

Message for May 3, 2020

Another day of being cooped up in the house due to the corona virus. Aside from a little grocery shopping and some occasional yard work, weather permitting of course, it's pretty much the same daily routine. Borrr-ing! I do have my daily devotions, and this extra time has allowed me to work on the fall retreat, assuming we're good to go by then. So it's not like I don't have anything interesting or important to do. Still, I feel somewhat imprisoned and I want my freedom back, and to be able to meet with all of you again in church. Do I hear an Amen? But in the meantime we all have to make the best of it. So Mary and I occupy some of our time together watching the Hallmark Channel on TV. It's good, clean, wholesome programming. Mary especially enjoys the mystery movies, and I like them too. It's fun following the plot and trying to figure out who did what, and why. We guess right about half the time.

Mysteries can be fun to untangle, and I guess that's a big part of their appeal, along with the suspense and unexpected twists and turns that the writers bake into the plot. But life in general can also be shrouded in mystery. We might wonder about such things as what is my purpose in life? What will tomorrow bring? Why did God choose me to save? Why do so many of my prayers seem to go unanswered? What is God saying to me in His word? How do I determine His will? Why is He allowing this Covid-19 virus pandemic? Questions, questions, questions. It's all a big mystery, right? But is it? Does it have to be that way? The answer is no! Let me explain how I came to that conclusion.

I believe that God purposely made many things in life, including His word, somewhat mysterious, or unclear. Not every piece of information we need is handed to us on a silver platter. God doesn't spoon feed us like babies. So if we want the answers to our questions we have to search them out. When we watch a mystery movie, and we want to solve the mystery before it's revealed to us at the end, we take note of clues, ponder their meanings, and piece them together like a puzzle to solve the mystery. So it is with God's word and the various issues of our lives. As we diligently pray and ask for wisdom and discernment, read His word, listen to teachings, and meditate on what we learn, understanding gradually comes to us as the Holy Spirit reveals the deeper meanings in order that we can then resolve the burning questions of our lives. I also believe that God is pleased when we search out the mysteries before us.

It's part of His plan for our spiritual growth. This process of discovery builds character traits such as patience, trust, persistence, and faith. Mysteries, especially kingdom mysteries, are meant to be solved. To back up that point, consider the following Scriptures.

And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given." Matthew 13:10-11

Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

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Corinthians 4:1

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

Matthew 7:7-8; Luke 11:9-10

From these Scriptures we see that God wants us to know the mysteries of the kingdom. Just as importantly, we are the stewards of these mysteries. But it is up to us to patiently seek them out. When we diligently do that, we will find the answers we seek. Sometimes from an unexpected source. God is desirous of revealing Himself and His ways to us, His beloved children. But it is all according to His plan and timing. And because He is faithful He will reveal things previously hidden from us. That is one of His precious promises. So never be discouraged, greater understanding will come. Keep seeking the answers to your questions.

I love good mysteries, how about you? Let's solve some together.

May peace, love, and grace be yours,
Pastor Joe

FINDING GOD'S GLORY

One of America's most gifted preachers in the last century was Theodore Parker Ferris, pastor of Boston's Trinity Church (Episcopal). In his book *The Image of God*, Ferris asked, "Where can you expect to see the glory of the Lord today?" He answered the query with the following words:

"In the heavens above? Yes, of course. 'The heavens declare the glory of God.' In the courts of Justice? Yes, of course. In the wonders of science as they unfold the mysteries of God's universe? Of course, yes. In the move toward peace? Yes! But most of all in that one Life, that one incredible Life, in whom the glory was once and for all revealed to all who have eyes to see it, and in every other life that reflects that glory."

SEE(K) FIRST

On Facebook, I can "follow" as many people as I want, viewing their messages, photos and activities. But I can choose only 30 to "see first" — that is, to prioritize in my news feed. As of this writing (Facebook changes often), if my "see first" list is full and I want to add someone new, I must "unprioritize" someone else.

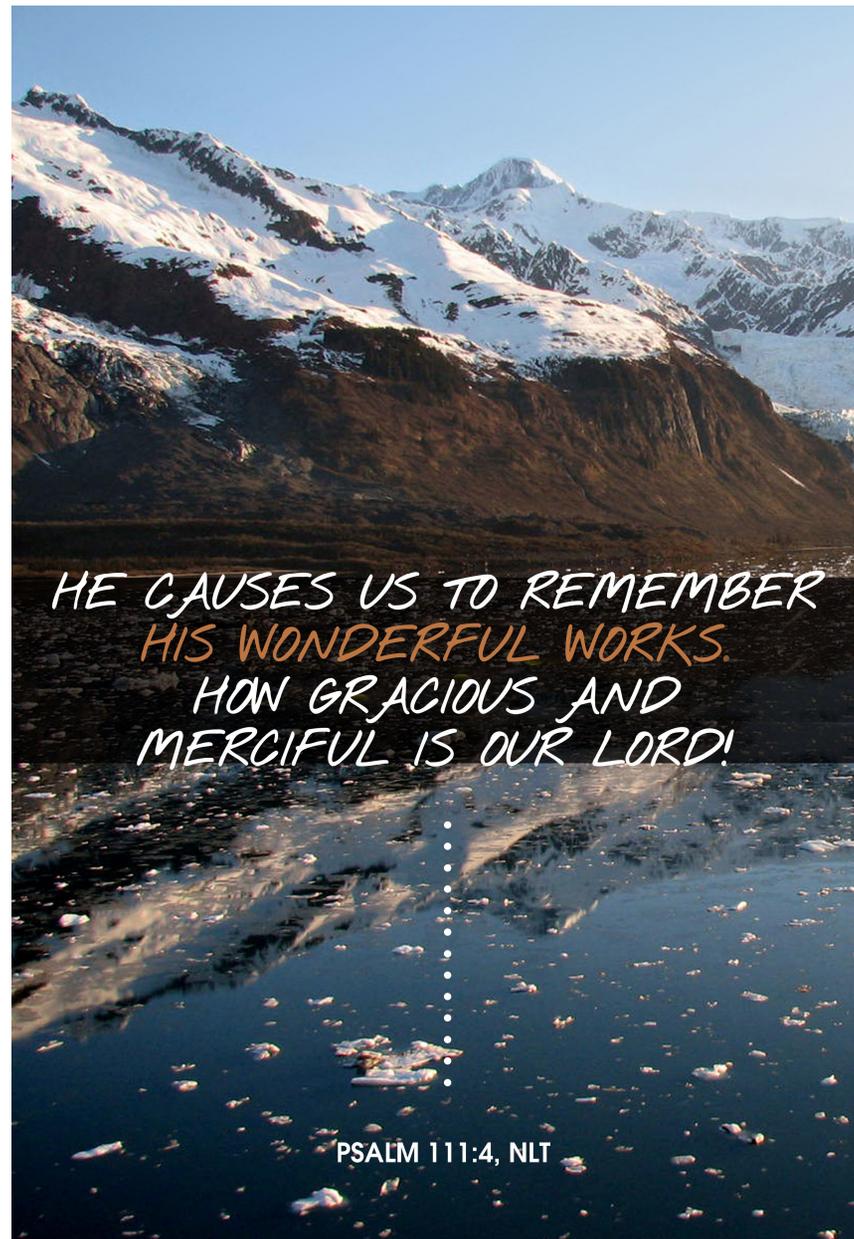
That leads me to ponder bigger matters: I often claim to follow Jesus, but what might I need to "unprioritize" to make him not just a priority but the priority in my life? To what do I devote time and attention but ought to let go to follow Christ more closely? What activities, behaviors and values do I need to not just bump from my "see first" list but "unfollow" or "block" entirely? Perhaps they are antithetical to discipleship or simply take too much time away from prayer, Scripture and service.

This dilemma isn't unique to the digital age. Facebook parlance is about what we "see first," but in Matthew 6:33 Jesus says, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" (ESV, italics added).

—Heidi Mann

To fall in love with God is the greatest of romances, to seek him the greatest adventure, to find him the greatest human achievement.

—St. Augustine



"The Little Church That Could"
"Believing is Seeing"