

Weekly Devotion for September 7, 2020

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### “Being Completely Honest About Ourselves”

Sam and his bride, Michelle were driving down the freeway on their way to the store a couple of weeks back. Michelle noticed from the passenger side that the needle was sitting steadily on E. When she made a mention of the gas gauge Sam confidently said, “I do this all the time. We’ll be fine. We’ve got enough to get home.” Famous last words.

Sometime later as they began their trip back home from the store the car began to stop working. Press the gas—nothing happened. Lights on the dash began to light up as the car shut down until finally Sam had to pull the car off to the side of the road.

Sam couldn’t think of what might be wrong. So, the AAA card was called upon and a tow truck was called. The car was hauled 13 miles to their regular mechanic. The next day Sam got a call from the mechanic and Sam and Michelle went over to pick up his car. When asked what happened, the smiling mechanic said, “We couldn’t find anything wrong with the car but we did figure out what happened. It ran out of gas.” Sam smiled and could feel Michelle’s smiling eye-roll without even looking. The mechanic went on saying, “We put a couple of gallons of gas in it. Turned right over. Runs well, but you may want to stop at the gas station on the way home. By the way that two gallons will cost you \$38 bucks.” Sam hasn’t let the gas get that low since.

Consider today what James says in James 1:22-25 <sup>22</sup> Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. <sup>23</sup> Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror <sup>24</sup> and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. <sup>25</sup> But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.”

Does the Word of God really shape all of your behavior? Or is there a little influence from somewhere else? Jesus says in Matthew 7 at the end of his Sermon on the Mount that anyone who hears His words and puts them into practice is like a man who built his house on the rock. Hurricane winds and tidal waves could not undo it. Most I know want a faith like that. I can’t think of any Christian that wants to be overcome or who willingly seeks out a weak faith. A misguided faith usually stops paying attention to the gas gauge.

Even as we believe in Jesus, we fool ourselves in sin. We want faith that moves mountains but often we settle for much less because we imagine certain sacrifices as too much. Peter loved Jesus but in Galatians 2 Peter had to be corrected for giving into peer pressure from Jewish converts who believed the Gentiles needed circumcision first. Paul had to remind him that even the smallest step towards the law is syncretistic. Peter as a pillar of the church needed to be corrected. Peter had imagined himself as a man worthy of the right hand or left hand in the kingdom of heaven; a strong man. However, as we know, Peter who loved Jesus, wasn’t really good with pressure from his fellow Jews. Before Galatians 2 Peter famously failed the Lord at the fire barrel in the court of the high priest when pressured to confess himself as a follower of



Jesus. He denied Jesus three times, each time with greater intensity. Thankfully, Peter was ready to humble himself and set aside his pride as He returned to the Lord.

We don't seek to be bad Christians but we tend to wander from the truth. Especially when we don't actively seek to fellowship with other Christians, physically be present with other Christians, we can easily succumb to false ideas. Worse, we can grow very comfortable in false ideas. The Gospel doesn't allow us to be half-hearted or lukewarm about Jesus or about Jesus' way of doing things. Truth is we all could be doing a lot better with our faith than we are actually doing. We don't run out of gas because we haven't been warned but because we chose not to pay attention to it.

Have you heard of the Psychology of the modern gas gauge? In an article by Terry Shea for AOL Autos titled "How Does Your Gas Gauge Really Work? Why That First Half-Tank Seems To Last Forever" we learn how the gas gauge has been adjusted to fit our comfort zones. Shea writes:

Have you ever noticed that your gas gauge stays on full for quite a while before the needle even moves and then it moves faster and faster as it approaches empty? And then when it gets to "E" it sort of stays there for a while until the low warning light comes on ...?

It turns out it's partially your fault that gas gauges work that way.

The engineers calibrate them to do that. Why? Because you, the customer, have told them that's the way you like it. We spoke with Phil Pierron, an engineer at Ford (his title is actually "Technical Expert for Systems Engineering in Core Fuel Systems), who told us, "Our customers really didn't want to run out of fuel when they hit 'E.' Customers do want some amount of fuel when they get to 'E.'"

Apparently, consumer surveys indicate that people don't like seeing the needle depart from "F" right away either ... . According to Pierron, "Customers want it to say on full for an amount of time." This gives them the illusion that they are getting better fuel mileage or at least not immediately burning through that expensive tank of petrol they just bought, even if they quite literally are. ...

And while customers want there to be a "reserve" of gasoline available when they reach the empty mark ... they don't want too much of a reserve. Otherwise, they will complain that their 20-gallon tank only takes 15 gallons when filling up from empty. Apparently, there is a sweet spot where customers are happy to be fooled by their gas gauges, but not too much. We customers sure are a fickle bunch.

The engineer's job should be to make things more accurate and efficient, but in this case he has to play psychologist to keep customers happy.

Who would have thought the gas gauge would reveal human nature so well. Jesus says the truth will set you free but the truth about our sin is always uncomfortable. No likes to be corrected especially in front of others. It's humiliating. And yet how much more humiliating was it for Jesus to be paraded naked, spit upon, mocked, beaten, nailed to a cross on full display in the most undignified way as a criminal and then die for sins not His own. Jesus held nothing back which means we don't have to either. Our sins are disobedience to the Word. If we are ever to experience deep faith one has to stop being disobedient and be completely honest about their sins with Jesus. We can't just correct the sins that are easy to get rid of like the clothes we send to Good Will. We are to be rid of the ones that are hard to let go of too. You know the kind. The sins that you don't want others to see. Idols you are afraid of losing most and most

likely to protect and be defensive about. The ones that when someone gets too close makes something inside rattle. Jesus already knows them. The gas gauge has been warning you that it can't stay this way and still make it home. "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." But then another truth comes to light in this verse. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8-9).

When our faith gets stranded on the side of the road God's mercy in Jesus gets us back on the road headed in the right direction. By grace we are called trust in His Word, live that Word, and by that Word learn to give better attention to that fuel gauge of our faith. The Word is the fuel. The Word is our salvation and because of it we will make it all the way home. So, why would any of us just get by on E when Jesus invites us to have life in full?

And now the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look on You with His Favor and give you peace in Jesus. Amen.

Pastor Matt Woods  
John 3:30