

FRIDAY: All Will Know

Read: Ezekiel 36:33-38³³ “Thus says the Lord GOD: On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places shall be rebuilt.³⁴ And the land that was desolate shall be tilled, instead of being the desolation that it was in the sight of all who passed by.³⁵ And they will say, ‘This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden, and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited.’³⁶ Then the nations that are left all around you shall know that I am the LORD

Reflect:

“Cleanliness is next to godliness.” It’s likely you’ve heard that saying before. But does it mean the same thing to us today that a similar phrase would’ve meant around 3,000 years ago? It’s doubtful...

The cleansing of YHWH isn’t merely a physical cleansing – like washing your hands. While personal hygiene was certainly a part of being “clean” according to the Old Testament law, this barely scratches the surface...

The idea behind being “clean” is the idea of holiness; of being “set apart” for YHWH and His purposes. Our holiness is required because we serve a holy God (e.g., Lev11:45). Notice that once again “the nations” (v36) will come to know YHWH as a result of what takes place in these verses. Ultimately, so will Israel (v38).

Respond:

What are some ways in which the statement “cleanliness is next to godliness” can be misleading? E.g., if you “appear” to be a good godly person, then you must be. But what about when no one is around?

Read 1 Kings 9:1-10 (especially vs6-10). Those words came to pass and Ezek36:34-36 shows the “flip side” of it all. God can work through any situation.

The book of Leviticus shows what an “unclean” person had to do to become “clean” again (e.g., Lev13). How could having to follow instructions like those in Leviticus be helpful in remembering our call to be holy?

Pray: Pray for the preparations for the Good Friday services that will take place next week. Ask God for a greater desire to be holy – for Him. Pray for the leadership of NLCC.

SATURDAY: Sing Me a Song...

Read: Philippians 2:5-11

Reflect:

Songs are powerful. Just think of how many songs you have committed to your memory. Can you even place a number on how many it is? Many people can hear a song on the radio they haven’t heard in years and still sing along. Something about music and words simply “stick” with us.

This isn’t a new phenomenon. Songs have been around a long time. They are found in the Old Testament (e.g., Exod15) and in the New (e.g. Rev5:9f). It is believed that Philippians 2:5-11 is a song from the early Christian Church.

Since songs are so easily remembered, it makes sense to conclude that very important information could (is) be contained in them. What makes the words of Philippians 2:5-11 so important? What does it mean? Why was it important for the church in Philippi? Why...

Respond:

Do you have a “favorite song” – what is it? Why do you like it so much? [Go ahead and pick two or three if you must.]

Do the songs that you sing on Sunday morning at NLCC stick with you during the week? If so, how is that beneficial? If not, could it be beneficial? Why don’t they?

Do you ever sing praises to God on days other than Sunday? Why or why not?

Pray: Pray for our services tomorrow at the NLCC building (and for other services as well). Pray our guests are welcomed and those invited to come will in fact come. Pray God is glorified and people are encountered by Him.

Of Ultimate Concern

March 9 - 15

Ultimate → ¹**ul•ti•mate** \’əl-tə-mət\ adj

- 1.d: the best or most extreme of its kind: **UTMOST** <the *ultimate* sacrifice>
- 3.b: **ORIGINAL 1** <the *ultimate* source>
- 4: **MAXIMUM 1** *syn* see **LAST**

Ultimate → ²**ultimate** n [1681]

- 1: something ultimate *esp* : **FUNDAMENTAL**
- 2: **ACME**
 - point, highest point

It’s interesting how a single word can have a variety of different meanings and nuances. In this source [*Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*. 11th Ed.] the word *ultimate* did have my intended meaning (see 1.d: above) but it also had a definition that is ironic for my purposes today...

Concern → ¹**con•cern** \kən-’sərn\ vb

- 1.b: to bear on
- 2: to have an influence on: **INVOLVE** *also*: to be in the business or affair of <the problem *concerns* us all>
- 3: to be a care, trouble, or distress to <her ill health *concerns* me>
- 4: **ENGAGE, OCCUPY** <he *concerns* himself with trivia>

Concern → ²**concern** n [1665]

- 1.a: marked interest or regard usually arising through a personal tie or relationship
- 3: a matter for consideration

Surprisingly, a 1665 definition (see 1.a: above) was my intended meaning for this word, although a more modern definition (see 2: above) is close to my focus as well.

Given the above, “Ultimate Concern” = ‘the most extreme’ ‘interest – via a relationship’ we can have. Since the most important relationship we have is the one with our Heavenly Father, what concerns us the most ought to be what concerns Him the most. But, what is it?

Ironically, two other definitions for *ultimate* are “arrived at as a last result” and “last in a progression or series.” I certainly hope what is God’s “Ultimate Concern” is not what we arrive at as ours simply because we’re out of other options of things to be concerned about...

MONDAY: Background

Read: 2 Kings 22:8-13⁸ And Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the secretary, “I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the LORD.” And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it...¹⁰ Then Shaphan the secretary told the king...¹¹ When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his clothes.¹² And the king commanded Hilkiah the priest...¹³ “Go, inquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah...”

Reflect:

There is a great amount of history “behind” the events in the book of Ezekiel. While today’s text will in no way fill in all of the gaps, it at least gives us a starting point. Although Josiah was a godly king (2Kgs22:1-2), he was unfortunately following a long line of evil kings (e.g., 1Kgs14:21f; 15:3; 2Kgs8:27; 16:2; 21:2,20).

The “Book of the Law” (v8) is believed to be what we call Deuteronomy in the Old Testament. Somehow it had been lost; perhaps “purposely misplaced” would be a more accurate statement...

King Hezekiah responds appropriately to this new information (v11). The tearing of clothes was a sign of grief and remorse. Upon hearing the words of YHWH (the Hebrew letters for LORD in our English Bibles), Hezekiah knew Judah was in the wrong and therefore in grave danger...

Respond:

You can read 2 Kings 22—25 for a better picture of some events immediately preceding the exile of the Jews in Judah.

Have you ever purposely ignored (or tried to forget) parts of God’s word because It exposed your actions (or thoughts) as contrary to God’s will? What is one result you can recall?

Judah was doomed (2Kgs22:16-17), but due to his response, Josiah will be spared (22:18-20). Notice he still is obedient to YHWH (2Kgs23:1ff) despite this mixed news.

Pray: Thank God for the privilege of having His word to read. Confess to God a specific area (sin) in which you tend to choose your own way. Pray for an obedience to God’s word like Josiah demonstrated.

TUESDAY: A “Green” God?

Read: Ezekiel 36:1-15¹ “And you, son of man, prophesy to the mountains of Israel, and say...Precisely because they made you desolate and crushed you from all sides, so that you became the possession of the rest of the nations, and you became the talk and evil gossip of the people,⁴ therefore, O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord GOD...Behold, I have spoken in my jealous wrath, because you have suffered the reproach of the nations.⁷ Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: I swear that the nations that are all around you shall themselves suffer reproach...”

Reflect:

Our text today sounds rather odd doesn’t it? Why would Ezekiel prophesy to the mountains? It seems YHWH is concerned for, well, dirt. Furthermore, at this point in Ezekiel, the people of Judah were in exile as the words of YHWH had been fulfilled (e.g., 2Kgs22:16-17). So, why be concerned with “dirt” over the people?

Some people say God is still concerned with that specific dirt (i.e., geographical [and ethnic] Israel). While we can’t deny the fact that God is concerned with all of His creation (and people), favoring one geographic area over another doesn’t make much sense. E.g., today there are a lot of ways to travel – all of them don’t pass through Israel.

Earlier (Ezek6:1ff) Ezekiel was told to prophesy judgment against the mountains. Here in chapter 36 Ezekiel is told to prophesy a blessing. The time of YHWH’s judgment was coming to an end; the dirt would no longer be punished. In fact it would be a blessing again.

Respond:

Mankind was to care for the earth (e.g., Gen1:28-31) and during the exile of Judah the land was given its ignored Sabbath rests (e.g., 2Chron36:20-21; Lev25:1-7). Certainly God is concerned about the care of His “good” creation.

Notice the word “because” in the text (vs 2,3,6,13) – certainly we see God’s involvement in the world through wording like this. How has He been involved in your life lately?

YHWH will act for the sole purpose of people knowing He is YHWH (v11). What do we learn about God from this action?

Pray: Thank God for His concern for all of His creation. Thank God for His involvement in your life. Pray for God’s blessing on the Bible studies of NLCC that will take place tonight.

WEDNESDAY: Failure?

Read: Ezekiel 36:16-21¹⁶ The word of the LORD came to me:¹⁷ “Son of man, when the house of Israel lived in their own land, they defiled it by their ways and their deeds...¹⁸ So I poured out my wrath upon them for the blood that they had shed in the land, for the idols with which they had defiled it.¹⁹ I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed through the countries...²⁰ But when they came to the nations, wherever they came, they profaned my holy name, in that people said of them, ‘These are the people of the LORD, and yet they had to go out of his land.’²¹ But I had concern for my holy name...”

Reflect:

It seems as if God is in a ‘lose-lose’ situation. Since the Hebrew people were in a covenant with God, their obedience was required. If they were not obedient, they had already agreed to the conditions of their punishment (e.g., Deut30:11-20).

As we know, the Hebrews were not obedient and their actions were disgraceful to God. Their lifestyles (generally speaking) were a far cry from being “holy” as the God they served is holy (e.g., Lev19:2). This meant they needed to be punished – the covenant required it.

Unfortunately, even by keeping true to His word and punishing His people (and thereby showing His sovereignty), YHWH comes up on the short end of the stick. Why? Because everyone knew why Israel was in that land (cf. Exodus) and since they were now exiled...it appeared as if YHWH had failed...

Pray: Pray for your desire to obey God to increase. Pray for the elders and preaching minister who will meet this Sunday (every 1st and 3rd Sunday) to talk and pray about the future of NLCC. Ask God to reveal to you ways in which you have profaned His name.

Respond:

While we’re not under the Old Testament covenant, our obedience is still required (e.g., Jn14:15). Do your thoughts and actions reveal your love for Jesus?

Many people have a concern for their “family name.” That has merit – you may be one of them. But, does your concern for God’s name trump that of your family’s name?

Israel profaned YHWH’s name in a variety of ways (e.g., child sacrifice and idolatry – v18). How do Christians profane His name today?

THURSDAY: Making Him Known

Read: Ezekiel 36:22-32²² “Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came.²³ And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name...²⁴ I will...²⁵ I will... I will... I will... I will... I will... I will... I will... I will... I will...³⁰ I will...³¹ Then you will remember your evil ways...³² It is not for your sake that I will act, declares the Lord GOD; let that be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel.

Reflect:

These verses are eye-popping. Doesn’t YHWH care about Israel (contra 36:22,32)? Yes. Weren’t they His covenant people? Yes. YHWH does care about Israel and they were His covenant people...but YHWH’s blessing was never meant to stay within an ethnic race (e.g., Gen12:1-3).

Notice that as YHWH’s holiness is shown (v23a) the nations come to know Him (v23b). It’s quite remarkable; people are attracted to “the best” of everything. God is the ultimate “best” anyone can be attracted to...unfortunately His people often misrepresent Him.

Notice the action of YHWH; “I will” occurs 13 times in these verses. But those words don’t tell the whole story (cf. v28a and “the land that I gave...”). Yet despite all of His action, Israel was not off the hook. YHWH required them to have their past inform the actions of their present (e.g., vs31-32).

Pray: Thank God for His love for all people. Pray for the people of the worship team as they practice tonight. NLCC has many volunteers, pick one you are aware of and pray for them – thank God for their service.

Respond:

Since “the church” (people, not a building) is the Israel of God today, who are appropriate substitutes for “the nations” now?

When was the last time you misrepresented God? Are you aware of any consequences of that action?

Do you make the effort to learn from your past mistakes? Why is this essential to the life of a follower of Jesus?