**Session 1**

***Scripture Memory Challenge***

**11-12 September 2023**

**A Recurring Theme –** We finished up the Bible study year last spring by watching the DVD *Before the Wrath,* which shed light on the timing of the Rapture by comparing it with Galilean wedding customs. We saw that every Jewish bride felt an urgency to be ready at all times because her husband could come for her at any moment…just as soon as his father said, “Go get your bride!” The eager anticipation to see her bridegroom and the urgency to be ready to go with him grew keener every day, especially as the one year anniversary of her betrothal drew near. The one thing ringing in her mind was, **“It won’t be long now: be prepared!”**

Then came a week of VBS in June. It was a good week, but also had its challenges. The oldest group of youngsters included some very rowdy young men, and we recognize that this will probably continue to be a characteristic of young people who come through our doors in the future. So if we want to present the claims of Christ effectively, we must be prepared to deal with disciplinary challenges effectively. In other words, **“Challenges are coming: be prepared!”**

Another phenomenon that has happened over the course of the past year is that many new people have started attending our services. Some of them are just visiting, but others are actively searching for a new church home. Some of these new attendees have proved to be mature believers who have since become members and are finding ways to become actively involved in ministry here at FBC. Others of them have come with deep needs, and we must have the eyes of discernment to see them as Christ does, with a heart of love that desires to reach out. **New people bring new dynamics to the church body, and we must be prepared to recognize what God is doing in our midst and join Him in His work.**

Last but by no means least, Caleb Williams has been teaching an excellent series of messages from the book of 1 Peter this summer. As he has worked through the book, one message seems to stand out over and over again, a clarion call to **be prepared.** Consider these verses:

* *1:13 – “Therefore,* ***PREPARING YOUR MIND*** *for action…”*
* *3:15 – “Always* ***BE PREPARED*** *to make a defense to anyone who asks you…”*
* *4:1 – “Arm yourselves [i.e.* ***PREPARE YOURSELVES****] with the same way of thinking (as Christ has)…”*

So as I have reflected on events of the past several months, I sense a growing urgency *to be prepared*: for Christ’s return…for service and outreach…to find ways to bless those with needs around us…to meet the challenges of our day. And that raises the question…

**How DO We “Prepare Ourselves”? –** We find clues in Peter’s writings. He ended his second letter by exhorting his readers to “GROW in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” And his first letter contained the command for us to prepare our minds for action. And how do we do that? By becoming more and more intimately acquainted with His Word. It seems self evident that if we are to KNOW it, we must *study* it…and *memorize* it.

Do you feel an immediate sense of push back against that last statement? Bible *study*—YES! We are so excited to be back again, ready to dive into Exodus with Jen Wilkin leading the way. But Scripture *memory*—I CAN’T! I’m TOO OLD! I try, and it DOESN’T STICK! So let’s think about those three things:

* I CAN’T – Really? I’ll bet if we went around the room, each one of us could tell about something new we had learned recently, whether it is how to print on both sides of a sheet of paper without having to manually flip the pages over or how to cook bacon in the oven or what a real “blue dragon” is. The truth is that we have to prepare our minds to learn by telling ourselves the truth: “I can’t” is a statement of unbelief when we stop there. But we can retrain ourselves to say, “On my own I can’t…but I CAN DO ALL THINGS through Christ who strengthens me.”
* I’M TOO OLD – Really? What is the age limit on obeying God? on growing in grace and knowledge of Christ? on being kind to one another? When do we get to stop doing all the things we know God wants us to do?
* I TRY, AND IT DOESN’T STICK – The problem with this statement is that we demand perfection of ourselves when what God wants is just our loving obedience. Putting in time to work on His Word pleases God, even if we can’t say some verse word for word perfectly. This shouldn’t become an excuse to be sloppy in our work, but we can know that every minute spent with Him is worth it. And we also have the promise that the Holy Spirit will recall things to our minds when and if it is crucial for the exact wording to be there.

**Tricks of the Trade –** So let’s pray about this issue and commit ourselves to GROWING in this area of our lives. We may not ever reach perfection this side of the grave, but we can, by God’s grace, become more proficient than we were last year…or last month…or even yesterday. And we will be looking at ways to help make those verses stick. Some of these methods may be new to you and others may be familiar ones that you used with your kids. Guess what? They work for adults, too! We’re going to start off with using hand motions to memorize the 10 Commandments in order. They are found on page 36 of the workbook.

**A Final Word** – On page 10 of the workbook, Jen Wilkin makes an interesting observation about “Storing Up Treasure”. She is talking about the process of Bible *study*, but her words apply equally well to the process of Scripture *memory*. In the middle paragraph of the page, she says,

In Matthew 13 we see Jesus begin to teach in parables. He tell seven deceptively simple stories that left His disciples struggling for understanding…After the last parable, He turns to them and asks, “Have you understood all these things?” Despite their apparent confusion, they answer out of their earnest desire with, “Yes”. Jesus tells them that their newfound understanding makes them “like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.” (verse 52)

A storeroom, as Jesus indicated, is a place for keeping valuables over a long period of time for use when needed. Faithful study *[Edie’s note: and memorization]* of God’s Word is a means for filling our spiritual storerooms with truth, so that in our hour of need we can bring forth both the old and the new as a source of rich provision.”