and your fallen human nature no longer hinders you. (TLSB)

The meaning then is: Christ is for me to live, or Christ is my life. He, Christ, sums up all that I am. He is the true life of my soul. If Christ is my life, then for me to die is gain; for only through death do I get into possession of the true life, and I do obtain the whole Christ. (Stoeckhardt)

gain. Verse 23 specifies that the gain brought by death is "being with Christ," so that here Paul is saying that his ultimate concern and most precious possession, both now and forever, is Christ and his relationship to him. (CSB)

1:22 *live in the flesh.* Earthly life (cf v 24). (TLSB)

fruitful labor. The spread of the gospel and the upbuilding of the church. (CSB)

Laboring for ourselves bears poor fruit (cf Rm 6:21). But serving others with God's Word evidences a life that endures forever. (TLSB)

Having set forth the great principles that govern a Christian's living and dying in Christ, Paul applied those principles directly to his own situation. He knew that a favorable verdict at his trial would mean more fruitful work for him. Being set free would permit him to take up his apostolic labors again. He would be able to preach the gospel openly, among old friends and in new places. That kind of work is always fruitful labor. Jesus Himself guarantees it. Through such faithful labor, or course, Christ would be glorified. (PBC)

which I shall choose – Paul cannot choose, and the choice is not his to make. The Lord who made you and gives you life has numbered your days (Ps. 139:16). He also prepares the good content of those days (Eph 2:10). (TLSB)

1:23–24 *depart and be with Christ ... remain in the flesh.* Either alternative was a good one. While mysteries remain, this passage clearly teaches that when believers die they are with Christ, apart from the body. (CSB)

1:23 *better by far.* Being with Christ after death must involve some kind of conscious presence and fellowship (cf. 2 Co 5:6, 8). (CSB)

Paul confesses what we know: to be with Christ in paradise is the absolute fulfillment of every good desire (cf Lk 23:43). (TLSB)

1:24 *necessary on your account.* Paul puts the needs of those he ministers to ahead of his personal preference. (CSB)

Paul would continue to serve God as an apostle of Jesus Christ in this world (cf v 22). (TLSB)

1:25 *I will remain.*† No doubt Paul was later released from prison (see map on “Paul’s Fourth Missionary Journey”). (CSB)

Considering the vision God granted him in Ac 23:11, Paul expects that the Lord will preserve his physical life. (TLSB)

Paul, as an apostle, serves God as an authoritative spokesman of His truth and grace. God’s Word makes progress as it makes our regenerate soul more capable, articulate, and dominant in relation to our contrary human nature. Progressing in faith and life increases our joy as we experience God’s will for us (Jn 16:24). (TLSB)

The Philippian congregation was less than ten years old. Many of its members had only recently turned from idolatry. The congregation had its weaknesses and was surrounded by dangers. It was now suddenly deprived of its beloved apostle and his strong leadership and guidance, the congregation’s development could be seriously hindered. (PBC)

progress ... in the faith. The Christian life is to be one of joyful growth and advance (see note on v. 9 and the verses cited there). (CSB)

Paul, as an apostle, serves God as an authoritative spokesman of His truth and grace. God’s Word makes progress as it makes our regenerate soul more capable, articulate, and dominant in relation to our contrary human nature. Progressing in faith and life increases our joy as we experience God’s will for us (Jn 16:24). (TLSB)

From this statement of Paul we are compelled to assume that the Apostle regained his freedom from his imprisonment at Rome. WE assume that the Apostle visited the churches of the Orient to strengthen them in their faith, and then struck out for the Occident and came to Spain. It is possible that he, according to ancient tradition came to Britannia; for the first missionaries in Britannia reportedly found traces of the Apostle’s doctrine of justification there. In the Orient the Apostle confirmed Christians in their faith, and in Europe he won new ones for the Christian faith. (Stoekhardt)

1:26 *your progress and joy.* Paul’s conduct of his ministry among the Philippians will be a reason for rejoicing in what Christ is doing among them. (CSB)

glory in Christ Jesus. Christ’s life worked blessing for us. Knowing more about His life gives more cause to relate His life (glory) to others. (TLSB)

These Christians glorified in Paul and were proud of him. This was not sinful pride. It was not of a carnal, but of a truly Christian nature. That is indicated by the phrase “in Christ Jesus. By glorying in the Apostle they manifested a noble attachment to Christ. In this attitude their gratitude for the gift of the Gospel is expressed. (Stoekhardt)

coming to you again – All the historical evidence we possess indicates that the apostle’s expectations were fulfilled. Apparently he was set from this particular imprisonment and allowed by the Lord to carry on his apostolic labors, at least for a few more years. It is also quite likely that Paul did see the Philippians again before he was arrested and imprisoned for the second and final time. That second imprisonment and its outcome are discussed in Paul’s last letter, 2 Timothy. (PBC)

Paul anticipated that Caesar would free him, after which he would revisit congregations, as was his custom. (TLSB)

1:27 *let your manner of life be worthy* – The root meaning of the verb Paul uses here is “exercise citizenship.” The Philippians, many of them Roman army veterans and their families, were especially proud of their Roman citizenship. The apostle wanted to remind them that as Christians they possessed a citizenship even more important than the earthly citizenship of which they were so proud. The Philippian believers were citizens of Jesus’ spiritual kingdom. As their conduct in so many ways gave evidence of their cherished Roman citizenship, it should, in even more ways, reflect their spiritual citizenship. (PBC)

Consistent with what the Gospel teaches and inspires in a believer. (TLSB)

To exercise citizenship in a manner worthy of the gospel means to live in a manner which will truly give evidence of the new spiritual life the gospel has produced in one’s heart. When the gospel enters human hearts and joins sinful human beings to Christ in faith, it changes people’s lives. It moves and empowers human beings, who previously lived only for themselves, to live in love to God and to their fellow men. Paul urges the Philippians here to show what the gospel has done for them and in them by living lives that will bring honor to God and glorify the Lord who the gospel proclaims. (PBC)

Ephesians 4:1, “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.”

Notes from Ephesians 4:1...

The Greek word is “walk.” The idea in Hebrew and signifies one’s entire conduct. (A)

The word for live is - pereepateho which means to be totally dedicated with living in a certain manner. Today we might say “walk the talk.” The word for worthy is acheeoe which means that which is appropriate for a particular position or calling. They were not to be ashamed of their faith and thus try to hide it.

Calling. kaleho. To be bidden in this case by God. The word “received” says very plainly that this was something done by someone other than the Ephesians themselves. This was done through the Gospel and didn’t include any of the Jewish rituals or other contingencies.

worthy of the gospel.† Their manner of life should reflect the influence of the gospel and not bring shame on the message of salvation. (CSB)

in one spirit. Having a common disposition and purpose. (CSB)

Since the Spirit regenerates according to Christ’s image, they share the same mind, which Paul calls them to use in 2:5. (TLSB)

striving side by side. Particularly where the gospel is under attack, Christians need each other and must stand together. (CSB)

Due to Adam's fall, everyone has turned away (Rm 3:10–18). The Gospel produces faith; it is not the product of human thought, imagination, or decision. (TLSB)

faith of the gospel. Eternal and absolute because it holds the truth and does so by God's grace and power. (TLSB)

1:28 Paul and the Gospel he proclaimed met some opposition among Gentiles (Ac 17:32), but most opposition came from Jews (Ac 13:45, 15:1). (TLSB)

a sign. Persistent opposition to the church and the gospel is a sure sign of eventual destruction, since it involves rejection of the only way of salvation. By the same token, when Christians are persecuted for their faith, this is a sign of the genuineness of their salvation (see 2Th 1:5). (CSB)

The Philippians had a difficult stand. There were such who persecuted them. But they must not be perturbed and frightened, must not fear for their life, else they will forfeit their faith. Their whole life must be adjusted to their faith and the Gospel. When they as Christians strive together and are unafraid, this is to their adversaries an omen of their destruction. What is to the enemies a sign of their destruction is to the Christians themselves a sign of their salvation. (Stoeckhardt)

their destruction. Perishing under the condemnation of their sin because they despise God's grace (1Pt 2:7–8). (TLSB)

1:29 *granted ... to suffer.* Given as a gift or privilege. Christian suffering, as well as faith, is a blessing (cf. Mt 5:11–12; Ac 5:41; Jas 1:2; 1Pe 4:14). The Christian life is to be a "not only ... but also" proposition: not only believing but also suffering. (CSB)

Believing in Christ is more than just knowing and liking what He did for you. Believing in Christ means devotion to His purpose, which will always include suffering at the hands of those who would oppose Him. God enables such devotion. (TLSB)

The apostle personally identifies with the Philippians by reminding them that as they struggle on behalf of the gospel, they stand on common ground with him. Many of the Philippians had personally witnessed some of the conflicts the apostle endured. They remembered when he first brought the gospel to their city and how he had been slandered, mobbed, flogged and thrown into a Roman dungeon. They also remembered how the apostle had remained steadfast and how from the depths of the prison he and his missionary partner Silas sang hymns of praise to the Lord. (PBC)

What the Apostle writes here to the Philippians is meant to find general application. Christians are to regard all their sufferings as coming from God. When Christians take it so in Christian patience, they have the assurance that God will help them through it to be a blessed end. Such Christian submission is already a gift of God's grace, which at the same time includes the assurance of final victory through their God and Savior. (Stoeckhardt)

1:30 *same conflict.* Their common involvement with Paul in conflict with those who oppose the gospel. (CSB)

The conflict is between truth/mercy and falsehood/condemnation. Ac 16:16–24 records the conflict Paul had in Philippi, being beaten and jailed because he cast a demon out of a young woman who told fortunes for her masters. (TLSB)

you saw. When Paul and Silas first visited Philippi and were imprisoned (see Ac 16:19–40). (CSB)

The Philippians had observed the Apostle engaged in conflict with the enemies of the Gospel at Philippi. For while he was there endeavoring to set up the first congregation in Europe, he had been seized as a public nuisance, mobbed, beaten, and thrown into prison, all of which he had endured for the Gospel's sake. (Stoeckhardt)

1:19–30 Paul turns his attention from the question of whether he will live or die to a more important issue: what it means to live in this world. If God grants you a day in this world, it is because He would have you serve others by living and speaking in a way that is consistent with (worthy of) the Gospel. Our ability to live this way is a product of the salvation God lavishes on us in the very words we read here and in the Spirit that accompanies those words. • Dear Lord Jesus, grant us grace and presence of mind to live in a way that agrees with Your Gospel and to strive for advancing the faith in the hearts and minds of others. Amen. (TLSB)

GOSPEL – Matthew 20:1-16

The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. 2 After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. 3 And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, 4 and to them he said, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.’ 5 So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. 6 And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ 7 They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’ 8 And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.’ 9 And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. 10 Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. 11 And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, 12 saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ 13 But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? 14 Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. 15 Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?’ 16 So the last will be first, and the first last.”

20:1–16 Wording of 19:30 and 20:16 surround this parable. This bracketing structure (an *inclusio*) suggests that God's mysterious way of reversing things is the parable's point. (TLSB)

Jesus' story will explain or ground why there are many first ones who will be last and last ones who will be first (19:30; also 20:16). This parable, the second longest one in the Gospel of Matthew, is a wonderful and suspenseful story, carefully crafted to reveal that in the most important way, all disciples are equal in the present and future reign of God in Jesus. The story exhibits a simple overall structure of

two parts. In 20:1-7, Jesus tells of a householder who goes out five times during the day to hire laborers to work in his vineyard. In 20:8-15, the laborers come at the end of the day to receive their wages. The ensuing conversation between the vineyard lord and the group hired first provides both a corrective warning and a blessed promise to all Jesus' disciples, then and now, as we wait for the final day of reckoning. The parable closes (20:16) when Jesus reverses the aphorism of 19:30. The parable's message is simple but profound: God treat all those who are workers in the reign of heaven the same; owing to God's grace, there is no distinction on the Last Day. (CC)

20:1-7 The first half of the story, a householder goes out into the marketplace and hires groups of day laborers at different times of the day. Although there are five different occasions when workers are hired, the middle three groups hired at the third, sixth, and ninth hours do not readily fit either set in the concluding proverb about "last one" and "first ones" (20:16; cf. 19:30). That conclusion explicitly refer only to the two contrasting extremes to express the message of the parable. (CC)

20:1 *kingdom of heaven* – Here it is the Kingdom of grace, the visible church on earth, which will be consummated in the Kingdom of glory, v 8. Jesus is not speaking of the kingdom of power. All ideas of labor and management or of capital and labor must be laid aside. Jesus is plainly speaking of how he deals with members of the church, among whom are hypocrites.

master of a house. Owner and manager of the household. (TLSB)

hire – Day laborers would be delighted for any work, because they had no other steady income. (TLSB)

20:2 *agreeing* – This is merely stressing the fact that the workers clearly understood the arrangement. They did not complain at this point.

a denarius. The usual daily wage. A Roman soldier also received one denarius a day. (CSB)

20:3-5 The three intermediate groups of workers recruited by the householder (at the third, sixth, and ninth hours) are entirely absent in the second half of the parable (20:8-15). Their chief function is to create and build suspense about the wages that will be paid, for the householder promises this third middle group: "Whatever may be just I will give you." (CC)

20:3 *third hour.* 9:00 A.M. (CSB)

going out – The point here is that the landowner alone takes the initiative.

Idle – They desperately need work. (TLSB)

market place – The city gates were the places in which public business was conducted, contracts executed, legal judgments handed down, and government administered (Gn 23; Dt 22:15). (TLSB)

20:4 *he said* – This again shows that the landowner took the initiative.

Whatever is right – Household master sets no specific wage for this and the subsequent groups hired. He merely promises to pay fairly. (TLSB)

20:5 *he did the same* – Then the landowner again takes the initiative and hires idle people at noon and at three.

sixth hour ... ninth hour. Noon and 3:00 P.M. respectively. (CSB)

20:6 *eleventh hour.* 5:00 P.M. (CSB)

An hour before quitting time. (TLSB)

The landowner takes the initiative and hires men at about five P.M., unheard of, and purposely so, for Jesus is speaking about the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of grace on earth.

Why do stand here idle all day – In marked contrast, the lord of the vineyard asks the last group, “Why have you stood here for the whole day idle? (CC)

20:7 *no one has hired us* – The answer does not denote irreverence but simply brings out their helplessness. But the landowner, in his utter generosity, takes the initiative, and engages their services.

You go into the vineyard too – Hiring these men to work only an hour was an act of charity, ensuring they would eat that day. (TLSB)

Since the householder promises nothing to the eleventh-hour group, the parable’s first half ends with an unanswered question: What in the world will the lord of the vineyard pay these men whom he has hired to work in his vineyard for just one hour? (CC)

20:8 *evening came* – A prophetic allusion to the Last Judgment. The evening of each individual’s life resembles the evening of the world.

foreman. Supervisor who oversaw the laborers. (TLSB)

beginning with last – In the kingdom of power, under the ordinary circumstances of labor and management, this would be unheard of and unfair. This order is in harmony with the rule laid down in (19:30 and 20:16).

20:9 *came* – They did not come forward until they were called.

Received a denarius – This is a surprise, to be sure, but at this point, the parable has only revealed that the householder must be regarded as strikingly generous, for he has paid an entire day’s wage to men who worked only one hour after spending the whole day standing idle (20:6). (CC)

Supervisor paid each worker the same, regardless of the number of hours worked. (TLSB)

20:10-12 The expectation that those hired first would receive more seems reasonable. Recall, however, that they agreed to their denarius wage beforehand. (TLSB)

20:10 *also received a denarius* – No distinction is made.

This employer is munificent, or so he must have seemed at first to the only group mentioned, namely, those who had been first. The lavishness of the vineyard’s owner, wedded with the inevitable calculation of how much more they had accomplished in comparison with the little work done by the last group, led them to think that they would receive more than their agreement with the owner had stipulated (20:2). Against all conventional wisdom and expectation, however, they also received a denarius – the same as the last group hired! (CC)

20:11 *they grumbled* – goggudzo – It is used of the envious, the self-righteous, the rejecters, and those who lose their souls. It is also found in Lk 5:30; Jn 6:41,43,61; 7:32 and I Cor 10:10. What Jesus intends is for us to examine ourselves now, lest we lose our souls in the Great Judgment.

20:12 *borne the burden of the day* – Among those who have worked the longest we may find many proud and conceited persons, who rely on their long hours of work in the church and despise those who have worked but little, who insist on their rights, and are offended at the grace and goodness of God.

20:13 *Friend*. Implies association, not necessarily personal affection. (TLSB)

did you not agree – There can be no agreement unless it be mutual.

20:14 *take what belongs to you* – This has the meaning of a gift, based on grace, not merit.

I choose. Or, “I will.” Emphasizes that the master’s decision regarding the pay of those hired later lies completely within his discretion. (TLSB)

20:15 *am I not allowed* – This question implies that the murmurer arrogated to himself the position of owning and disbursing the money.

The master’s decision to be generous with those hired last does not mean he has shortchanged those hired first. On the contrary, those hired first receive the wage mutually agreed upon. Being part of God’s kingdom is not based on earning or deserving anything but rather on grace. (TLSB)

A problem only emerges when the employees start comparing themselves to their fellows. In this little story, however, all comparisons are odious, and such comparing reveals the danger of an envious and evil spirit. (CC)

The parable’s primary message, then, is one that takes a community and its members and places them all on the same level. There is no room for self-promotion, no occasion for competition, no basis on which one disciple can say to another, “I have no need of you” or “I am more important than you are.” Even the unique apostles, who on the Last Day will sit on thrones as they judge the twelve tribes (19:28), are, in final and ultimate terms, simply laborers in the vineyard like every other baptized believer in Jesus. (CC)

20:16 *last first...first last* – In a time and culture in which relative social status played an extremely prominent role, this parable was as revolutionary and transformational as the way that Jesus practiced table fellowship. In our modern time and culture, in which sinful disciples still want to (or think that they must) compare and evaluate so that someone comes out on top and someone else falls to the bottom, Jesus’ concluding aphorism undercuts all prideful superiority and assuages all fearful inferiority: “in this way, the last ones will be first ones, and the first one (will be) last ones.”

The parable of the Workers in the Vineyard, then, exhibits a primarily horizontal message and is not directed against an overt form of legalism or “reward by merit thinking.” By implication, however, there is also a message of profound grace here, expressed in the master’s words “but I wish to give to this last man as also to you” (20:14). It may, in fact, be the case that the parable illustrates the difference between mere generosity and genuine grace. Grace by its very nature gives without regard to any merit or worthiness in the one who receives it. The wages are awarded to the workers, but the amount of the wage has nothing to do with the effort expended or the time spent, and all in the vineyard receive the same. (CC)

The master's actions are stunningly unexpected. However, they are only insulting or hard to swallow if one takes one's eyes off of the owner. One can imagine the scene as the parable sets it up. Wages are paid out, beginning with the last group and ending with the first. As the first group stands in line and waits their turn, their gaze falters, leaving the master who has hired them, given them meaningful work, and promised them a fair wage. They stop looking at the master, and they start looking at their fellow workers. That's when they get into trouble. Their eye actually becomes evil because the master is good to others. (CC)

20:1–16 Serving the Lord's kingdom is a privilege and labor of love, not something undertaken to gain a reward. When we begin to think that God's kingdom needs or depends on us, we get it completely backward. We need and depend on it! Through forgiveness and the renewing work of God's Spirit, we can indeed be used by God for vital service in His kingdom. • Keep me ever mindful, Lord, that it is only by grace that I have been included in Your kingdom and am privileged to serve in it. Amen. (TLSB)