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**Sunday 15 January 2023 to Sunday 22 January 2023**

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Sunday 15 January 2023

# How many followers have you got?

by Sal Huckel

**Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ... A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me (John 1:29,30).**

Read John 1:29–42

John describes himself as preparing the way of the Lord. We are familiar with his and Jesus’ story as cousins, their mothers’ friendships and the special way John was chosen for this role as a prophet. In this fascinating passage, we see John pointing Jesus out to his own disciples, declaring Jesus as greater than himself, and ‘losing’ followers to Jesus on the same walk.

John knew his job here was not to have his own followers – he was here to gather followers together, ready for Jesus.

Have we recalibrated our thinking to ponder how counter-cultural this is?

‘Having a following’ is language we are accustomed to in today’s society, especially in the online world. It’s important to people in many contexts, even with Christian influencers, personalities and churches. Perhaps popularity and numbers are in danger of becoming more important than the gospel message or the one true God we are supposed to be following.

Take some time to consider any situations in which you’ve placed ‘your following’ or your church numbers over the gospel message we are here for. Are there any counter-cultural (and difficult) decisions that need to be made to get back to your calling?

**Lord, thank you for the reminder of John’s humility and his example in pointing to you and away from himself. Help us remember this in the decisions we make, the influences we try to have and the work we do, even in your name. May we walk more humbly, pointing to you, even at the cost of our own popularity or church numbers. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Sal is married to Pastor Matthew Huckel, and they have six wonderful children – now an entire worship band as they serve together in ministry. Sal wears many other hats: she loves writing, speaking, and working as a wellness coach for Weight Watchers.

Monday 16 January 2023

# God has forgotten me!

by Sal Huckel

**But Zion said, 'The Lord has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me’ (Isaiah 49:14).**

Read Isaiah 49:13–23

We read here of the exiles’ struggles and God’s promises to them of redemption and restoration. We read exhortations to praise and continual reminders of God’s faithfulness, which even surpasses parental love for our children.

The fear or feeling of being forgotten and isolated is one many of us may have experienced from time to time. We may utter prayers, cry out to God and seek counsel from our brothers and sisters in Christ to still feel that the prayers are not being heard or that we have been forgotten. Even our close friends may dry up in their interest in our problems.

We are reminded to lift up our eyes and look around. It’s a little like some techniques that can be useful during an anxiety attack or similar to naming small blessings and gifts from God every day if we are practising gratitude.

We are reminded not only that the Lord comforts his people and has compassion (verse 13) but also to praise him for it! Our names are engraved on the palms of his hands (verse 16).

Sometimes we need to concentrate on the facts, praise God for his compassion and mercy, and resist the temptation to judge his faithfulness to us based on how we actually feel. If we ‘lift up our eyes and look around’, how many signs can we see of God’s faithfulness and gifts to us in everyday life? It doesn’t change the problem or bring us ‘immediately out of exile’, but we know those who ‘hope in the Lord will not be disappointed’ – even if it’s only when we see our name engraved on those precious hands.

**Lord, thank you for these redemption promises for your people. Help me lift my eyes to you and find reminders of your faithfulness and promises, no matter how forgotten I feel. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Tuesday 17 January 2023

# Read past verse three

by Sal Huckel

**Is my hand shortened, that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver? (Isaiah 50:2).**

Read Isaiah 50:1–11

You may think this is the oddest devotion title you’ve seen. However, it took me several readings of this short passage of Scripture to get past verse three. What can I find here to encourage in the short time we have together today?

After wrestling with it for longer than usual, I realised, firstly, that if I was reading alone without the accountability of writing for these devotions, I would have put it down and moved on.

First lesson: we choose the path of least resistance. Sometimes we have to work a little harder when reading Scripture. Did the title of the devotion get your attention? I hope so. Do you always read the devotion that goes with the daily Scriptures? What about the whole passage? If you read these devotions through the LCA Facebook page, I encourage you to only ‘like’ the Facebook post if you’ve spent more than a scroll on the devotion webpage. I’m not worried about my following! (Go back to Sunday, and read the passage and devotion if it passed you by.)

Secondly: I realise here, in this reading, we have a mix of law and gospel. We can’t only address the gospel and avoid the law. We begin with God’s righteousness and power – and continue on to his grace and redemption.

What stands out to you in the second part of the passage today? For me, it’s that if we are ‘taught’ by the Lord, our tongues and ears will be awakened and reflect that teaching. What are the attributes of one taught by the Lord? We will sustain the weary with our words and turn the other cheek; we will be vindicated, not disgraced, and protected from our adversaries, who are still offered the grace of God.

**Lord, help me to stay with difficult passages. Please speak to me through your Holy Spirit. Inspire your living word, and may I evidence the tongue and ear of one taught by you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Wednesday 18 January 2023

# Stop, look and listen!

by Sal Huckel

**Hear me, you who know what is right, you people who have taken my instruction to heart: Do not fear the reproach of mere mortals or be terrified by their insults (Isaiah 51:7).**

Read Isaiah 51:1–8

We continue the thread running throughout our readings this week of listening to God and following his teachings.

We find several imperatives in this passage today – a kind of spiritual ‘stop, look and listen’. Find them and read them in context (you’ll need to look at the whole passage – another theme running through this week!):

* Listen to me (twice – in verses 1 and 4)
* Look to Abraham (verse 2)
* Lift up your eyes (verse 6)
* Hear me (verse 7)
* Do not fear (verse 7).

Who are these instructions for? They are for all who have taken God’s instructions to heart (verse 7).

We are reminded of God’s faithfulness, redemption and everlasting salvation. We consider the physical creation around us, and however magnificent it is, it will ‘wear out like a garment’ – we again compare it to the righteousness and salvation of God that will continue through all generations. This is a promise we need to hold on to when we suffer the reproach of mere mortals and their insults – something else you will find in our readings this week.

How can you stop, look and listen to God today?

**Father God, we praise you in awe of your righteousness and salvation. Help me keep this big perspective in mind whatever I go through. Please remind me to stop, look and listen to you. Amen.**

Thursday 19 January 2023

# You put words in my mouth!

by Sal Huckel

**I have put my words in your mouth and covered you with the shadow of my hand – I who set the heavens in place, who laid the foundations of the earth, and who say to Zion, ‘You are my people’ (Isaiah 51:16).**

Read Isaiah 51:9–16

We are reminded in this passage of the awesomeness and majesty of God and that we are his people! We can see so many acts of the mighty arm of God as we read this passage – have a look. It does us good sometimes to put our relationship with God into the bigger context. Reflect on some of these mighty acts: imagine the power of the parting of the sea! We know the story – do we consider the power of God and the access we have to him in the same breath?

Even though God’s people were rescued, they still forgot and turned away from him later. These mighty acts are remembered … and then forgotten. God constantly reminds his people of his power, mighty acts and rescues and redemption, but this is forgotten in the moment of oppression (or temptation). Perhaps we are the same. We are certain that if the waters had parted for us, we would not have melted gold and made idols. However, we may reflect on our own mountaintop (or rescue helicopter) experiences and still doubt when persecution or troubles seem unending.

Let’s focus on the final verse. The God who set the heavens in place says, ‘You are my people’. We are not forgotten. We must not forget.

**Lord, help me remember your mighty acts, to read and learn from your word and promises to me. Please help me to learn from what you have done for me and remember that we are your people. Amen.**

Friday 20 January 2023

# Gives and takes away

by Sal Huckel

**See, I have taken out of your hand the cup that made you stagger; from that cup, the goblet of my wrath, you will never drink again (Isaiah 51:22b).**

Read Isaiah 51:17–23

We continue with this difficult Isaiah passage today, reading about the wrath of God and his righteousness and judgement – but we also know that we have redemption through the cup of suffering from which Jesus himself drank.

At the beginning of the passage, we see that Jerusalem has fully drained the cup of wrath right to the bottom. We also learn that the Lord says he has taken that cup away and put it into the hands of their tormentors.

We are reminded again of the righteousness of God through his law and the redemption and salvation through his Son Jesus’ death on the cross. Law and grace.

At my husband’s ordination, we took a photo of ourselves for fun: me representing law (lawyer) and him representing the gospel (pastor). Finally, we ‘were’ law and grace. Our personalities complement each other, and I have learned through many avenues in my faith that we not only need the law, but we need grace, and we have forgiveness too.

However difficult passages like this can be, we see the use of opposites and turnarounds in Scripture. We cannot have gospel without law. The law is the lens through which we must identify and acknowledge our sins – the gospel is our redemption through God’s grace.

Which side of the fence do you tend to dwell on: law or gospel? ‘Loving’ people without correction or pointing out their faults with little love? Can we really love without the full spectrum of law and gospel? Can we really love God without accepting and acknowledging our sins, as reflected by his law?

**Lord, help me appreciate all aspects of who you are: the mighty, righteous God and loving Heavenly Father who protects and shelters his children. *Please help me live out my faith with all of this in mind. Amen.***

Saturday 21 January 2023

# Just one thing?

by Sal Huckel

**… that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple (Psalm 27:4).**

Read Psalm 27:1,4–9

If you could ask God for only one thing, what would it be? He’s not some genie in a bottle giving us a finite number of wishes (or even only one). Here we see David prioritise what he would ask God for if he only asked one thing.

If we were to pray for one thing, we would probably prioritise one earthly thing. Instead, David tells us his heavenly bucket list!

Why is this David’s request? It will keep him safe; he will be hidden. He will be lifted up above his enemies and praise God with songs and music.

When we seek God first, other things are added. Recently, my family was in a place of discerning God’s will, and we experienced exactly this. Rather than discerning each of our checklists, we agreed, after prayer, on what we felt was God’s will. As sure as anything, all the things the eight of us needed if we followed that path were added one by one.

Let’s learn to pray to seek to dwell in the house of the Lord, to seek his kingdom first (Matthew 6:33). Let’s allow him to add all the things (or the ones he chooses) after that, instead of praying for all of the things to show us whether something is God’s will or not.

**Lord, I seek your face. Help me remember that you are the stronghold of my life and that I have no reason to fear. I rest on your promises of shelter and protection. May I seek you first before all other things. Amen.**

Sunday 22 January 2023

# Can I be healed?

by Pastor Greg Fowler

**Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people (Matthew 4:23).**

Read Matthew 4:12–23

Often I am asked whether Jesus heals miraculously today as he did when he was on earth. Usually, it is someone who is suffering from a chronic illness or fighting a debilitating disease, and they desperately seek relief from their Lord. While I would never presume to know God’s thoughts and actions in every circumstance, I do know his character, and I am encouraged by Scripture.

When Jesus began his ministry, healing was an integral part of the message. Time and again, we see Jesus proclaiming the kingdom of God has arrived, in his very person, that those who hear the news are called to repentance, and almost always, there is miraculous healing. This is the loving nature of our God. He calls us away from those things that lead away from life and calls us to the ultimate source of life. Jesus’ ministry was all about bringing life and tending to the wounds of a broken world. He asks us to follow him as members of his kingdom.

I know that Jesus’ nature doesn’t change. Where there is a simple and clear proclamation of the kingdom of God and repentance, there is also healing. There has to be. Whether it is the healing received as we take the body and blood of Christ in communion or the healing received when we lay hands on the sick and pray, the gospel heals. Sometimes we witness a miracle that’s obvious. Sometimes the healing is not obvious.

**Lord Jesus, heal us as we turn to you and your kingdom. Amen.**

*Pastor Greg lives in Adelaide and serves as pastor of Golden Grove Lutheran Church and Golden Grove Lutheran Primary School. He is blessed to spend lots of time with his grandchildren, Teddy and Olivia. His spare time is taken up with golf, Formula 1 and going out with his beautiful wife.*