

## 22nd Sunday After Pentecost

Isaiah 45:1-7

Some say that Christians should keep their religion to themselves. They say that just because Christians believe that God has the only answers to life doesn't mean that they are the right answers for everyone. Someone has said, "Just because God is right for you doesn't mean that He is right for everyone." Another unfortunate thought these days is, "It doesn't matter what you believe so long as you're sincere." In many circles, Christians are considered too exclusive in their teachings.

God stated the absurdity of all of these ideas over 2500 years ago through the prophet Isaiah in his proclamation concerning Cyrus the Persian. Cyrus did not honor God, or believe in Him, so why did God have this special message for him? Cyrus would conquer Babylon where God's people would spend the coming exile. Cyrus the Persian would become God's tool to free His people. God says that there was an additional reason for singling out the Persian, "That men may know...that there is no one besides Me. I am the Lord, and there is no other."

Many modern Christians allow the world to proclaim many gods and religions without response. Why? Are we afraid that people will laugh, call us narrow-minded, ignorant, or uninformed? It's true that this will and does happen, but we are in a battle that is worth the danger of suffering a little embarrassment.

Now that our world has begun to reject the idea that we can outgrow our need for God, Satan is working hard to make sure that not too many people become Christians. He would much rather they follow Eastern religions or philosophies, pseudo-Christian cults, nature worship, Islam, or even Judaism because not one of these will save a single soul from hell. We are the only ones who can tell the world that he is lying to them!

God proclaims that not only is Jesus the only way to salvation, but God is the only One in charge of the whole world—believers and unbelievers alike. We can proclaim this by living out our faith!

*Renew your walk with Christ through a Bible study this week!*

**A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee**

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Isaiah 45:1-7

1. Who is the "anointed" referred to in vs. 1? For what purpose was this king anointed?
2. The prophet Daniel speaks of another "Anointed" in Daniel 9:25-26. For what purpose was He anointed?
3. What had been the response of Israel to God's working among them (4b, 5b)?
4. What was God's continuing response to His people?
5. How does this lesson state that there is only ONE God? Why is that emphasis important in today's world?
6. "I, the Lord, do all these things." (vs. 7) What has God done for you that you celebrate today?



## 22nd Sunday after Pentecost

1 Thessalonians 1:1-5

Paul begins this passage with praise for his God and for the work of the people of the church at Thessalonica. He says that God has chosen them to be His workers. Their work has consisted of constantly pursuing the true faith. It is by God's power within their lives that they are able to persist in the face of the enemy.

The early church began and grew because the Spirit empowered and directed the process. Paul isn't specific, but makes it clear that anyone who was present knew the presence of the Spirit and saw His work in action. All churches begin at the inspiration of the Spirit and by His working, but not all churches are worthy of the praise given to the Thessalonians by Paul. Why?

If we go a little beyond today's lesson, to verses 6 and 7, Paul says that the Thessalonian Christians are imitators of Jesus and of himself; that they are an example to the Christians in all of their area. Perhaps this is where many churches fall short. Are we all imitators of Jesus and Paul? What is an imitator of Jesus and Paul?

Jesus and Paul had one mission for the church—spread the word! The ways that the gospel spreads may change from one generation to another, but those who do the spreading seem to have some things in common. They are totally committed to Jesus as the Lord of their lives. They are excited about their faith. They live their faith. They share their faith. They long for others to know the joy that they know. They serve one another and their communities. Those simple traits seem to have permeated the church at Thessalonica, and because the members of this family could not contain their enthusiasm within their own group, the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit spread outward from them.

This is how God's work is done. He touches His people with His love and power. The question becomes, "How do we respond?" That sounds like we are taking the work from God and making it man's, but this is not about salvation. Our becoming more like Christ, our imitating Paul, our sanctification if you will, is our response. It is God's power in our lives and He inspires us to accept the challenge of *living* in Him. We can seek that life because it is His will.

Learn more about living by Lordship in a Bible study this week.  
*A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee*

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1 Thessalonians 1:1-5

1. Who is God's author of this book? Who were his traveling partners? To whom was this letter written? Using the Concordia Self-study Bible or another reference find other background information about this book of the Bible?
2. Paul again uses three words to express God's workings: "your work produced by \_\_\_\_\_, your labor prompted by \_\_\_\_\_, and your endurance inspired by \_\_\_\_\_." (vs. 3)
3. What accompanied the "words" of the gospel? (vs. 5) Who was the source of the power and conviction?

### For Family Reflection:

4. The people of Thessalonica were in Paul's prayers. (vs. 2) For whom do you pray? What do you pray for them?
5. The people of Thessalonica were "chosen" by God. (vs. 4) When and how were you chosen by God?
6. Do others see the "work," "labor," or "endurance" (vs. 3) which result from our faith in Jesus? In what specific ways could our faith be more visible?

## **Twenty-Second Sunday After Pentecost**

Matthew 22:1-14

We can hardly imagine refusing to attend the wedding feast of a prince. Imagine if you were invited to a royal wedding dinner and festivities in Britain (all expenses paid). Most of us would manage to get to the plane on time!

The King represented by Jesus' parable and His Son, were not the splashy, wealthy, royal family that the world admires. Remember that Jesus' own followers were disappointed to learn that His kingdom would not be a political one that would conquer Rome and restore power to Israel. His kingdom was quiet, residing in the heart and soul. His was a kingdom of servants, not rulers. Entry into His kingdom required of the applicant repentance, submissiveness, self-denial, love, and an acceptance of his own unworthiness.

The leaders of Israel denied all that Jesus demanded. They insisted on their own worthiness, wisdom, and power. The ways of the King were denied by those who believed that they had everything under control. They had no time for Him.

Probably the most often heard excuse from unbelievers today for not becoming Christians involves the belief that we can control our lives and our actions. It goes something like, "Why do I need a Savior? I'm a good person. Why wouldn't God want me in heaven?" These folks feel that they don't need to make time for God's feast—they are too busy controlling their own destinies. Very, very few people today deny that God exists—they just don't believe that they could be unworthy of being in His presence. In reality, they are perhaps afraid to examine their own success at being good or being in control.

While most of us would manage to attend the wedding party of today's royalty, do we often neglect the joy of being with the true Son of the true King? Do we like to think of ourselves as being in control? Are we afraid sometimes to submit to our Master?

Alone, we live in hopelessness for the future. But we are not alone—God is always with us. He holds us up every day with His power and absolute love. He is a quiet and forgiving Master as even Christians easily ignore Him as their busy lives control their priorities. Luke says that those invited to the feast had excuses for not attending. Do you sometimes ask to be excused from your King's celebration because you're just too busy to attend?

### ***Are you in a weekly Bible Study?***

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

## **Twenty-Second Sunday After Pentecost**

Matthew 22:1-14

1. Interpret Jesus' story. Who's the king? When is the banquet? Who's invited? Who comes?
2. Why were wedding clothes required? Who provided the special garment? What happens to those who do not have the wedding clothes?
3. What excuses (vs. 5) do some have for not attending the banquet? What excuses do individuals offer today for not responding to God's invitation?
4. If God wants all to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4) how do we reconcile the statement that "few are chosen" (vs. 14)?

### **For Family Reflection**

5. When were you chosen to be part of God's family? How do you know that you will be at the wedding banquet?
6. How will we be dressed in heaven? (See Revelation 7:9) What the symbolism of the white robe?

## Twenty-second Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 18:9-17

“...some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt.” (vs.9)

Ever meet a Christian who talked so much about being humble that you could hardly stand it? Everything they said at a meeting would begin with, “I certainly am not worthy to speak here, but...” In some cases they were the biggest cause of division within the church because, in reality, they believed that they were in better touch with God’s will due to their great humbleness. An old test still rings true, “If you know you’re humble, are you?”

The Pharisees of Jesus’ time liked everyone to know how humble and faithful, and righteous they were. They wore special robes that had tassels hanging from them. Many Pharisees would make these decorations extra-long and the boxes of the law worn on their foreheads extra-large in order to impress people with their godliness.

But you can’t fool God. They didn’t show off their “holiness” as praise to God, but as evidence to other people that they were greatly “holy” and greatly in God’s favor; that they were better and more perfect than other Jews. The opposite was true.

In verse 13, Jesus talks about a tax collector who is praying near a self-righteous Pharisee. Jesus’ choice of a tax collector as His “hero” in the story was especially offensive to the listening Pharisees. Tax collectors were not only thought to be collaborators with the Romans, they usually were. Their wage was whatever they could extort from the people over the tax that went to Rome. They were not well-liked.

But, Jesus says that this man, one of the least respected in the nation, beat his chest with head bowed, asking God to forgive his sinfulness. Jesus says that this man was justified, the Pharisee was not. One was sincere, seeking God’s intervention. The other only wanted to show off his supposed faith to others.

The tax collector demonstrates the faith of a child who depends wholly on his Father, without arrogance, without doubt, without false bravado; only with love and trust and a confidence that Father can do it better than anyone.

***Is Bible study on your “to do” list this week?***

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

## Twenty-second Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 18:9-17

1. What was the prayer style of the Pharisee? What was the prayer content of the Pharisee?
2. What was the prayer style of the tax collector? What was the prayer content of the tax collector?
3. Which prayer receives Jesus’ commendation? Why? What can we learn about prayer life and discipleship from the parable?
4. What does it mean to receive the kingdom of God “like a child”?

### **For Family Reflection**

5. How does your church receive and celebrate children?
6. Why should we all pray “God be merciful to me, a sinner”? Have we received God’s mercy?