

COMMENTS/QUESTIONS ON THE LESSONS FOR AUGUST 24, 2025

Isaiah 58:9b-14

- Isaiah 56-66 is likely written after the return from the Babylonian Exile and is often referred to as Third Isaiah in scholarly circles. As they have returned to the land of Israel, the prophet encourages them to renew their faith, to make sure that their outward actions of justice match their worship of God.
- Though the prophet refers to practices done on the Sabbath, it expands our own conception of Sabbath. Sabbath is not about what you do or don't do on Sunday (or Saturday). It is about preparing for your life throughout the week. Where do these words challenge you? What practices or behaviors do these words call you to change?

Psalms 103:1-8

- This psalm gives several descriptions of who God is. So, God ...
 - Forgives all our sins.
 - Heals all our diseases.
 - Redeems our life from the grave.
 - Crowns us with steadfast love and mercy.
 - Satisfies our desires with good things.
 - Provides justice for all who are oppressed.
 - Is full of compassion and mercy, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
- So given this description of God, what does it mean to "bless the Lord"? Blessing the Lord means more than just praising God in prayer or song. Blessing the Lord means living a life that conforms with God's ways and works. So if God is full of compassion and mercy, then we are to be full of compassion and mercy. Looking over the list of God's attributes from this psalm, how are you doing living these out? Which ones are easier for you? Which ones are more difficult? What can encourage you in your walk of faith?

Hebrews 12:18-29

- The writer of Hebrews presents a stark contrast here between two realities, represented by two mountains. The first (unnamed) is Mt. Sinai – the place of the law – and the second is Mt. Zion – the place of (new) Jerusalem. Note the differences between the two:

You have not come to [Mt. Sinai]

- Something that can be touched
- A blazing fire
- Darkness
- Gloom
- Tempest
- The sound of the trumpet
- A voice whose words made the hearers beg that not another word be spoken to them

But you have come to Mt. Zion

- City of the living God
- The heavenly Jerusalem
- Innumerable angels in festal gathering
- The assembly of the firstborn
- God the judge of all
- The spirits of the righteous made perfect
- Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant
- The sprinkled blood that speaks a better word

As you look over these two lists, which mountain do you want to be a part of? How do we make the choice each day to be a part of that mountain?

- The LaughingBird version of verse 26 reads: "and you have arrived to join them, for it is here that all those who committed themselves to doing right are finally made complete in love and integrity." This vision is meant to inspire us to greater love and integrity. What does that mean for you?

Luke 13: 10-17

- Jesus emphasizes what the Sabbath is about. It is not about following a list of restrictions for a Saturday or Sunday. It is about loosing and freeing one another from any bondage. It is about setting things right.
- Jesus heals the woman so that she can "stand up straight." We are called to unburden people, give them worth and dignity, so that they might stand straight as well. How can we do this?
- Note the passive-aggressive nature of the synagogue leader. He does not address Jesus directly, but rather implicates him with an address to the crowd. This is not spiritual or mature behavior, and Jesus addresses this directly – which Jesus makes clear that we all should do in Matthew 18.
- When do we get mixed up in rules and regulations rather than seeking to live our lives by faith and in the Spirit.