

Poison in Their Mouths

Thanksgiving Sunday, 8 October 2023

Leaders' Guide

Read Numbers 21:4-9

1. In the introduction to the sermon what did Jame suggest were two benefits of juxtaposing the old sinful life with the new life in Christ, like the Apostle Paul did with the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:19-23?
 - a. First, the contrast helps to highlight the extraordinary gift and miracle of our redemption. Second, and less comfortably, it can shine the light on those areas of my life where aspects of the old, sinful self remain alive.
2. What is the opposite of thanksgiving that is so graphically highlighted in our story from Numbers?
 - a. A critical spirit and complaining words.
3. In their complaint about God and Moses, what consequence of a critical spirit and complaining words did the Israelites highlight (vs. 5)?
 - a. "there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food." This internal contradiction in their criticism points out that a critical spirit and complaining words will blind us to the grace and gift right in front of us. Though it was the same food every morning & they had seen it more than 12,000 times over all those years, it was no less a miracle & no less an example of God's loving provision for them.
4. *Read John 3:14-17*. What significance does Jesus attribute to the remedy of the bronze serpent? And what is the great catastrophe that Jesus' crucifixion can avert? Is James' conclusion about this convincing? Why or why not?
 - a. "The Israelites repented of their poisonous ways, looked up to the bronze serpent and lived. Likewise, when we are confronted with the severity of our own poisonously sinful ways, repent of them, and look up to the cross upon which Jesus was lifted, we too shall live - eternally."
 - b. "The great catastrophe is not physical death, though it is often heartbreaking - physical death comes to us all - no the great catastrophe is spiritual death, because the remarkable work of redemption on the cross means that, though spiritual death is much more serious than physical death, spiritual death is not inevitable. Through Jesus we can choose the new birth & eternal life that he offered to Nicodemus."
5. *Read Colossians 3:1-3, 5-8, 12, 16-17 - or 1-17 if you have the time*. How does having died to the old sinful self and been raised to new life in Christ fit together with having to continue to put to death what is "earthly" in us?

- a. "In Christian theology we talk about **positional** and **progressive sanctification**. And by that we mean that, having been redeemed by God through Jesus, we are considered sanctified – holy – dead to the old sinful self and alive to and in Jesus. But every Christian knows that in our day to day lives, in our relationships, we are not immediately and automatically pure and holy. We know that we must embark on the life long process of Christian discipleship by which we become increasingly sanctified or holy. And so, day by day, we seek to put to death those things that were part of our old life, those things which alienate us from God and others, and which further corrupt and fracture the Image of God in us."
6. And what must we "put on" to replace those earthly things in our lives (vs. 12)?
 - a. "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience."
7. What are the key attributes of a healthy Christian community that Paul describes in vss 16-17?
 - a. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with **thankfulness** in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, **giving thanks** to God the Father through him."
8. What aspects of that description do you see in our community at Little T? Where do we need further growth and maturation?
9. *For reflection:* How are you doing personally with these qualities and characteristics?