

Week 1: Spiritual Learning Journal

Obedience

A. From these verses I gathered that the obedient are blessed, that they will be able to distinguish between what is truth and what is false, that our works will become greater and greater as we stay obedient. God will also grant greater authority to those who stay obedient; God will keep open a door (from heaven for God to flow/move) because we stay obedient in the little things and so greater things are also coming. Because we are obedient to God's commandments and hold fast to the testimony of Jesus we will have opposition from satan, but if we stay in the Lord we are still going to be blessed and find rest. Though if we do not stay obedient then our lampstand will be removed (our light, power, effectiveness) and the only way to come back is through repentance. If we do not stay obedient to the Lord then the Day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night just like it will to unbelievers. So yes, again and again we must stay obedient and keep the words of the prophecy in this book, in the Bible as a whole, and we must obey and live by them.

B. In 1 Peter 1:13-25 Peter adds that through our obedience we become holy, just like our calling directs us to. God washed us and made us holy, He is calling us up from where He found us into something greater, something sanctified, holy, set apart for special use. Because we were bought with a price, an unimaginable cost to God we now owe Him our lives, because Jesus Christ God's Son spilled His blood for us, our only just response to such an act is to hand our lives over for His purpose. All the physical earthly things will pass away but the one thing that will remain is God's Word that we can take to the bank!

C. Lord, I can see the importance of staying obedient, especially in these last days. I want to be blessed and to find rest; I do not want the Day of the Lord to come as a surprise to me, if it occurs in my life time. So, Heavenly Father put a fire in me for your Word and your commandments; let this desire be only second to you, for my desire to love you, to praise you, to forever be in your presence. Lord, do not let me wane in my desire for you. I feel the cyclicalness of it right now so help me to make it instead an ever gradually increasing desire for you. I know that we cannot even go to the deepest parts of your infinite self but that means that there is always room to go deeper, to press in further, to really start to begin to understand the face to face experience that we can have here on this earth. I know all your promises are back up by your Word, by the fact that you cannot lie, in that I know I can securely lay my hope in you, that I can find rest in your presence, in your hands. Thank you Lord for giving us all these promises in written form that we can take anywhere and everywhere with us, what an extraordinary blessing it truly is. I thank you, I praise your holy name, you are good and amazing, amen.

Week 2:

A. Blessed.

Rev. 14:13 The context of this pronounced blessing is for those who are on the receiving end of severe persecution for those who do not worship the beast. There is a proclamation of judgement to come by 3 angels and after the blessing the angles are proclaiming that Jesus is ready with His sickle ready to proclaim the judgement and the grapes that are ripe are intended for God's wrath.

This clues me in that those who receive this blessing are those who are persecuted for their faith in God and Jesus.

Rev. 16:15 This blessing comes towards the end of the 7 bowl plagues that were poured out on the earth and its inhabitation. The plagues continued because the people refused to repent their way and continued to curse God. Right before the last bowl is poured out comes the blessing for anyone who stays vigilant because God's judgement comes like a thief in the night, anyone who is awake and clothed will then not go naked and be shamefully exposed. So in the middle of this judgement those who are blessed are those who are vigilant and prepared, the blessing is for those who the timing of the judgement does not come as a surprise. For those who are left during this tribulation time there is still time to be blessed by God. The quote "We are never without hope" come to mind when I think about this verse. God always wants to save and there is always time to repent, to turn to God and be blessed for doing so.

Rev. 19:9 This blessing comes after the proclamation of God's victory, three different times are there proclamations of God's victory and the last shout includes a testimony that now God has the victory there will be a wedding feast, which the bride has already prepared herself for (that's us, we are wearing fine white linen which represents the righteous acts of God's people). The blessing comes after that which indicates to me that the blessing is for only God's people, those who were invited, those who are wearing the right clothes (white), those who have done the righteous acts of God, those who hold to the testimony of Jesus.

Rev. 20:6 This blessing is only for those who did not worship the beast or its image and did not receive its mark on their forehead and hands, these believer's died because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the Word of God. So this blessing is pretty specific and only applies to those believer's this is called the first resurrection and all those who are a part of this resurrection will come to life and reign with Christ for a thousand years. The second resurrection is only after the judgement of satan where he too will be thrown into the lake of fire and be tormented day and night forever. The blessing states that the second death hold no power over those who are resurrected first, and further in the chapter it explicitly states that the second death if the lake of fire, so those who were in the first resurrection will either be in the book of life or they are excluded from having to be in there because they already were reigning as priests of God and Christ for a thousand years before.

Rev. 22:7 This chapter begins with a description of life in the “New Eden” and the blessing is for those who keep the words of the prophecy written in this scroll. This is a warning that Jesus is coming soon and those who do not hide this prophecy but keep it in remembrance and follow its directions those are the people who will be bless. God wants us to know, to be aware, so that when all this goes down we are not caught off guard and we are blessed if we are aware of the times, we cannot stick our heads in the sand and just be happy with our first confession of faith and our ticket to heaven there is so much more that is required of us.

Rev. 22:14 This blessing is for those who wash their robes, I think this means that they have worked out their salvation, and the right of those who are blessed is that they are able to have access to the tree of life and they are able to walk past the gates into God’s city. The ending of this section describes all those who are not able to go past the gates and are on the outside. This section is a warning and an invitation to the blessing. I think maybe that they tree of life means we are able to have eternal life and walking past the gates of God’s city is to live with God in the perfected world that is restored to its original intent in the Garden of Eden.

So what does it mean to be blessed? Being blessed means that you persevere and hold onto our testimony, of our faith in Jesus. I think it’s easy to look at all the blessings and accept those (no second death, rest, 1,000 years of reigning with Christ, not being left naked and ashamed, being invited to the wedding feast, Jesus’ quick return, having access to the tree of life and being welcomed into God’s city) but it is more difficult to be the people who have earned those blessings. The people who receive these blessings are excommunicated from culture, the “norm”, they are believers who are dying because of Jesus, they are being beheaded and persecuted, life is hard for them, these believers’ don’t find rest on this side of the eternity, but they do not lose faith. They fight the good fight of faith, they continue in the good works to glorify God’s name, they hold fast to their testimony, especially when it would be so much easier to waiver. This reminds me of so many testimonies in the book of Acts, were disciples were being stoned because they would not deny Jesus, their daughters raped in front of them, people being burned for not bowing down to the Caesar. I couldn’t even imagine what I would do if I lived in that time, would I stick with the Gospel or cave to that intense pressure? Having these blessings comes with a hefty price but an even heftier price was already paid for us, with Jesus’ blood, if we try to count the cost, God’s price for us will always out weight our current persecutions and then we are always getting God’s added bonuses of His blessings on top of our immeasurable gift of salvation.

B.

C. This reminds me of the concept of the Law of First mention, how the first definition of a subject is what you always have to go back to, to define the same subject in a new context. I think this is a similar concept; we have to go to the original definition to see the intent that the author had. We all come in with our own definition of things, like being blessed, but to truly understand what the author meant we have to understand what he meant by being blessed.

Week 3:

1. Yes, I do believe they are very similar. Both the first century believer's and we now have a tremendous pressure to fit into culture. Back then if you did bow to the imperial cult so many doors were opened for you, into culture, power, an easy life but if you did not and stood against the imperial cult then there was a great risk of persecution, property being taken away, public humiliation and even sometimes death. Now I feel like if we do not fit into culture we tend to be ostracized and labeled as old fashioned or out of date. I think currently our culture likes to shame all those who do not follow norms and because of our public platforms that it taken to the ends of the world. In both instances there is a great allure to just fitting into what culture is propagating, assimilating can seem like the only means to reach out to future generations. If the culture accepts you the thinking is that we can then show a different path but if culture does accept us then we have already lost all the flavor of our saltiness, we'll be just like everyone else and our voice, our stance would have lost all credibility. Jesus says to be different, to not follow the current days culture but by standing firm by our convictions, then people will be able to see a different way of life.
2. I think this description of Jesus is to show the first century believers that Jesus is the only and true King, God, Lord (and not the current Caesar that is in power). For those believers to see the description of Rome's culture and propaganda juxtaposed to Jesus and His culture and propaganda. Yes this description ties in very well to what I believe John is trying to illustrate in the book of Revelation, John is asking the believers which life they are going to buy into, Rome or God/Jesus?. We cannot serve two masters, Jesus told us in the Gospels, we cannot dip our toe into culture to get all the benefits without completely falling into the trap of going against the convictions of Jesus and thus idolizing one and hating the other. We do not have the capability in our heart and souls to be devoted to two ideologies at once, in the end one wins out.
3. Lord, help us, help me. It is way too easy to assimilate, way too easy to lose our flavor in this culture just like it was a difficult decision in the first century church. I know that right now our current culture is searching for something different, I feel like it has tasted all the vanities of life and not been satisfied and is now searching for something else, answers. We can be those answers as long as we do not fade into the background of our current culture. We can be that one person who is weird or different that others are attracted to. In the midst of all the chaos we can be the people who have peace that is beyond understanding and thus draw people into our circles of influence. I ask you Father to help me always attune to your will and that my desire for you, for your word never runs dry. So that I can become a light in darkness or salt in the world, so that I can become more like Jesus.

Week 4:

1. To the Church of Smyrna they were facing a lot of persecution and I know that the church as a whole, especially in countries that do not have religious freedom are heavily persecuted probably similarly as the believer's in Smyrna. Being thrown in jail, martyred, property stolen, raped, excommunication from community, probably only names a few. But for us here in America the church is also being persecuted but in a different way. Here we can be excommunicated from community, face public wrath if not conforming to cultures ideals (mainly on public platforms), ignored or call out-dated if we try and talk about God and religion. I know the level of persecution is definitely different but the temptation is the same which is to conform to stay alive or to have influence. While to the church at Pergamum is a church that did conform to culture, God tells them to repent. I think this also, if not more, relatable to our culture. Many churches have conformed to what culture is promoting and living in the status of everlasting grace. Many churches take out all the negatives or the discipline that God or Jesus gives because it may be hard to digest and instead focus on the loving aspects of Jesus. This ideal is nice but does not live in the complete picture of God as the Judge and God as a purifying and consuming fire.
2. We definitely need to repent. Even if we aren't a church that focuses on the love of Jesus and completely ignores God as Judge we are still responsible. We are one family and something has pushed the pendulum to one extreme and that is never right. We have to repent in all the ways that culture has infiltrated our churches, distracting us from God's Word, from God's mission. We cannot stand for and must repent from all the ways of going to church to just hear an encouraging lecture one that leaves us with fuzzy feelings and completely ignores the reality of God's Word. We have to repent when we call God's Word old or outdated, when we stay silent in that argument of those around us. Jesus told the church in Pergamum to hold fast to His name, we cannot say we are Christians while not standing up for what the Bible tells us to stand up for. Even for me, it is so easy for me to just stay quiet, to not share the difference of my opinion because I don't want to cause an argument or have to stand for what I believe. I have to repent for all those times I did stay quiet, all those times I shifted the conversation so that I can avoid sharing my opinion. I am appalled at how easy it is for me, I am definitely happy that we have God's grace but that not the end of the conversation. Jesus warned us that we will give an account, for our actions and our words.
3. The Spirit always is trying to redirect us back to God, back to living the holy and pure life that was intended for us to be lived all the way back at the Garden of Eden. For me personally, the Spirit has brought up verses or scripture, sometimes I even have a feeling of reading a certain book of the Bible and the following day I tend to see why I needed to refresh my knowledge on a certain topic. I have listened to podcast or sermons on Youtube and have almost an immediate need for the information shared or the change in perspective on a certain topic. It feels almost uncanny but I have to attribute it all to God

or the Holy Spirit. I definitely have places in my life where I resist. For the longest time I resisted giving up smoking weed, the funny thing was is that I don't even like smoking but it was just a place where I was stiff necked, I wanted that freedom to do it. Another place was drinking and I had the same logic, I just want to be able to drink. The Holy Spirit had me fast it a couple of times which was not hard for me but it became difficult when I was told to put it down for an indefinite time period. I was in the midst of arguing with the Spirit when I told Him point blank I deserve the right to drink, like it was a reward for me, when I heard myself say that I was like wow, okay I will listen. It has been a bit more difficult but it really has shown me how I would rely on a substance and not on God. Lately though the Holy Spirit is telling me that I have to spend the time with God. I need to give God space to talk to me, I need to practice the disciple of obedience and persistence. I feel like I have failed in many ways and am only now getting back on the horse of obedience and perseverance. It is way too easy to be distracted, way too easy to fill my time with other things even godly thing but it is not the same as spending the time with God, one on one, in your prayer closet.

4. The church as a whole needs to reorient back to the standard of the Bible. We have to be faithful to the teaching of Jesus and the standard that He place. Jesus warned us that it would not be easy, that the road to heaven was narrow and difficult but we don't want to be Christians who go to wedding feast and Jesus looks at us and tells us that He doesn't know us. We cannot cherry pick or avoid teaching the hard things that are in the Bible. Over and over again we are called to obedience, to persevere, so that we can to receive that gold crown of eternal life, we are told that we have great examples of faith in the Bible and that they are now a cloud of witness cheering us on. Are we showing that we are going as a church family or going around the same mountain over and over again? I know we are all responsible and there is plenty repentance that can go around. When we go to heaven the words we want to hear is "Well done, good and faithful servant".