

Devotions for Jan 16 - 22, 2012

SO WHAT? MONDAY, JANUARY 16 | EPHESIANS 1

In the years following the life and death of Jesus, the church begins to answer some very deep, reflective questions about what this Jesus event means. As Christianity spreads across the world, the “what” of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection becomes firmly embedded into the lives and cultures of many people. But people are not satisfied with merely the “what’s” of the Jesus story. There’s a need to answer the question of the heart: “so what?” What does this mean for me? For my community? For the world? That’s precisely the question the writer of Ephesians is answering. We’re going to spend some time in Ephesians, finding the “so what” of the Jesus event. Ask God to help you answer the “so what” question.

MOVEMENT #1 TUESDAY, JANUARY 17 | EPHESIANS 2:1-3

Within the first movement, verses 1-10, there are 3 sections. Paul pulls no punches in 1-3 when he frames the problem, describing the human condition in stark reality. We’re dead. Not hurting, injured, lost, blind, or any other term we use to describe the effect of sin in our lives. Nope. We’re dead. And there’s more! Not only are we dead, but also we’re by nature deserving of God’s wrath! This is sin, our human and broken condition. It’s not the bad things we do, or the good things we don’t do. It’s our nature. From birth we are sinful and need to be moved from death to life. When we confess in worship, we are simply admitting that we are dead in our sin and need God to do for us what we cannot: forgive. Ask God to help you understand this stark reality that Paul paints.

MOVEMENT #2 WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 18 | EPHESIANS 2:4-9

Now Paul adds something to this picture of condemnation. Verses 4-9 spell out a totally different reality than the one previously proclaimed. It starts with that lovely word, “but.” In the face of the reality of verses 1-3, another reality has taken place. God does something. God acts, because we can’t. Because of God’s love for us, out of his mercy in the face of deserved judgment, God has made us alive in Christ. We have been moved from death to life. The humanly impossible has happened. It’s a done deal. There’s no waiting to see if we want it, or will choose it. There’s no appeal to one’s presumed “free will.” Our free will is dead. God steps into the great cosmic war and brings to life those who were once dead and condemned. That’s you and me! And not only that, we’ve been seated with Christ in the heavenly realms, as grand victors of the whole cosmos! Ask God to help you grasp the magnitude of this movement from death to life.

MOVEMENT #3 THURSDAY, JANUARY 19 | EPHESIANS 2:10-14

Verse 10 points us to the additional movement of God in all this: that even our lives have been prepared for us in advance. This is God’s action toward us once again. Nothing is left to chance. For Paul, this first movement of restoration is between God and humans. He then moves on to show God’s restoration between people; specifically Jew and Gentile. God is not done simply when we are “saved.” God continues to restore as the dividing walls come tumbling down between us, all made one in Christ. That’s when we begin to see our neighbors in a different way. They’re just like us, identical in their predicament with sin, and in the love of God for them in Christ Jesus. The dead are raised, the far-off are brought near, reconciliation happens through the cross of Christ. What seems impossible of our own volition, God makes a reality. We are restored with God and one another. That’s God’s grace in action. That’s God’s love in the flesh. Ask God to help you understand how great this third movement of God is on your behalf.

FOR THIS REASON FRIDAY, JANUARY 20 | EPHESIANS 3:1-6

“For this reason,” Paul begins. When we see ourselves as dead, yet made alive in Christ, then we can look to our neighbor and see the same situation. When we see our neighbor in the same predicament as us, it can motivate us to become a proclaimer of God’s good news. There’s a song by Charlie Peacock that gets at this. The lyric goes, “You don’t ask a drowning man if he wants to be saved when you know he’s sinking down, down beneath the crashing waves.” In a world chasing after love, acceptance, and life, this message breathes all of that into their reality. While some would place Jesus out in front of people like a carrot, waiting for them to choose him, we simply proclaim what God has done, and let God’s Spirit do the work. The richness of the reality that Paul proclaims is the impetus for all we do. Because/therefore. “For this reason.” Because we live, we love our neighbor. Ask God to help you live as a proclaimer of good news.

BECAUSE/THEREFORE SATURDAY, JANUARY 21 | EPHESIANS 4

Ephesians is separated into two distinct parts. Chapters 1-3 cover God’s great action toward and for us in Jesus the Christ, and chapters 4-6 cover our response to such overwhelming love and grace. It’s a classic “because/therefore” structure, something the Apostle Paul is famous for! We find ourselves in the middle of the first three chapters, at the heart of what Paul wants us to know about God’s action toward us. It’s the centerpiece of his proclamation, and Lutherans hold it high as the rallying cry of the church. Most Lutherans have learned at least a portion of this passage by heart during their Sunday school and confirmation days. It’s that important. Ask God to help you understand how to live in Christ and model what Paul is talking about in chapter 4.

TRANSFORMATION SUNDAY, JANUARY 22 | EPHESIANS 5:1-14

It’s all about God: God’s action toward us, bringing us to life, showing mercy and love and grace to those who are deserved of wrath and condemnation. There’s nothing we can do or say. We can’t take credit for this at all. This is God’s doing in Jesus the Christ. And it’s a done deal. We once lived in darkness, but now we live in the light. We once were dead asleep, but now we’re wide-awake. We once imitated the things of the world, but now we are imitators of Christ. This is the ultimate transformation. God has accomplished the impossible by a means that seems unlikely. Ask God to guide and direct how you live your life today as a follower of Jesus Christ.