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A WITNESS TO THE TRUTH

and a warning against the deception in the last days
foretold by Christ

"Take heed that ye be not deceived"

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THE DOCTRINE OF CORBAN

Throughout the Lord Jesus' ministry He often found Himself in confrontation with the scribes and Pharisees as is seen in Mark's record:

"Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem.

And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders." Mark 7:1-3

This incident happened shortly after He had traveled through the land of Gennesaret, where He had fed the multitude with five loaves and two fishes and where in the evening He prayed alone on land, and seeing the disciples in their boat battling a stormy sea, came to them, walking on the water. All of these events were done not only to comfort and minister to those who came to hear His preaching, but also done in order to increase His disciples faith in His power as God's Son.

"And when they were come out of the ship, straightway they knew him, and ran through that whole region round about, and began to carry about in beds those that were sick, where they heard he was. And whithersoever he entered, into villages or cities, or country, they laid the sick in the streets, and besought him that they might touch if it were but the border of his garment: and as many as touched him were made whole." Mark 6:54-56

Word would spread from town to town of where He was in the countryside and people would flock by the hundreds to His side to hear and be healed. Along with them came the scribes and Pharisees from Jerusalem, over eighty miles away - not to be healed or learn, but rather to criticize and find fault.

What petty thinking they displayed to criticize Him and His disciples about the washing of hands after witnessing the wondrous miracles of healing He did among the multitude. It was done to challenge His authority in the presence of the people because He was not keeping their man-made traditions His reply in rebuttal was made directly to their habit of heeding their own traditions rather than the spirit of the law:

"...Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.

Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do.

And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition." Mark 7:6-9

He rebuked the scribes and Pharisees for following after the traditions of the elders - man-made rules and regulations of their own making and not contained within the word of God. These man-made traditions were created to enhance their own position and give them a form of self-righteousness before others and for this He called them hypocrites because they were replacing God's word with their own thinking.

He went on to draw upon the Law of Moses which taught to honor one's father and mother. Yet the elders had circumvented this commandment by creating the doctrine of Corban:

"For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death:

But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free.

And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye."

Mark 7:10-13

If a vow had been made to the temple to give one's goods, money or time as a gift, then those same goods, money and time which might have been used to help one's parents, was forgiven - they were not seen in fault according to the elders. They did not have to devote the time and care needed to help their parents for their vow to the temple came first in the elder's eyes. This was a clear violation of the spirit of God's command and more so of the spirit of love as taught by Christ.

To obey the doctrine of Corban was an empty gesture in God's eyes for He made that particular law to honor one's father and mother, in order to help and care for one's parents. This reveals the danger of man-made traditions which can nullify obedience to the spirit of God's commands given to teach love one for another.

What a danger it is, even today, to rely on habits and practices held over the years, which may be man-made traditions, rather than closely examining our walk and actions to make sure they are being done in the spirit of love and not from habit or the thinking of, “this is the way we have always done it, so it must be right in God’s sight.”

As the children of Israel were ready to enter into the land, Moses gave them some final words of instruction and warning:

“Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers giveth you.

Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.”

Deuteronomy 4:1-2

The scribes and Pharisees diminished His word by adding their own traditions to the law and revering these man-made ideas with obedience. Also by their own making, their traditions circumvented the mercy and love God intended to be seen in His law for the instruction of mankind.

This same warning is given through the Spirit by John in Revelation:

“For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:

And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of the prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”

Revelation 22:18-19

The scribes and Pharisees were so entangled in their own man-made traditions, that they lost sight of the more important matters taught through the spirit of the law, which all should heed as vital to salvation - judgment, mercy and faith!

“...these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.”

Matthew 23:23

Mercy, judgment and faith are the commandments of God - but the scribes and Pharisees traditions centered on those things which were

pleasing to the flesh and gave them the appearance of righteousness before others:

“But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.
Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows’ houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.” Matthew 23:13-14

This is a stern warning for those, who like the scribes and Pharisees, refuse to see the spirit of love within God’s word - that love which must permeate every facet of our living. If we replace the Spirit’s teaching with love of self or the traditions of men, we are abhorrent in His sight. Those that persist in their own thinking or continue to walk after the traditions of men instead of God’s spirit will not escape His condemnation.

M.C.S.

BEWARE OF SLOTH

Recently in a reading, Solomon’s wisdom makes us contemplate the concept of slothfulness, which means to lean idly, and its affect on our living:

“I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of a man void of understanding;
And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down.
Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep:
So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth; and thy want as an armed man.” Proverbs 24:30-34

As anyone knows, who has attempted to garden, it takes work to have a healthy garden. If we let our efforts decrease, our garden can become overrun with weeds. In Solomon’s example, the slothful remained idle and allowed the thorns and nettles to grow, and the wall was not maintained.

The nettles would choke out the cultivated plants, and the lack of a wall would allow animals in to eat up the young shoots. When one considers the slothful's garden, it becomes obvious that it will not be fruitful; and we can learn from those observations and should apply them to our own efforts. We all need sleep to recover from work each day, but we need to keep it balanced with the need to work and accomplish the tasks of each day. Otherwise, our poverty will come upon us as one who travels. We know when we travel or vacation we end up spending money, and are not working to earn more. If we have prolonged travels, it could bring us into a state of poverty. Likewise, our wants could come upon us as an armed man. The armed man means one who carries a shield, and gives the impression of a soldier. While actively part of an army, the soldier does not enjoy the benefits of one's home life, with good food and a soft bed.

Solomon has similar thoughts about becoming poor, in the tenth chapter of Proverbs:

“He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich.” Proverbs: 10:4

Solomon's thoughts certainly show that he believed idleness brings about poverty. We see this again in his writings as he uses the example of one who travelleth/armed in another reference:

“Give not sleep to thine eyes, nor slumber to thine eyelids.
Deliver thyself as a roe from the hand of the hunter, and as a bird from the hand of the fowler.
Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise:
Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest.
How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep?
Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep:
So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man.” Proverbs 6:4-11

This example warns us to be diligent and alert as the roe and bird in order to escape from those who seek us harm. We are also told to consider the ant which does not need to be told how or when work must be done to provide the sustenance needed to keep strong. The need to work for our achievements reminds us of the curse upon Adam after the fall in the Garden of Eden:

“And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast harkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”
Genesis 3:17-19

As man’s punishment after the fall, Adam was told that he would have to work to make the earth bring forth fruit, and would do so until he died. This could be the origin of Solomon’s proverb about the “slothful.”

The concept of “sloth” has certainly applied to obtaining food in the previous examples; but most of us understand that if we don’t work, we don’t eat! However, it would seem that there is a deeper, more spiritual meaning associated with slothfulness, as seen in Jesus’ parable of the ten virgins. In the parable there were five wise and five foolish virgins waiting for the arrival of the bridegroom. The five wise virgins brought extra oil for their lamps, but the five foolish did not; while they all slumbered, there went out a cry that the bridegroom was coming:

“While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.”
Matthew 25:5-6

When the virgins awoke, the foolish realized that their lamps had gone out and they had no oil to light them again. They asked for oil from the wise virgins, who refused, and the foolish had to go and buy more oil. While they went to purchase oil, the bridegroom returned and entered into the marriage with the wise virgins who were prepared. The foolish virgins returned and sought entrance, but the bridegroom declared that He did not know them. We are all then warned to be diligent and alert:

“Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.”
Matthew 25:13

By the example of this parable, we come to understand that it wasn’t the act of sleeping that caused the foolish virgins to fail, because both wise and foolish slept. But it was the fact that the foolish were not diligent or prepared that caused them to lose their hope. From the time of the fall in the garden we all have become dying creatures, and must toil to gain the sustenance we need to live. The spiritual meaning is that we all need to

prepare our minds, bodies, and spirits so that we can cultivate the good fruits of the spirit which are pleasing to God. It is to be our continual work to apply the spirit of God's word to reduce the weeds of the flesh, for they can prevent the good fruits from flourishing. If we cease to work in that effort, then our hope to bring forth good fruits is eventually lost, as seen by Jesus' example in the parable of the sower:

“Hearken; Behold there went out a sower to sow:
And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up.
And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth:
But when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away.
And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.
And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred.”
Mark 4:3-8

Jesus explains that the seed is the word of God which is received into several different types of people; and depending on the type of person in which the seed is sown, will determine how much fruit is brought forth:

“The sower soweth the word.
And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts.
And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended.
And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful. And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.”
Mark 4:14-20

We all hope to be considered that good ground in which the word sprouts and produces good fruit. In order to be that good ground, we must work to prepare ourselves for the Lord's word, so that it may prosper within

us. The ground must be tilled and worked to remove the rocks and other obstructions. We must remove the weeds, keep up the wall, fertilize and spray to kill pests. All this work will help the seed to produce the good fruit; but we do not know how much fruit will be produced until the harvest arrives. We do not know how the seed grows to produce fruit, but we do know that a slothful farmer's garden will not produce as much good fruit as that of a diligent farmer.

So let us be reminded of the Lord Jesus' example of how He labored to produce good fruit by relying on God to guide Him. We need to fight our slothful tendencies as we work to prepare our hearts to accept the word of God, hoping that our fruit will be good and plentiful when we are judged at the final harvest of the Lord.

E.J.M.

THE REFINING PROCESS

Solomon's words in the Proverbs give us food for thought, particularly as we read in chapter 17 verse 3 of how we may grow spiritually in mind and heart:

“The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold; but the LORD trieth the hearts.”
Proverbs 17:3

Solomon compared the use of the refining process for precious metals, to the transformation needed from flesh to spirit as one works towards the goal of pureness of heart.

In the refining process, dross or impurities are driven off by heat and to be removed, leaving behind the pure metal - whether of gold or silver, giving it an increased value with purity. In the same way, God tries man's heart through the fire of affliction, to bring impurities to the surface to be recognized and dealt with, leaving behind a purity of spirit:

“Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”
Hebrews 12:11

God, the Great Refiner chastens out of love, and if we have a yielding spirit, we will submit to His hand upon us in order to subdue our natural carnal nature within that through His instruction we may develop qualities of the spirit pleasing to Him.

“And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:

For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?” Hebrews 12:5-7

If a father does not chasen, he shows no love to help his child’s behavior improve and learn that his actions result in consequences.:

“Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence; shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits and live?

For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.”

Hebrews 12:9-10

We are chastened in order to grow more spiritual as God our Father tries our heart to bring to our attention what needs to be corrected in our behavior. If He sees something in need of change, He will reveal it. Metal when it is refined and finally purified is perfected, with no more application of heat needed. However, our refining goes on and on because we are flesh, and always in need of tempering and correction. As long as we are in this fleshly body and our minds subject to the Father’s correction upon us, He will in mercy, continue to guide and direct us:

“Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint: and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.

Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall:

But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.” Isaiah 40:28-31

It is God who allows us to go from strength to strength, for through

fleshly failure can come spiritual growth when we yield ourselves when chastened:

“Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them.

Who passing through the valley of Baca (valley of weeping) make it a well; the rain also fileth the pools.

They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.

O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer: give ear, O God of Jacob. Selah”.

Psalm 84:5-7

Ending this thought with “Selah” which means “value it considering the end”, David directs our minds to the end of God’s purpose and the blessing of immortality He has promised to those found acceptable at Christ’s judgment seat.

He knows our mind and heart and helps us to see where we are lacking and strengthens us to carry on:

“O bless our God ye people, and make the voice of his praise to be heard:

Which holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved. For thou, O God, hast proved us: thou hast tried us, as silver is tried.

Thou broughtest us into the net; thou laidst affliction upon our loins.

Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water; but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place.”

Psalm 66:8-12

God delivers us from affliction and places us into a “wealthy place” or place of spiritual comfort, supplying our needs when He sees a yielding in humility to the guidance He gives.

David goes on to remind us:

“The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.”

Psalm 12:6

If silver is refined once, it is perfect, but God knows we need His word every day as a guide, if we hope to be refined from the base qualities that inhabit our fleshly frame.

Those at the judgment seat of Christ will be there not because they were perfect, but because they submitted to the hand of God upon them, to mold and shape during their time of probation - fashioning them through testing and tribulation into vessels more acceptable for His use:

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.”
Jeremiah 17:9-10

God knows the heart, and in mercy reveals what lies within to us, that we may change as needed according to His Word. How thankful we should be that He does test us daily, working towards a spiritual refinement in order that we may endeavor to walk after the example of His Son.

How did Christ refine Himself? In all matters He looked to God’s Word and answered His temptations with the words, “It is written” as He compared His own thoughts to the path that God had set forth for His and all mankind’s direction. We too must allow His Word to guide and instruct us each day of our living if we hope to become spiritually refined and find pleasure in His sight as vessels meet for His use.

M.C.S.

A BIBLE CLASS

“THOU WILT REVIVE ME”

“Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me: thou shalt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and thy right hand shall save me.”
Psalm 138:7

This consideration is a psalm of David in which he gives praise to God for all His bounteous mercies granted. He mind is expressed here as he realizes that the Father is aware of the circumstances of all His children and provides for their every need, as he also states in verse 6:

“Though the LORD be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off!”

There is love and care shown for those who are lowly, whose view of themselves is not puffed up or lofty and who in humility attempt to quell the demands of the flesh within them. This same thought is reflected in the words of Isaiah 57:15:

“For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”

As these words in Isaiah relate, only the humble and contrite of heart are revived, or made alive again by God. Perhaps this also tells us that those struggling to walk in the paths of righteousness need reviving for as failure comes, there is the danger that the spirit man within could be overcome by the flesh. Only those of a contrite spirit, bowing down to God with the flesh broken and the man of spirit revived and growing stronger day by day, can hope to please the Almighty.

“For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.”

(Psalm 51:16-17)

David did walk in the midst of trouble and trial many times, and from past experiences of deliverance could say with confidence, “thou wilt revive me”. He no doubt remembered his experiences with Saul or his stand against Goliath, both instances when death was very near. In his everyday circumstances David knew God would preserve him during difficult times, and in the bigger picture had a firm belief in the hope extended of life everlasting as long as he daily fought to overcome his own natural impulses.

The 8th verse of this psalm concludes with the thought:

“The LORD will perfect that which concerneth me: thy mercy, O LORD, endureth for ever: forsake not the works of thine own hands.”

This word perfect in the above verse, translates as complete. David had a sure trust in God’s prophecies and promises, believing that His purpose would be accomplished or perfected concerning himself and with all who, throughout the ages had faithfully looked for the establishment of His kingdom. Those who have died in this faith share the hope of being

quicken or revived to stand before His Son in judgment and, if found acceptable, enjoy the glories of life everlasting. Psalm 85 verses 6-9 reflect this same thought:

“Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?

Shew us thy mercy, O LORD, and grant us thy salvation.

Surely his salvation Is nigh them that fear him; that glow may dwell in our land.”

In Psalm 71 can be seen within the words of David, the spirit of the Lord Jesus also, where it says:

“Thou, which has shewed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth.”

verse 20)

All are condemned to the lowest depths of the earth—the grave, and without a reviving by God have no hope of an escape from death. Here then is the ultimate mercy of God seen, therefore like David, the need is to submit ones living to the saving grace of the Almighty.

COMMITMENT

As we read Paul’s message to the Ephesians, we can feel his care and concern for those he knew as brethren in the family of God.

Chapter 1:1-3 says:

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus:
Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:”

Paul’s purpose in writing to his brethren, or saints as he called them, was to charge them to lay hold on that hope of spiritual blessings which

had been promised when they first embraced the Truth. His words in Ephesians I verses 17-19 summarize his intent:

“That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:

The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power,”

Paul hoped to instill in his brethren the understanding of how the power of God might be granted to help them in their living, as he points out in the 6th chapter the 10th verse:

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.”

These words used by Paul - strong, power and might when looked up in the Concordance, help us to a better understanding of his message. To be strong means to be empowered, power is translated as vigor, and might as ability. We could then paraphrase the above message as follows:

“Finally, my brethren, be empowered in the Lord, and in the vigor of his ability”.

Was Paul saying that to receive a measure of power from God was to receive the help of His Spirit to work in their living and give them strength to do the work appointed them? This thought of empowering oneself with the might of God reminds us of Paul's words where he speaks of putting on the armor of God as a defense against the destructive working of the flesh. Paul specifies what this armor consists of in verses 13-17 of Ephesians chapter 6:

“Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;

And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:”

These defenses of the spirit - truth, righteousness, peace, faith,

salvation and the word, are strong allies, yet if there is no real desire, no commitment all will come to nought.

We read an example of commitment in our portions of Joshua. Here was a man instructed by Moses, given a great work and responsibilities, who took up this commitment without hesitation, no doubt encouraged by the words of God who said to him in Joshua 1: 5-7:

“There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

Be strong and of a good courage; for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I swear unto their fathers to give them.

Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper withersoever thou goest.”

We know that Joshua did prosper, or as that word means, “to deal wisely” in the things committed to his care. He was chosen to do this great work, to take over the leadership of Israel from Moses because of his earlier commitment made when he and Caleb entered the land as part of the 12 spies. At that time he and Caleb showed confidence and trust in God regardless of the fear and faithlessness of the other ten spies. How much this example speaks to us of the need to recognize that all attributes of the spirit must be sustained by a sincere commitment.

When we think of the work given to those who trusted in the Lord, we remember the work of building the house of God. In Zechariah 8:9 we read:

“Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Let your hands be strong, ye that hear in these days these words by the mouth of the prophets, which were in the day that the foundation of the house of the LORD of hosts was laid, that the temple might be built.”

The injunction - “Let your hands be strong”, was to encourage them to make a deep commitment to the work ahead of them. Haggai 2:4 speaks to those who did oversee the work and showed responsibility toward it - Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest:

“Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the LORD; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the LORD, and work: for I am with you, saith the LORD of hosts:

According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not.”

We can see from these verses in Haggai, that God was promising those involved in this work that in exchange for their strength and commitment to carry out His purpose, He would grant to them His strength, might and power to enable them to carry this work of building the house of the Lord to its finish.

The spirits of men such as Joshua, Haggai, Zechariah and Zerubbabel who were not afraid to make a commitment to God, were similar to David, a man whose heart was stirred by thoughts of God’s might when he said in Psalm 8:3:

“When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou has ordained;
What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?
For thou has made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour.
Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou has put all things under his feet.”

David was moved in the spirit to write of the power of God and how that might can work on behalf of one such as himself. We likewise are to contemplate that power and have that same spirit which moved David in so many right ways. The example of David clearly showed that he had put on the whole armour of God, but had first donned the commitment necessary to accomplish whatever was set before him. Is the same desire there in us to serve Him in whatever way He asks?

Paul knew great suffering and yet displayed the same committed spirit to the work appointed him, seeking to instill it also in his brethren, along with the reminder of how much could be achieved with the help of God.

We too can be helped as we allow Paul’s words to enter our hearts as he says to us today:

“Finally my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.”

If that commitment is there within us, we can move with humble confidence that God’s power may work with might on our behalf.

“WHERE IS YOUR FAITH”

We read in Luke chapter 8:22-25 of the Lord Jesus and His disciples crossing the lake during a storm. As the Lord Jesus slept during the tempest, His disciples grew afraid and woke Him in fear of perishing. After He stilled the wind and waves he said to them, “Where is your faith?” As we ask ourselves this same question it requires us to examine our heart. We are given help when we look to the example of those of old who were helped because of their faith.

Previously we read in this same chapter of one called Legion, whom the Lord Jesus healed. After being returned to good health he sat at Jesus’ feet growing in the understanding of God’s word. He was healed because of faith. Some when they saw the miraculous transformation in this man were afraid of the Lord Jesus and asked Him to leave (Luke 8:35-37):

“Then they went out to see what was done; and came to Jesus, and found the man, out of whom the devils were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid.

They also which saw it told them by what means he that was possessed of the devils was healed.

Then the whole multitude of the country of the Gadarenes round about besought him to depart from them; for they were taken with great fear: and he went up into the ship, and returned back again.”

These circumstances of wondrous healing were allowed by God to test the faith of Jesus’ followers, particularly the disciples who needed to establish their faith to do the work set aside for them.

In another example, Jairus a leader of the synagogue came and besought the Lord Jesus to come to his house and heal his daughter who was dying. His faith was strong enough that he believed the Lord Jesus could help, even in this hopeless situation. As the Lord Jesus and His followers started on the way, He stopped to perform a miracle—again a moment seized upon to demonstrate the importance of faith. In this situation a woman with an issue of blood for twelve years had spent all her living upon physicians searching for a cure, but to no avail. Her faith was so great, that she believed she had only to touch the hem of Jesus’ garment and she would be healed: (Luke 8:47-48)

“And when the woman saw that she was not hid, she came trembling, and falling down before him, she declared unto him before all the people for what cause she had touched him, and how she was healed immediately.

And he said unto her, Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace.”

The crowd could plainly see the power that was evident when one had faith and belief in the Almighty. Meanwhile, can we imagine how anxious Jairus must have felt by the delay in reaching his daughter? And while Jesus spoke praising this woman for her faith, word came that Jairus’ daughter was dead— “trouble not the Master”. Jesus’ words immediately to him were:

“... Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole”.

(Luke 8:50).

These words were meant as a source of comfort to Jairus as well as instruction to those listening—fear not and believe.

How important it is to remember that faith and belief are all that is needed to be made whole. Yet what a test of faith this would be for this grief-stricken father. Even as Jairus realized his daughter was dead, he needed to still believe that with God nothing was impossible. Of course, not all had the faith of Jairus, for we read of the response of some in chapter 8:51-52:

“And when he came into the house, he suffered no man to go in, save Peter, and James, and John, and the father and mother of the maiden.

And all wept, and bewailed her: but he said, Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth.

And they laughed him to scorn, knowing that she was dead.”

Those that laughed were sent out of the room and with only the mother, father and disciples present lie took the girl by the hand and said:

“... Maid, arise. And her spirit came again, and she arose straightway.”

(Luke 8:54-55).

Can we imagine the joy and awe that Jairus and his wife would feel as they saw life given again to their daughter? How different was this power of faith displayed here by Jairus, from what our own is at times. Often the power of fear grips us and paralyzes our faith, making us doubt.

In Luke chapter 17:11-19 we read of the ten lepers that were healed by Jesus, yet only one returned to give thanks. Were not all ten healed? Yet the one who returned was “made whole”. There was more healed than just his physical body — his was a true spiritual healing giving him a deeper understanding of the power of God.

In another instance of healing in Luke 18:38-43 we read of the blind man who cried without ceasing as he learned of Jesus’ passing, pleading for his sight to be restored. Through his tenacity and faith he was heard by the Lord Jesus who said:

“... Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee. And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God: and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.”

Again, not only was there a receiving of sight but that man received greater insight of what was necessary to serve God and receive eternal life, for the Scriptures tell us “he followed him, glorifying God”.

Another demonstration of faith given to the disciples is seen in Mark 9:17-19:

“And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; And wheresoever he taketh him: and he foameth and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not.”

and verses 25-29

“When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him. And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose. And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out? And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.”

Here was a situation where the disciples were powerless to heal this child and asked why. The faith required here needed to be pure and strong, with the mind and heart focused only on the purpose of God.

In Acts 14:8-10 we have another example of faith:

“And there sat a certain man at Lystra impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother’s womb, who never had walked: The same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked.”

Here was a faith that Paul could see. How much that speaks of what faith must be like - not surface but vested deeply in God’s purpose and understanding so that it radiates in our living. We are reminded in Hebrews 11:6 by Paul:

“But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”

True spiritual healing can come only as we recognise the Lord as our Saviour and Mediator. As we think back on these examples that illustrated the power of faith to heal, it should help and strengthen us, anchoring our trust in God and His Son. If the Lord Jesus could ask us, “Where is your faith?” our answer should be “Only in Him.”

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