

DAILY READINGS

Summer Stories

December 24 - 28



Due to the holiday season, the January Daily Readings were prepared far in advance of the Summer Series, and so therefore are not connected with the content of the Summer Series.

The readings for the next four weeks will take us through the two New Testament books of 1 & 2 Peter. The readings will still follow the same format as before.

Enjoy.

Day 1 – Citizens of Heaven

Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading – 1 Peter 1:1-9

As the name suggests, this letter was written by the apostle Peter, and was written to Christian communities distributed across the country we know today as Turkey. One of the things Peter does right at the start of the letter, in his opening address to his (diverse, widely scattered) audience, is remind them that they are Christians, that they follow Jesus Christ. He doesn't focus on their background, their ancestry, or any other possible descriptor of who they are: how could he, writing to such a varied, polyglot group of people? It is their common identity as followers of Jesus that he emphasises; what matters most is the fact that they have all been called by God to be his particular people set aside for his particular purpose. That commonality is the foundation stone.

This new community of followers is God's signpost of the new reality of his kingdom that is been born. Jesus' sacrificial death, the power of his resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit are the means by which God has effected this transformation in people. We are citizens of this world still, but also now have citizenship 'in heaven', in God's kingdom, and it's our role in shining forth the reality of this new life – open to all – that elicits Peter's praise of the living God. Being such dual citizens isn't easy though – much of what Peter will address in the rest of the letter is the suffering of the early Christians as they attempt to live out their faith in a world that refuses to acknowledge its true lord. But despite this, Peter encourages them to continue to live out the love of Jesus in them.

Question to Consider

How do you notice the tension of living this life of dual citizenship?

Prayer

Lord God, help us all to live truthfully as citizens of heaven, so that all who don't know you may see your glory and benevolence shine through us, your faithful followers. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

Day 2 – Ready to Play Our Part

Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading – 1 Peter 1:10-21

I'm sure we are all aware of how easy it can be to fall back into the old patterns of the life we lived before we were rescued (redeemed, ransomed, reconciled) by God's saving action on the cross. Without vigilance, without discipline, and certainly without prayer, we can so easily let our minds and hearts slacken, and more and more find ourselves falling into old ways of thinking and behaving. That is why Peter encourages his readers to stay focused, to maintain self-control and to be holy as God is holy. The old way of life has no hold on us any more. Back then, we didn't know our purpose, and we were ignorant of what we had been made for. But we know now. We have been rescued and refined, and know our purpose in God's world. So we need to live it out.

God's plan – his long gestating plan, the one the prophets spoke of – has been fulfilled in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. God's purpose has been revealed, and in the process of redeeming us to play our part in his glorious plan, God has cleaned us up and polished us into such a state that we know our part in his plan, and are now in a position to play our role to the full. Through him, we are capable of the holiness that he calls for. We can undertake the new use that he has for us with confidence and assurance that he is with us in all we do.

Questions to Consider

What is our part in God's plan? What role do you have, both generally, and more specific to you?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, as we seek to faithfully follow you, and play our part in the grand plan of restoration now underway, continue to guide us in your work and shape us in your image. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

Day 3 – The Sower and the Seed

Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading – 1 Peter 1:22-2:3

Based on Peter's use of scriptural quotations in this letter, it appears that he was a fan of the book of Isaiah, as he quotes from it in several places. In verses 24-25 of the current passage he quotes from Isaiah 40:6-8. Coupled with his use of the image of the seed in verse 23, we can see clearly in this letter, written by one of the original apostles and close companion of Jesus, the echo of the many instances in which Jesus himself told parables based around the image of the farmer sowing seed. And much like the seeds Jesus talked about, the seed Peter (and Isaiah) is referring to here produces something that lasts far longer than mere grass and flowers. This was an image that appealed to a lot of Israelites during the time of exile, when many of them were hoping that God would soon act to restore his people to the land: the image of God as the farmer sowing seed in his fields, seed that would flourish as God's new, true people would spring up as the new crop waiting to be harvested.

The followers of Jesus are the new crop, the fruit of the Father's seed sowing. Peter mixes in a second metaphor: that of a new born baby (new followers of Jesus) needing food and sustenance in order to grow (nourishment and training in order to grow into being a full member of God's family). The seed, the word of God that makes this whole process possible, is the message of Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God sent to reconcile us to God and bestow the gift of his spirit upon us so that all may be told of God's magnificent, saving love.

Questions to Consider

What do the images of seed and growth mean to you? Why?

Prayer

Almighty God, may our lives be fruitful, so that others can the abundant love that you have for everyone, if they will only turn to you and receive it. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

Day 4 – The New Temple

Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading – 1 Peter 2:4-10

In the Old Testament, the idea of a stone or rock had two particular meanings that Jews of Peter's time would have been particularly interested in. The first was connected with the idea of God returning to Zion (Jerusalem) and taking up residence forever in a properly rebuilt Temple, and there was a long Jewish tradition of describing the Temple as being built on a 'rock'. If the right rock, or cornerstone could be found, then the building of the new Temple – the one God has promised to come and dwell in – can begin.

Secondly, the word stone (*eben*) is very similar to the word son (*ben*), and if there's one thing we know about God, it's that he likes wordplay. (Jesus made a pun on the same two words in Mark 12:1-12.) How do the two concepts go together? In 2 Samuel 7:12-14 we read of God's promise that David's son would build the Temple and would also be the son of God. And the son will build the temple with the proper foundation stone.

God had promised to both send his son and build a house in which he will come and live forever. All people who belong to Jesus, no matter who they are or where they are from – even if they are Gentiles, living far from Israel, in tiny scattered communities – have been welcomed and fully incorporated into the people of God. The Temple has actually been rebuilt and God has come to inhabit it – because his people are God's new Temple, and he is now living in them, wherever they are.

Questions to Consider

How are the people of God the new Temple? What does it mean to say God dwells in us?

Prayer

Loving Father, thank you for loving us so much that you made your home here with us – in fact, even more than that, *in us*, by your Spirit. Amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

Day 5 – Obedience and Faithfulness

Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading – 1 Peter 2:11-17

Verses 13-14 have been problematic to say the least, and have caused much heartache and head scratching over the centuries. Are we really supposed to submit to every authority instituted over us, to obey and honour all leaders and people in positions of power in our society? What about tyrants and dictators? What about those whose behaviour shows a complete lack of regard for law, morality, fairness? What about those abusing their positions and authority for their own gain? Are we, as followers of King Jesus, really supposed to submit to these people? Aren't they the very people we should be opposing and rebelling against through truth speaking to power in order to point to the sovereignty of the true King? If we put up with their rule, aren't we just colluding with them?

Peter wants us to submit to the ruling authorities, but in a way that allows the way we live – the good life Peter describes in verses 11-12 – to shame those that criticize and ridicule us. We need to play our part in establishing God's rule on earth by showing that there is another, better way of living, a way that is far more revolutionary than actual revolution: truth speaking to power through Jesus mirrored in our lives and actions. Anyone looking at us, from any position in society, should see a genuine way of being human. The world needs to see that our conduct is right and admirable. Yes, we will oppose injustice and oppression, but with our whole lives, every word and action, not just through protest but through God's life in us.

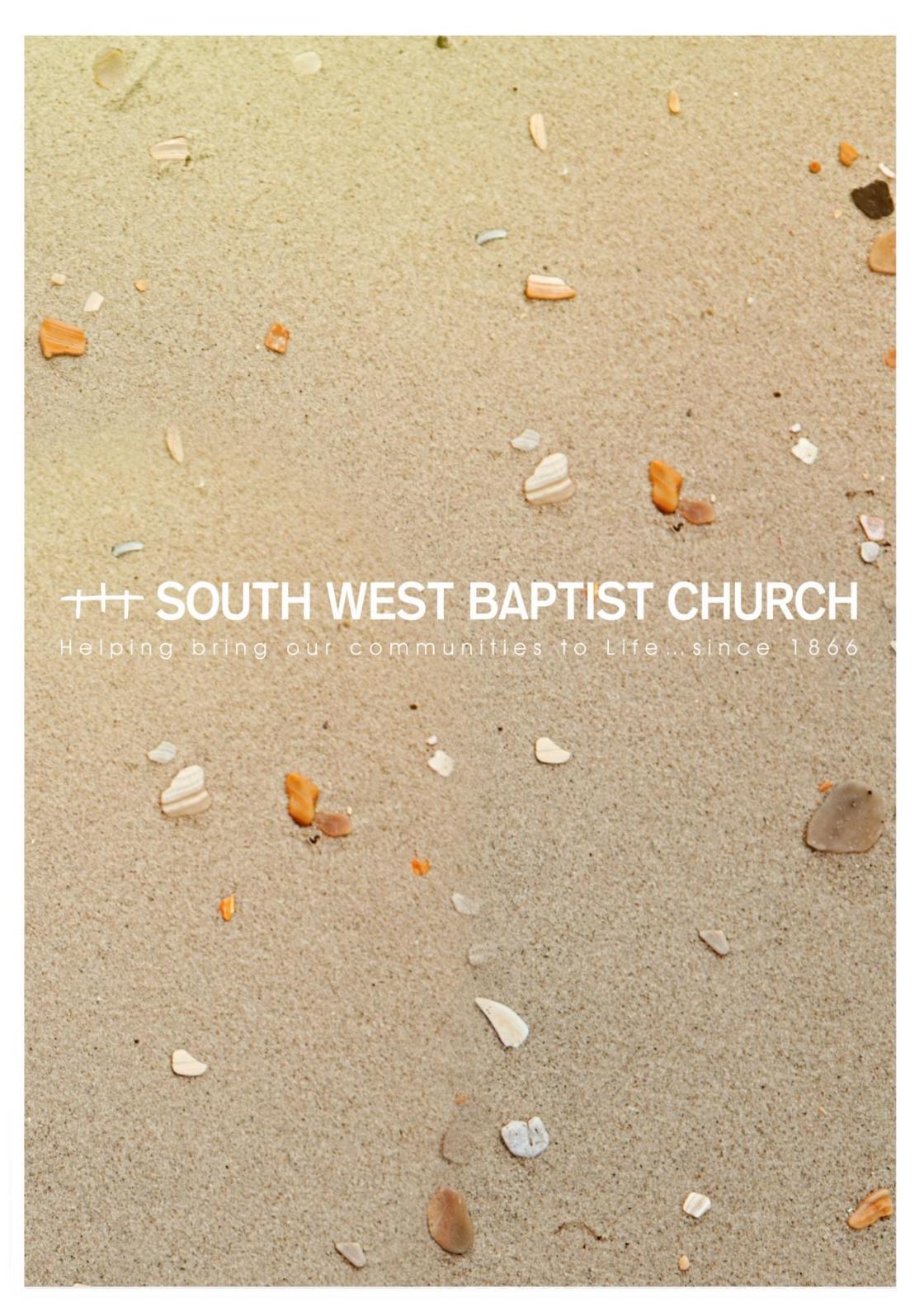
Questions to Consider

How do you live our Peter's command in verses 13-14? What does this look like? What should it look like?

Prayer

Lord God, we are yours first and foremost, but must still live in a world that refuses to know you. Help us do this with faithfulness and integrity. Amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)



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