Doing and Saying – a Christian Pilgrimage

Beginnings – Week 2

I hope you are enjoying this course and finding it fulfilling. This week, we continue to explore "Beginnings." If you are looking at each day on your own, about 15 minutes should be good for recording your thoughts. Once you meet with others, allow an hour to share your thoughts and hear what they share as well. In total, you're looking at 6 * 15 minutes + 1 hour, so 2 ½ hours plus any transportation time, per week. Have fun!

Day 8: Wanting our own way

"… concerning the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the orchard God said, 'You must not eat from it, and you must not touch it, or else you will die.'" When the woman saw that the tree produced fruit that was good for food, was attractive to the eye, and was desirable for making one wise, she took some of its fruit and ate it. She also gave some of it to her husband who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both opened, and they knew they were naked … they hid from the Lord God… The Lord God said, "Did you eat from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from? … What have you done?"

There is a story in the beginning of the Bible of a man and woman named Adam and Eve (which mean "human" and "living one") who lived in a wonderful garden which God had created for them. They could have anything in the garden except the fruit from one plant – so of course, they ignored the bounty around them and had to try some of this forbidden fruit. The ramifications were huge – they realized they were naked, they were vulnerable. They hid from God. When we choose to do our own thing against what God directs, we are being Adam and Eve. *Are you saying this story isn't worried about history, but is rather trying to explain how humans are?* Yes! We try to hide our actions from God. We realize we are vulnerable, and that others are too. And this leads to more ramifications.

Write down your thoughts: If God desires you to live in a state of Shalom, what would be some things that you do which could be against God's desire, for you or for others?

Now, share your thoughts with some people you trust.

Day 9: Murder

Cain became very angry. The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? If you do what is right, will you not be fine? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at the door. It desires to dominate you, but you must subdue it."

Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" And he replied, "I don't know! Am I my brother's guardian?" But the Lord said, "What have you done?

Realizing people are vulnerable leads to the conclusion that we can hurt them. And we can. The story of Cain and Abel is about two brothers, one of whom becomes so jealous of the other that in his anger, he strikes him down and kills him. Being jealous of others is one of the ramifications of us choosing our own way instead of God's way. *But I'm not like that – I haven't tried to kill my brother.* Good! I'm glad you haven't gone that far. But you have experienced jealousy, even to the point of wishing for "justice" against the one you are jealous of? *Ummm. Yes.* Jesus tells us if we've even been angry against someone, we've murdered them in our hearts. *That means I'm doomed – every human, in fact – for everyone has been angry at someone. And who is Jesus?* We'll get to him in a bit – but do you agree with Him? *I'll think on that.*

Another point: the Lord said to Cain "If you do what is right, will you not be fine? …sin is crouching at the door. It desires to dominate you, but you must subdue it." It's important to understand that we always have a choice to do what is right or not, regardless of our emotions and thoughts.

Write down your thoughts: Have you ever been jealous of someone else? Have you been so jealous that you wanted to "make it right?" If so, you felt a little how Cain felt. Can you list times when you were jealous and wanted to inflict harm on the person you were jealous of, but didn't? These are examples where you "subdued sin".

Now, share your thoughts with some people you trust.

Day 10: Evil

The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind had become great on the earth. Every inclination of the thoughts of their minds was only evil all the time. The Lord regretted that he had made humankind on the earth, and he was highly offended. So the Lord said, "I will wipe humankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth—everything from humankind to animals, including creatures that move on the ground and birds of the air, for I regret that I have made them."

The story of Noah and the Ark tells of how God became so disgusted at the evil ways of humanity that He destroyed them all, except for Noah, his family, and the animals they brought into the Ark. *He destroyed them all? He doesn't sound like a very loving God!* The ramification of everyone deciding to be their own god, to decide what was good and evil on their own right, was that they were doing evil, depraved things against each other. And when people do evil things, there are consequences.

Write down your thoughts: Have you seen or heard anything evil in your life? On the news? On TV or in a movie? What do you think of wars, or of people killing each other in "peaceful" society? Of people taking advantage of each other, being jealous of each other and sniping about each other? Of people taking advantage of others to get rich, gain power, or become famous? Write down some items which come to your mind.

Share with others whom you trust.

Day 11: Finding our own way to salvation

Then they said, "Come, let's build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens."

The other ramification of us wanting to be our own gods is that we want to define our own paradise, and our own way to get there. The story of the Tower of Babel is about society getting together to try and build their own way to heaven, ultimately being frustrated by God from doing so. Can you think of ways in which people have decided something they will pursue above all else, and then devote their lives to it? *Some people like money. Some like power. Some like fame.* Perhaps it is power, such as ruling a family, a tribe, a nation, a people. Perhaps it is wealth. Perhaps it is fame. These are all ways people try to find their own "salvation". Not living in shalom leads people to pursue weak facsimiles of it, where people think they can find purpose, happiness, or even joy – and they are always, ultimately, frustrated. No matter how much power, wealth, or fame they achieve, shalom is always out of reach.

Write down your thoughts: Do you have examples where people devoted their lives to pursuing fame, fortune, or power? Where they gained fame, fortune, or power, and were ultimately unfulfilled? Where people pursuing such has caused harm to others?

Share your thoughts with others you trust.

Day 12: Being Human

We were created as Images of God. However, we focus on ourselves and seek our own way. We become jealous of others. Society is full of people striving to do their own things and hurting others. We seek our own way to salvation. In short, we have fallen from the heights to which we were created. The stories contained at the beginning of the Bible, of our creation, of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and the Flood, and the Tower of Babel, all exist to explain what we are like – these stories are all experientially true, for every person has lived them to some extent. *They're not historical? Conversely, they're not just fantasies?* They may be historical, they may not be – the point is that they are *experientially true in the life of every human* – they are not fantasy, for they describe the truth of the human soul.

So if that is what we are like, what is remaining? Should we just fight and strive against each other for what we can get, and may the strongest prevail? Does "whoever have the most toys" win? Is this a meaningless life where people will fight and war and rape and kill and that is all there is to it? *I think we are just random atoms and the only meaning to our existence is what we provide it ourselves.*

Not according to God. God intended us for shalom. God created us as good. God created us as His Image but we destructively sought (and seek) our own path, to be our own image, no matter the harm to ourselves and others. Another way of thinking of it is: "The line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either — but right through every human heart." (Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago).

And so, God intervened.

Write down your thoughts: Many people throughout history have lived under warlords and tyrants where "might makes right". What do you think it is like to live in such a society? How can such a society be changed? Have you experienced being done wrong to by another person? Have you done wrong to another?

Share your thoughts with others you trust.

Day 13: Jesus

Jesus proclaimed the good news of God. He said, "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is near. Change how you live your life and believe the good news!"

Jesus was God and human. *Whoa – seriously?* He taught the ways of God and showed us what God wanted by how He lived His life. *How would He know?* Jesus sacrificed everything for us, even giving His life – and then he rose again. *Isn't that a fairy-tale? Who can rise from the dead?* Jesus removed the separation between God and humanity and allowed people to realize who they truly were: In the Image of God. He stressed forgiveness and love. He stressed caring for each other. He stressed loving God and loving each other. He stated He was one with God the Father and prayed that we would be one with Him likewise. He died for us to save us. *How did His dying save me?* You ask very good questions, and we will get to them as we walk together. Right now, though, I'd like to ask you: what do you think of a God who would personally intervene to set things right?

Write down your thoughts: What do you think of a God who would personally intervene to set things right?

Share your thoughts with others you trust.

Day 14: Rest

Just like the seventh day, on the fourteenth day we shall rest – in fact, we rest once every seven days (refer back to day 7 if you would like to revisit the reasoning). Today, reflect on the past week and care for your needs (body and spirit). In the evening get together with a group you trust and share what you would like to from the previous week – good points, hard points, what you've learned, what you've struggled with, etc.

Have you come to a point where you trust your fellow travelers with whom you are exploring, those you are meeting with? If you continue, we're going to be examining and testing a lot of concepts and ways we've looked at life, and trust is paramount within your group – I pray that you have found this trust and can continue on with us.