

## “With My Whole Heart I Seek You”

### 21 Days of Prayer and Fasting

#### Day 9: May 11, 2018: Which of these proved to be a neighbor?

Luke 10:30-37: *Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup> Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. <sup>34</sup> He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’ <sup>36</sup> Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” <sup>37</sup> He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”*

The lawyer’s question, “And who is my neighbor?” was really a way of asking “Is there anyone ***I am not obligated to be a neighbor to?***” Jesus perceived this and framed the issue quite directly at the conclusion of the parable: “Which of these three, do you think, ***proved to be a neighbor to*** the man who fell among the robbers?”

So, the issue is not “who counts as my neighbor?” Rather, it is, “Am I being a loving neighbor?” Love does not discriminate between rich and poor, likable and unlikable, deserving or undeserving (James 2:1-13). This is the sin of favoritism. It is becoming “judges with evil thoughts” (James 2:4). On the contrary, and as the parable of the Good Samaritan shows, love flows to the person who needs to be loved, regardless of their race, gender, social status, or the condition in which we find them when we encounter them. The ironic thrust

and twist of the parable is that the Samaritan – just the kind of person whom the lawyer might have been wanting to avoid treating as a neighbor – both understood and lived the commands of God better than the fully Jewish orthodox lawyer himself. The Samaritan was the hero of the story – because he proved to be a neighbor to the beaten man – and Jesus told the lawyer to go out and follow the Samaritan’s example.

The parable of the Good Samaritan thus confronts us with an uncomfortable reality: sometimes we can learn much about godliness from people we would expect to be ungodly. The lawyer would not have expected the Samaritan to be more courageous and generous in love than the priest and the Levite. We who follow Jesus and belong to the church today can become insular and proud. We can become blind to the ways in which we fail to love God and our neighbors. Thus, we would do well to pay attention to people we perceive as “outsiders” – especially to those who, whatever their religion or irreligion, are passionate about issues of justice and fairness. If we look, we will see people who are spending themselves in loving their neighbors, even if they don’t follow Jesus.

Such examples can only serve to convict us of our apathy, and to inspire us to renewed commitment. We must ask ourselves, “are we proving to be neighbors to the people we encounter who need to know God’s love?” “Do we have compassion for those in need, as the Samaritan had for the beaten man?” “Are we willing to give of ourselves to others, even to strangers?” When we hear again the parable of the Good Samaritan, the words of Jesus to us are the same as those he spoke to the lawyer two thousand years ago: “**You go, and do likewise.**”

Take time now to seek God. This brief prayer can help you get started: “*Heavenly Father, you have shown me that I need to be a loving neighbor to each person I meet. Help me to have the compassion, courage, and generosity to love my neighbor as myself.*”

*Forgive me for when I am apathetic or indifferent to the needs of others. Help to be like Jesus your Son. In His perfect name I pray, Amen."*

### **Day 10: May 12, 2018: Partakers of the Divine Nature**

2 Peter 1:3-4: *His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, <sup>4</sup> by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.*

A "partaker" is one "who takes part in something with someone." In this remarkable passage, Peter said that we who follow Jesus "may become partakers of the divine nature." That is, we may come to "take part in godliness with God." As the context of this statement reveals the focus is on us coming to "take part in" the excellence of God's moral nature – his righteousness and holiness.

- Verse 3a states that God has given us everything which pertains to life **and godliness**.
- Verse 4c indicates our escape **from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire**.
- Verses 5-7 urge us to grow in the virtuous **qualities** of Christ-likeness.

So, the possibility is held out right at the beginning of Peter's second letter that Christians can come to share in the righteousness which belongs to God's own character. How is this possible?

First, Peter speaks of God's **generosity** as the means of our partaking in the divine nature. He has granted us everything we need for life and godliness. Through the atoning work of Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection God has given us:

- The forgiveness of our sins (2 Peter 1:9, Colossians 1:13-14, Hebrews 10:1-18)

- Justification: we now have a right and lasting relationship with God (Romans 3:21-26; 4:1-25)
- Death to sin, and new life to God. Liberation from sin's power, and freedom to obey God (Romans 6)
- The example of Jesus to follow, so that we will know how to live in holy love (1 Peter 2:18-25, Philippians 2:1-11)
- The living hope of eternal life with God in the new heavens and earth (1 Peter 1:3-9, Revelation 21-22)

Further, through the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit God has given us:

- Adoption as his children. By the Spirit of God, we cry out "Abba, Father" (Galatians 4:1-7, Romans 8:12-17)
- The Spirit is our teacher, comforter, guide, and advocate (John 14:15-17 and 25-31, John 15:26-27, John 16:1-14, Romans 8:26)
- The Spirit is the One who produces the characteristics of Christ in us (Galatians 5:16-26)

Second, Peter speaks of God's **calling** as the means of our partaking in the divine nature. God has called us to his own glory and excellence. God has taken the initiative to call us to himself and to share his nature with us. The call of Jesus to discipleship is, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men" (Mark 1:17). As Dietrich Bonhoeffer observed about the call of Christ, "The disciple simply burns his boats and goes ahead. He is called out, and has to forsake his old life in order that he may "exist" in the strictest sense of the word. The old life is left behind, and completely surrendered." The calling of God separates us from the old life of sin and creates new conditions in which we may pursue (by following Jesus) the glory and excellence of God.

Third, Peter speaks of God's **promises** as the means of our partaking in God's nature. "*Through them [God's precious and very great promises] you may become partakers of the divine nature.*" To which promises of God was Peter referring? In one sense, he probably had in mind the full scope of God's promises included in the plan of

salvation. However, in both of his NT letters Peter consistently concentrates his readers attention on God's promises for an eternal future with Him:

- **1 Peter 1:3-5:** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.
- **1 Peter 1:13:** Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.
- **1 Peter 4:5-7:** ... but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. <sup>6</sup> For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does. <sup>7</sup> The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.
- **1 Peter 5:10:** And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.
- **2 Peter 1:11:** For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
- **2 Peter 3:7-13:** But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. <sup>8</sup> But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. <sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. <sup>10</sup> But the day of the Lord

will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. <sup>11</sup> Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, <sup>12</sup> waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! <sup>13</sup> But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

These promises of God hold out to us the goal and hope of eternal life in God's presence. They remind us that evil will be finally and forever punished on the day of judgment. They motivate us to live in holiness and godliness now since our future home will be the place in which "righteousness dwells." They assure us that in his time God will "restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish" us. Thus, the promises of God empower us for the present and guarantee our future.

It is clear, therefore, that our coming to "take part in godliness with God" depends upon God's work: his gifts, his calling, and his promises. There is, however, a role for us to play in response to and cooperation with God, and it is spelled out by Peter:

**2 Peter 1:5-7:** "For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, <sup>6</sup> and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, <sup>7</sup> and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love."

Take time now to seek God. This brief prayer can help you get started: "*Lord, I rejoice in you. Thank you for giving me everything I need for life and godliness. Thank you for calling me to your glory and goodness. Thank you for your great and precious promises. Thank you for sharing with me your own holy nature. Help me to make every*

*effort to grow in Christ, that I might partake more and more of your holiness. In Jesus' name, Amen."*

**Day 11: May 13, 2018: An Outrageous Thing in Israel**

2 Samuel 13:1-2, 11-14: *Now Absalom, David's son, had a beautiful sister, whose name was Tamar. And after a time Amnon, David's son, loved her. <sup>2</sup> And Amnon was so tormented that he made himself ill because of his sister Tamar, for she was a virgin, and it seemed impossible to Amnon to do anything to her... But when she brought them near him to eat, he took hold of her and said to her, "Come, lie with me, my sister." <sup>12</sup> She answered him, "No, my brother, do not violate me, for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do this outrageous thing. <sup>13</sup> As for me, where could I carry my shame? And as for you, you would be as one of the outrageous fools in Israel. Now therefore, please speak to the king, for he will not withhold me from you." <sup>14</sup> But he would not listen to her, and being stronger than she, he violated her and lay with her.*

This story is one of the greatest tragedies related in the Old Testament. The tentacles of this tale of incestuous rape extend both backward and forward in the history of David's reign. Amnon was David's firstborn son (2 Sam. 3:2). In his inability to restrain his lust, and in his abuse of his power to take what he wanted, Amnon proved to be very much like his father (the affair with Bathsheba, 2 Samuel 11). So, within the royal family, Amnon's vile actions against Tamar had their precedent in David's vile actions against Bathsheba. Further, Amnon's rape of Tamar laid the ground work for: 1) Absalom's revenge-killing of Amnon two years later (2 Sam. 13:23-39), and 2) Absalom's rebellion and attempt to overthrow his father (2 Sam. 15-19). Absalom's actions in each of these episodes may have been motivated not only by his own anger at Amnon and his own desire for power, but also by his anger at his father, for David failed to do anything at all to Amnon for what he did to Tamar (2 Sam. 13:21; to which the text of the Septuagint adds this explanatory note:

*"But he would not punish his son Amnon, because he loved him, since he was his firstborn.")*

The text says that Amnon "loved" his half-sister Tamar (v. 1, 4). However, the story itself clearly shows that Amnon's "love" was really a wild, raging lust. He was obsessed with Tamar, but he could not have her, for she was a virgin (the Law required unmarried women to maintain their virginity, Dt. 22:13-21), and she was his half-sister (the Law forbade such incestuous sexual relations, Lev. 18:9, 18:11, 20:17). Faced with this seeming inability "to do anything to her" Amnon was "tormented" to the point of illness with sexual frustration. We might say that Amnon was "bound up in knots" over his inability to have his way with Tamar.

Enter into the story Jonadab, his "crafty" friend and cousin, who readily suggested a way for Amnon to get Tamar alone in his room (v. 3-5). The ruse was for Amnon to pretend to be sick, and to ask his father David to send Tamar to come prepare food for Amnon, and to feed it to him, so that he could feel better. Amnon wasted no time putting this plot into action (v. 6). David, apparently without suspicion, sent Tamar to Amnon (v. 7); and Tamar dutifully went to care for her brother (v. 8). When Tamar had prepared the food, Amnon emptied the room of all the attendants so that he and his sister were alone (v. 9). Then Amnon beckoned Tamar to come near to his bed and feed him the cakes (v. 10). At her approach Amnon's illness and weakness suddenly vanished and he "took hold of her and said to her, 'Come, lie with me, my sister.'"

Against her brother's sudden sexual aggression, Tamar protested, "No, my brother, do not violate me..." The term translated "violate" here is a word that often has violent and oppressive connotations (Ex. 1:11-12, Ex. 22:22). It is used prominently in the Bible's other accounts of rape (Dt. 22:29, Judges 19:24 and 20:5, Gen. 34:2). Tamar also referred to Amnon's intended action as an "outrageous thing." This word is used consistently in the OT to refer to actions of

great folly (1 Sam. 25:25, Isa. 32:6), and to willful and heinous sins of idolatry and violence (Gen. 34:7, Josh. 7:15, Judges 19:23-24 and 20:6 and 20:10, Jer. 29:23).

Further, Tamar protested that if Amnon were to violate her it would ruin them both: she would be cursed with a shame she could not remove, and he would be considered an “outrageous fool” in Israel (v. 13a). Lastly, Tamar tried to plead with Amnon to the effect that their father would give her to him in marriage if he would only ask (v. 13b). Whether or not David would have allowed Amnon to marry Tamar – in contradiction to the Law of Moses – is a matter of considerable debate. Clearly, Tamar was just trying to find a way to escape from Amnon’s clutches. Unfortunately, all of Tamar’s pleas fell on deaf ears. Amnon overpowered her and raped her.

At one level this story is a warning about the danger of disordered and unbridled passions. The apostle Peter gave this exhortation to Christians: “Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the *passions of the flesh*, which wage war against your soul” (1 Peter 2:11). The ‘passions of the flesh’ are our sinful desires; or, our desires which are sinfully directed and exercised. If we indulge our passions they will only grow stronger and become more difficult to control. Amnon indulged his lust for Tamar in his mind until it exploded in the violent act of raping her.

At a second level this story demonstrates the effects and influence of sin across generations. After David had committed both adultery and murder, the prophet Nathan announced to him God’s judgment: “Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. Thus says the Lord, ‘Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house...’” (2 Sam. 12:10-11a). The prophetic word that violence, bloodshed, and evil would continually mark David’s family proved true in Amnon’s violation of Tamar and all its subsequent troubles. Commentator Robert Bergen writes, “... the

sins of one generation imprint the next generation. Each sin not only fosters more sin, it also fashions it by providing precedents for others to follow.”

Third, this story is about the suffering of an innocent victim. Tamar’s plight will be addressed more fully in the devotion for May 14, but it is important to note at this point that her story shares much in common with other biblical stories about female victims of male aggression: the rape of Dinah in Genesis 34, and the rape and murder of a Levite’s concubine in Judges 19. These three stories are some of the most graphic portrayals of violence in the OT, and through their literary artistry they display both God’s judgment on the perpetrators and His compassion for the victims. So, Tamar’s story is a scriptural witness that cultivates in us compassion for innocent victims as well.

Take time now to seek God. This brief prayer can help you get started: *“Heavenly Father, I know that the stories in Scripture are ‘examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did’ (1 Cor. 10:6). The story of what happened to Tamar is awful, but I thank you for the lessons it teaches. First, Lord, I submit all my passions to you. Help me not to indulge my sinful desires but rather to abstain from them through the power of the Holy Spirit. Next, Lord, help me to remember that my sins can have a terrible impact on my family – even for generations. Help me to fear you and to turn away from evil. Finally, Lord, give me your compassion for people in the world today who, like Tamar, are innocent victims of violence. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”*