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REDEMPTION IS POSSIBLE FOR ALL

"The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit," Jm. 5:16-

18. Oliver Cromwell once famously insisted on his self-portrait being painted "warts and all". No attempts were to be made to conceal any blemishes or imperfections, but rather laid completely bare for all to see his likeness in it's essential honest truth. This is the phrase which seems most fitting for any who would make commentary or observation of the intended meaning of James' mention of Elijah being a man with a nature like ours...warts and all. Just as Mr. Cromwell did not want an airbrushed

embellished image of himself to deceitfully portray his physical appearance as being without any flaws, the Holy Spirit saw fit to preserve the biographical portraits of many of God's most faithful and influential servants in a complete bare and open manner, warts and all. He made sure we knew Moses committed murder and was unable to enter Canaan for not believing God when He instructed him to provide water for the Israelites by speaking to it. He lets us know how Abraham and Jacob were liars and that David was an adulterous murderer. We learn how Elijah had a suicidal mental breakdown and that Solomon was seduced by women to turn away from God. He includes the embarrassing moments in Peter's life when his mouth writes checks his faith can't cash in boasting he will walk on the water to Jesus

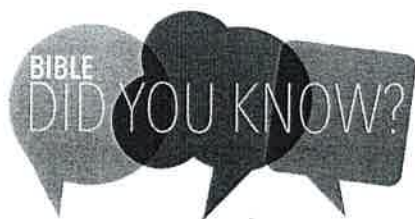
and that he would never in any circumstance ever fall away from following Jesus and the inevitable humiliating failures to follow. While we may have been satisfied simply knowing the Apostle Paul had a shady past that he was humbly ashamed of, the Holy Spirit made sure we know every detail from him standing by in assistance to those who killed Stephen to his breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, ravaging the church and dragging off men and women to be imprisoned. There are those who would prefer that we not know any of this. You can usually tell who they are from the uncomfortable squeamish look on their faces whenever these verses are discussed. There are those who feel that to publicly uncover the sordid past and history of faith's great hall of fame is to give them feet of clay and throw water on the extraordinary image their faithful lives portray and bring them down to a mere ordinary level of human frailty. That is a problem of perception. Is it your view that by following God your life can be magnified and viewed as being extraordinary compared to

those who reject Him? Or are you willing to demonstrate with all of your own personal flaws and weaknesses God's awesome power and influence to instill life-transforming faith? Is it your endeavor to view the follower of God as being extraordinary or is it your endeavor to glorify God as extraordinary in His ability to lead and transform the ordinary? There is actually a great benefit to knowing many of the ugly details which accumulated in the lives of many of God's greatest servants. When we come to realize that men like Elijah, Abraham, Moses, Peter and Paul were men who were essentially just like us...warts and all...it is reassuring to know that there are no extraordinary servants in the Kingdom of God and that faith levels the playing field. This is what James is trying to say by adding that little comment about Elijah being a man with a nature like ours and then proceeding to remind us of his faith in God to accomplish the extraordinary. Elijah was an ordinary man who through faith, came to see God accomplish the extraordinary. I hope we will be reminded of this when we spend time

focusing our attention on examples like Abraham and Sarah's life where they failed in their lives in moments to completely trust God. While they serve as examples of what to avoid, in the great big picture of their life as a whole, it is also encouraging to know they are not that much different from us, giving us all the more hope and confidence that God is able to change and mold us to great service through faith just like them!

"By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants as the stars of heaven in number, and

innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore," (Heb. 11:8-12). – Daniel Ruegg



"A man who hardens his neck after much reproof will suddenly be broken beyond remedy. When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, but when a wicked man rules, people groan. A man who loves wisdom makes his father glad. But he who keeps company with harlots wastes his wealth. The king gives stability to the land by justice, but a man who takes bribes overthrows it. A man who flatters his neighbor is spreading a net for his steps. By transgression an evil man is ensnared, but the righteous sings and rejoices."

Prov. 29:1-6



DIRECTIONS: Each first Sunday of the month, we will have challenges that you should attempt to complete by the end of the month. If we all, as members, complete these challenges, our church will grow in spirit and in number.

1) Seeing Christ In The Old Testament Challenge

Ephesians 3:4-5 *"By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit."* While the Old testament was guiding the Jewish nation towards God's promised messiah, it was the New Testament that finally revealed how Jesus is our ultimate redeemer. In light of this, as we study and read the old testament, it is amazing how we can see shadows and glimpses of Him and His saving gospel hinted at and revealed in the pages of the old testament. Spend time this month reading books from the old testament, and see if you can find further pictures and references to Jesus there. See if you can trace themes and patterns in various books that help shed light on the saving power of Christ. "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come." 1 Cor. 10:11

2) USING YOUR BIBLE IN THE WORLD

Share the following verses with someone who does not attend this congregation at least twice this month:

Isaiah 6:1-8

"In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, 'Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.' And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. Then I said, 'Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.' Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. He touched my mouth with it and said, 'Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven.' Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, 'Whom shall I send, and whom will go for Us?' Then I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'"