

May 10

Experiencing True Awe

This is what the LORD Almighty says: “It may seem marvelous to the remnant of this people at that time, but will it seem marvelous to me?” (Zechariah 8:6).

Scripture: Zechariah 8:1-8, 11-17

Song: “What a Beautiful Name”

When visiting great cities in Europe and Latin America, I haven't been able to resist walking around and into old cathedrals. The buildings and ornate artwork are designed to provoke a sense of awe at the greatness of God. Yes, I know some wonder how humans could have the audacity to think that God, who is so huge, has penetrated all the enormous galaxies to be near us. Yet our value is not determined by our comparatively small size. For that matter, the entire universe is nothing compared to God. It's amazing to consider that He is interested in all the small bits. Yet God is indeed mindful of you and me.

From Genesis and Exodus to Zechariah and Malachi, the Old Testament speaks of the Lord God as the Creator of Heaven and Earth. It's a constant reminder that He can merely speak and accomplish anything He wishes. It's never complicated or hard for Him. What seems absolutely marvelous to us (like the night sky!) is for the Lord all in a day's work, so to speak. Then again, there is something that does bring great joy and delight to His heart. And that is when we experience true awe and instantly give God our heartfelt worship and praise.

Don't wait. Plan new opportunities to feel awe-inspired by creation. Each time, be sure to tell God thanks!

Dear Lord, thank You for all You have made. In Jesus' name, amen.

Prayer Received

When I am in distress, I call to you, because you answer me (Psalm 86:7).

Scripture: Psalm 86:1-13

Song: “What a Friend We Have in Jesus”

I sat in my car around midnight, weeping. “God, I feel so alone. I can’t do this on my own. I’m worried about my kids too.” Eventually, I exited my car to go into my home.

A neighbor pulled up, calling out, “How are you?”

I waved and tossed an “I’m good” over my shoulder. Of course I wasn’t, but I wanted to hide my tears.

She responded, “My sister feels the Holy Spirit is saying you need prayer.”

Why did God give away my neediness? I thought, then relented. “Yes, I do.”

Although I hadn’t given them any details, the Spirit led my neighbor and her sister to pray specific Scriptures related to each of the concerns on my mind. I’m certain God heard my cries of despair and responded through my neighbor and her sister.

The psalmist also cried out to God in a time of need, and he too received an answer. Answers don’t necessarily mean changes in our circumstances. They may come in the form of assurances that in the midst of raging storms we’re seen, heard, and surrounded by God’s love and protection. David knew he could rely on God’s faithfulness. We can too.

Lord, thank You for always being on our side, hearing our prayers, and providing assurances of Your love and mercy. In Jesus’ name, amen.

May 12

Misplaced Confidence

“Do not listen to your prophets, your diviners, your interpreters of dreams, your mediums or your sorcerers who tell you, ‘You will not serve the king of Babylon.’ They prophesy lies to you that will only serve to remove you far from your lands; I will banish you and you will perish” (Jeremiah 27:9, 10).

Scripture: Jeremiah 27:1-11

Song: “We Trust in the Name of the Lord Our God”

The newly appointed commander of the Army of the Potomac, “Fighting Joe” Hooker, was confident in his advantage. His army was twice the size of the Confederate Army he pursued. He boasted that he would not be deprived of victory over his enemies. At first it appeared his confidence was well-founded, when he gained the initiative in battle. However, leaders of the Southern forces soon discovered that his left flank was vulnerable, and Fighting Joe went down in utter defeat.

Jeremiah warned the warring kings that they would not be able to defeat Nebuchadnezzar. While it defied conventional wartime wisdom, people who would submit would live in peace. However, those who ignored God—to put their confidence in their own abilities and listen to those who claimed to see a different future—all came to ruin.

Sometimes we think we’ve got all the details buttoned down. We place our trust in ourselves and our resources, but lose the battle. When we follow God’s leading, even when it feels counter-intuitive, He will ultimately make us victorious.

Lord, please help us not rely on poor counsel or our own strength, but clearly hear Your voice in each decision we make, both large and small. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Letting Go

I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you (Deuteronomy 30:15, 16).

Scripture: Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Song: “Oceans (Where Feet May Fail)”

There are many stories about a man holding a branch jutting out from the side of a cliff. They depict the life-or-death dilemma as the victim calls out for help. One of these stories inserts God as the would-be rescuer, who tells the desperate man to trust Him and let go of the branch. After much thought the victim asks if there is anyone else up there who can help.

We might laugh awkwardly because the story rings true. We call out for help, but expect it to come in a way that we want—at a cost or level of risk that we like.

God is everywhere around us. He is above us when we need to be pulled up, and He is below us when we are falling. He is the only one who can rescue us for eternity. All He asks is that we let go to love and obey Him. Both responses come from trust. When we are hanging on for dear life, our most secure response is to let go and turn to God in obedience, love, and trust.

Father, help us walk in obedience, trusting You in both the good and the difficult times, knowing that You desire to bless us in all things. In Jesus' name, amen.

Listen Up

Then King Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah the prophet and had him brought to the third entrance to the temple of the LORD. “I am going to ask you something,” the king said to Jeremiah. “Do not hide anything from me.” Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, “If I give you an answer, will you not kill me? Even if I did give you counsel, you would not listen to me” (Jeremiah 38:14, 15).

Scripture: Jeremiah 38:14-18

Song: “Word of God, Speak”

You’ve probably heard the quote, “The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again but expecting different results.” Although we don’t like the anticipated outcome, we re-fuse to change our way of thinking, hoping something else in the equation will give way so the bottom line changes.

King Zedekiah was guilty of this when he once again pulled Jeremiah out of prison to ask him for a word from God. He directs Jeremiah not to “hide anything” from him, perhaps hoping for an “out clause” from the earlier prophecy of death. But the prophet has been down this road before with the king—and so responds, “Even if I did give you counsel, you would not listen to me” (v. 15).

There’s wisdom in godly counsel. When we refuse to see harmful things that another points out—a toxic relationship, an all-consuming job, or destructive habits—circumstances can end in tragedy, as they did for King Zedekiah. Tragedy or not, the conclusion to any circumstance outside the will of God is always less than perfect.

God, please help us to pay attention to Your voice and turn from harmful ways. In Jesus name, amen.

The Cost of Noncompliance

“Inquire now of the LORD for us because Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon is attacking us. Perhaps the LORD will perform wonders for us as in times past so that he will withdraw from us” (Jeremiah 21:2).

Scripture: Jeremiah 21:1-7

Song: “If My People Will Pray”

In September 2010, a home in rural Tennessee burned to the ground because the homeowner hadn't paid a 75-dollar fee for fire-fighting services. Desperate as the flames raged, the owner called 911 and offered to pay whatever was necessary, but was told it was too late. When the blaze spread, the fire company responded to save a nearby home. That homeowner had paid the fee. The mayor said the fire department couldn't let homeowners pay the fee on the spot because the only payees would be those whose homes were actually on fire at the moment.

In this passage, the kingdom of Judah was in a similarly desperate situation. Nebuchadnezzar was attacking, and those who sought out Jeremiah hoped he'd speak to God on their behalf. But the “firefighting fee” hadn't been paid by the current inhabitants of Judah. They were desperate, but there had been no repentance or obedience, as in their forefather's day, to reverse the sentence.

We can't rely on the relationship others have with God to see us out of desperate times. We need to establish our own relationship with Him. Thankfully, unlike that Tennessee mayor, God is willing to accept our confession of sin anytime from a truly repentant heart.

Lord, thank You for wanting relationship with us and for hearing our prayers of true repentance. In Your name, amen.

The Enemy Within

Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon. . . . The Babylonian army pursued the king and overtook him in the plains of Jericho. All his soldiers were separated from him and scattered, and he was captured (2 Kings 24:20b; 25:5, 6).

Scripture: 2 Kings 24:20b–25:7

Song: “God’s Way Is Best”

Charles Spurgeon said, “The greatest enemy to human souls is the self-righteous spirit which makes men look to themselves for salvation.”

King Zedekiah tried everything but looking to the Lord for help in his circumstances. While he went through the motions of seeking a word from God, he had no intention of complying. Instead, he believed the yes-men prophets and threw the truth-telling Jeremiah into prison. Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon’s King Nebuchadnezzar, then tried to outlast a siege, and finally used his army to attempt escape. Nothing worked. Zedekiah’s self-righteous spirit refused to be humbled of its own accord, and in the end he was humiliated and tortured in the worst way.

It’s a losing battle when we try to “work things out” on our own. When God says to surrender, then yield. Rebellion won’t work. Worldly counsel won’t work. Holding out hope that He’ll change His mind won’t work. There’s nowhere to hide from His omnipresence.

Today let us recognize that our sole source of salvation is found in God. Replace the self-righteous self-talk with humble submission to the lover of our souls. He alone can forgive our missteps and poor choices and redeem them for a victorious life.

Father, thank You for Your willingness to redeem our hardened hearts when we humbly submit to Your grace and mercy. In Jesus’ name, amen.