

Only take care, & keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, & lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life.

KEEPING YOUR SOUL DILIGENTLY

A group of friends went deer hunting & paired off in twos for the day. That night one of the hunters returned alone, but staggering under the weight of an 8 point buck. “Where’s Mike?” the others asked. “Mike fell & broke his ankle. He’s 5 miles back up the trail,” replied the successful hunter. “You left Mike lying out there & carried the deer back?” they inquired.

“A tough call,” said the hunter, “but I figured no one’s going to steal Mikey!” **PAUSE**

Much of life involves setting priorities, which means determining what’s important to you – the 8 point buck or Mike, your career or your marriage, the things of this world or your soul. Jesus spoke of that last combination rather clearly:

“For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world & forfeit his soul?” And just because a person gets the priorities straight in his mind, doesn’t mean he actually carries them out. As it’s said, the road to hell is paved with good intentions. You realize, don’t you, that walking the walk is more important than talking the talk?

How often do children see right through our talk if we aren’t walking the walk? They’re hyper-sensitive to our deeds contradicting our words. All we end up teaching them is hypocrisy. One of the things Moses is doing in the book of Deuteronomy is emphasizing how important it will be to teach the children, but hypocrisy is not to be the subject matter.

Moses wrote, “Make them known to your children & your children’s children...” In other words, the deeds of our Father in heaven, that we’ve seen & heard & experienced, are to be passed down to the children. Not our deeds, but Yahweh’s. And notice the order Moses put his

instructions in. First he says keep your own soul diligently lest the things your eyes have seen depart from your heart. After that's accomplished, then Moses says, "Make them known to your children & your children's children..." If you miss that 1st part, keeping your own soul, your children will see right through you, & learn the hypocrisy of men instead of the ways of God.

If our faith is authentic & true, it will express itself in our home, & children will learn of the things our Savior has done in our lives. How diligently have you been keeping your soul? What priorities are you setting in life, the things of this world, or your soul?

A rich man spent his time building larger barns to store his goods. Then one night God required of him his soul. "Fool," is what our Lord called him. Like children, adults struggle with the hypocrisy we see, but usually that battle is against what we find in our own hearts. The Gospel reading gave a fairly detailed list:

"...out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, & they defile a person." It's not hard to understand why people buy into the lie of the devil that they can't forgive themselves.

Looking at the filth of our hearts & knowing that we are the cause brings the immediate temptation to try & fix what we've broken, to make right what we have caused to be wrong. Pride demands such a response even of people who believe in Jesus. How else do we look at the filth in our hearts & still believe that God loves us, if we do nothing to make things right?

That's how our mind works, because the very sin which corrupts, continues to tempt, even once we admit we've failed. Our sinful nature tells us that if we just work harder, then we'll finally overcome what spills out of our sinful heart. Yesterday's internet edition of USAToday quoted a farewell letter from Ted Kennedy with the headline stating, "I've done my

best.” The choice of that headline accurately reflects the thinking of our sinful nature & the world around us. If we only do our best, what more can God demand? If we only do our best everything else will fall into place. If we only do our best then, no one dare hold us accountable for our sins. But that is not at all how forgiveness works.

Our heavenly Father is holy, without sin or even the slightest blemish. Therefore, He cannot simply overlook sin. Payment for it must be exacted or God would cease to exist. He cannot deny the essence of Himself, which is holiness. We overlook sin all the time. We shrug it off, sweep it under the rug, or wink at it, as if it’s not all that bad.

In so doing, we are hypocrites through & through. With the impossibility of avoiding sin, & with no recourse on our own to justify ourselves, it’s easier to just worry about the things of this world, than to concern ourselves with something as abstract as the soul. Many people busy themselves with the things of the world in order to quiet their conscience.

In the punch line to the joke, the man concerned himself with the 8 point buck because he “...figured no one’s going to steal Mikey!” But there is someone looking to steal & devour your soul. You’ve heard the words, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”

As Peter was inspired to write those words, it’s not a stretch to believe he had Deuteronomy in mind, as Moses wrote, “Only take care, & keep your soul diligently...” Moses was giving his final advice to the people of Israel, about a month before they’d enter the Promised Land. Moses would die first as discipline for his disobedience.

This text from Deuteronomy is sort of his last will & testament, kind of like Jesus’ institution of the Lord’s Supper on the night before His death. Reading these words from Moses should be deadly serious business, & at the same time they should bring us the greatest of

comfort, peace & joy. The events Moses tells them to remember are the miraculous deeds of God from the past 40 years while being rescued from Egypt & then provided & cared for during all the years of wandering in the Wilderness.

There was no way that Moses, or the 2-3 million Israelites, could have survived on their own. They absolutely needed God to deliver them right to the very doorstep of the Promised Land. The same is true of your journey, & mine, to the eternal Promised Land. There's no way any of us can make it on our own, through this sin filled world, to the Pearly Gates.

Satan is too powerful. Our own hearts are too filthy & corrupt. We struggle to believe even that God is able to get us to the gates of the Promised Land. So Baptism is God's seal, placed upon us, to mark us as one of His own. In Baptism God creates & sustains faith in Jesus as Savior, Savior from sin & death & the devil.

No where does Scripture command us to forgive ourselves, but it pleads with us to believe that Jesus, the Son of God, has forgiven us. He paid the penalty for our sins. He has the right to declare us free. We keep our souls diligently simply through remembering that good news, no matter what else our eyes may see, or what else our ears may hear, God loves us.

Baptism is the beginning of Yahweh's work, & He calls upon us to make that known, to our children & to our children's children. He calls upon us to keep our priorities straight so that we can pass on this precious gift, this vital knowledge, this life-giving faith, not in our own thoughts & deeds, but in God's declaration that we are holy in His sight.

Without seeing the filth of our sins we do not appreciate the gift of God's Son. Without seeing the gift of God's Son the filth of our sins would destroy us forever. Nothing else in all this world is worth losing sight of that message, not deer hunting, not the schools you graduate from, not your spouse, not your children, not your job, not your house, not even your retirement.

Yet, as we see our sins, & the forgiveness that erases them, joy is inherently ours. Keeping our soul diligently means making it a daily practice to remember what God has done in our Baptism. We do that through personal devotions, or personal Bible study. We do it through prayer & through song. We do it through hearing the Word of God as it is preached & sung to us.

We keep our souls diligently as we remain connected to the Vine, to Jesus Christ, & in so doing, God almighty Himself will bear fruit through us. One of the ways He can bear that fruit is through children & grandchildren. As Nick & Micole brought Jameson to the font this morning they were making known to their son the deeds of Jesus Christ as Savior.

In the years to come they'll have the responsibility & privilege of continuing to make known the deeds of Yahweh, & they begin that work most surely as they keep their own souls diligently. If that thought makes you nervous, remember the words of Ephesians 2:

“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” In the end, it is God who works in us to keep our souls diligently. Even that is a deed He prepared in advance for us to do. We can turn away from it. We can reject it, but we cannot fail in that work as long as we remain connected to Christ.

In God’s plan of salvation – the only one there is – walking the walk is as simple as remembering our sinfulness so that we might remain humble & repentant. Coupled with that is simply believing that Jesus has taken our sins away & given us life in their place. Keeping our souls diligently is nothing more than living that life Christ has given us. Amen.

In Baptism we now put on Christ – our shame is fully covered with all that He once sacrificed & freely for us suffered. For here the flood of His own blood now makes us holy, right & good before our heavenly Father. So use it well! You are made new – in Christ a new creation! As faithful Christians, live & do within your own vocation, until that Day when you possess His glorious robe of righteousness bestowed on you forever. Amen.

