

May 19, 2020

Dear Sunday School Class,

How great is our God! We have had the most wonderful rain over the last few days, which is God's response to our prayers and fasting. The world would try to convince us that it is a "coincidence" but it is not! God answers prayer, especially when His Body joins together in prayer and fasting. We will fast and pray again on Thursday for rain, because our land is really dry, and we must also lift up those with health issues, and pray that we as a church stay close to Him and one another. Someone asked me about fasting, and fasting can mean we may give up food for a time, or we give up other pleasures temporarily, (most of us spend lots of time on the computer) and during our fasting, we spend more time in prayer and Bible study. It gives us an opportunity to focus on the Lord, giving Him our deepest concerns, and thanking Him for all He does for us.

Our lesson this week was called "You Declare" and focused on Paul and his transformation from hating Christians and killing them, to being stopped in his tracks by God, and accepting Jesus as God's Son. Paul made a complete turnaround, and spent the rest of his life preaching and teaching about Jesus. However, Paul also made it clear in the Scriptures that it was a struggle for him to stay focused on being new in Christ, and that his old emotions and actions constantly rose up, and he had to deny them. He is an example for us because we fight the same battle, but we are new creatures in Christ, and we don't have to act and react according to our emotions, but according to who we are in Jesus; with love, kindness, forgiveness and faith.

Though Paul asserted that he had a new identity, he also confessed that he had to constantly CHOOSE to live as someone who had Christ at the center of his life. That choice is constantly before us as well. We like to live by emotion, and not by faith. The lesson asked us "Based on our past lessons, If you could give a warning to yourself and others, what would it be?" Do we "play" at being Christians, or do we really let the Holy Spirit help us think and act? It is great that we will spend eternity with Jesus, but we still have to live in the world, and our life's responsibility is to share Jesus with others. We don't usually think of that as our life's goal. Instead we think of our jobs, our family, our hobbies, and the things that entertain us as our "responsibilities." While those are good things, the thread of knowing Jesus must be woven through all of it. The authors reminded us that Paul witnessed with boldness and without hindrance, and asked us to think what "hinders" our witness. The class was pretty unanimous that our main hinderance is fear of man's anger or rejection if we talk about Jesus or our faith. We simply can't get past our craving for acceptance by the world. That doesn't imply that we offend others with a witness that is unkind or angry. Being obnoxiously judgmental or self-righteous is from Satan. A Christian witness is kind, yet true, and always, always based on love.

This study has enabled us to take a good look at our faith, and what kind of actions it is inspiring in us. Our assignment this week was to list the things that hinder us from acting and speaking in faith. That can be discouraging in ways as we see our failures, but we have to remember that God forgives our lack, and each day is filled with new opportunities to walk in faith, and share that faith. Jesus will interact with us as much as we allow Him, and He loves to spend time with us.

Next week is our last Sunday School time until further notice. We will review our 5 past lessons and see where the Lord is taking us. We so look forward to our time together, and think of those who don't have the technology to join us visually, but are out there united with us as well. Be sure and tune in to Pastor Steve's sermons on Facebook, they help us get through the week!

Blessings,

Judy & Stephen