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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"

WHOM GOD HAS APPOINTED

TRUST IN GOD

IN NEWNESS OF LIFE

A BIBLE CLASS - THE SPIRITS OF THE PROPHETS

WITNESS WHILE IT IS DAY

GOD WILL NOT FORSAKE

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WHOM GOD HAS APPOINTED

Recently we have been reading from the book of Jeremiah - a prophet whose name means "whom God has appointed":

"Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations." Jeremiah 1:4-5

He was called to speak God's word to those of Judah and Jerusalem and convey His displeasure because of their disobedience and idolatry before Him. It was not an easy task and Jeremiah did not feel up to the challenge:

"Then said I, Ah, Lord God! behold I cannot speak: for I am a child." Jeremiah 1:6

Either because of his youth or a feeling of inadequacy, Jeremiah shrank from the work God had called him to do. Yet God encouraged him saying:

"But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak.

Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD.

Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth.

See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant." Jeremiah 1:7-10

God knew he was fearful, yet in mercy encouraged him, knowing the task would not be easy.

Knowing God's word, Jeremiah would remember those also appointed by God when they were but young men - men like Samuel, who was given by his mother when he was but a child, to assist Eli the priest in the work of the house of God:

“And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bullocks, and one ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine, and brought him unto the house of the LORD in Shiloh: and the child was young.”
I Samuel 1:24

Samuel’s mother being barren for years had prayed for a child, and when this child Samuel was born unto her, she gave him in gratitude to serve in God’s house. Upon delivering the young child to Eli the priest, she said:

“For this child I prayed; and the LORD hath given me my petition which I asked of him:
Therefore also I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the LORD. And he worshipped the LORD there.”
I Samuel 1:27-28

Also David, who as a young shepherd boy, armed with great faith and trust in God, answered the challenge of the Philistine’s champion Goliath (a seasoned man of war), slaying him and saving all of Israel that day from the Philistines.

Moses was also given the charge of bringing his brethren from enslavement in Egypt, but felt inadequate to the task appointed, being inexperienced in leadership or speaking:

“And Moses said unto the LORD, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant; but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.” Exodus 4:10

However, God in mercy gave him encouragement and comfort in this work by providing Aaron his brother as a spokesman and companion:

“...Is not Aaron the Levite thy brother? I know that he can speak well. And also, behold he cometh forth to meet thee; and when he seeth thee, he will be glad in his heart.
And thou shalt speak unto him, and put words in his mouth: and I will be with thy mouth, and with his mouth, and will teach you what ye shall do.
And he shall be thy spokesman unto the people: and he shall be even he shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God.”
Exodus 4:14-16

The record and remembrance of those who were also young, inexperienced and sometimes fearful, would help Jeremiah in the work that lay ahead of him.

God gave Jeremiah two visions to help him. The first vision given was of an almond branch:

“Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying Jeremiah, what seest thou? And I said I see a rod of an almond tree. Then said the LORD unto me, Thou hast well seen; for I will hasten my word to perform it.”
Jeremiah 1:11-12

The prime root for the Hebrew word for “almond” means to be “alert or to hasten”. This would remind Jeremiah that God’s word would bring about His purpose, just as He had spoken. The almond tree is also the first to blossom in the spring and would remind all after the winter’s barrenness, that God’s purpose with this earth was ongoing as He had established as its Creator.

The second vision given Jeremiah was of a seething pot:

“And the word of the LORD came unto me the second time, saying, What seest thou? And I said, I see a seething pot; and the face thereof is toward the north.
Then the LORD said unto me, Out of the north an evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land
For, lo, I will call all the families of the kingdoms of the north, saith the LORD; and they shall come, and they shall set every one his throne at the entering of the gates of Jerusalem, and against all the walls thereof round about, and against all the cities of Judah. And I will utter my judgments against them touching all their wickedness, who have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands.”
Jeremiah 1:13-16

This was the warning of God’s wrath to come upon the people, through the nation of Babylon from the north - for they would come down as a destroying scourge from God, because the people had worshipped idols and turned from serving the one true God who had given them this good land as an inheritance. These words of rebuke through Jeremiah were sent to punish, but also given in the hope that some would hear, fear and turn back to God:

“See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.” Jeremiah 1:10

Jeremiah would feel strengthened to carry on, even though fearful of bringing these fearsome words to the elders of the people, yet in hope that there might be some who would hear and fear and could once again be “planted” in the truth of God’s word. To the prophet, God also gave comfort and encouragement:

“Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them.

For, behold, I have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brasen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land.

And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the LORDS to deliver thee.”

Jeremiah 1:17-19

We too must look to God for comfort and strength when the troubles of this life threaten to engulf us. God has promised to provide a means of deliverance if we fight faithfully against the carnal man within which seeks daily to pull us down.

Just as He sent Jeremiah to plead with Judah and Jerusalem, so too in spirit has He pleaded with all, right from the beginning. Through His word He pleads with us when we are complacent or walk after the traditions of men’s teachings, which have crept into our lives, replacing the purity of His word alone.

Jeremiah was fearful and reluctant when he was first called, however he was encouraged and strengthened to know that God was with him and therefore performed all that God required of him. His example is a help to teach us of the need to have unwavering faith and obedience, for we too will be strengthened and comforted in our walk if we endeavor to please Him.

M.C.S.

TRUST IN GOD

In the fiftieth chapter of Isaiah, there is a general theme: TRUST IN GOD. When we trust in God we can be protected from harm, can be guided through strife, and be given strength as weakness prevails. The Lord's words through Isaiah questioned why Israel no longer trusted in God:

“Thus saith the LORD, Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away? or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you?
Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away.
Wherefore, when I came, was there no man? when I called, was there none to answer? Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver? behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness: their fish stinketh, because there is no water, and dieth for thirst. I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering.”

Isaiah 50:1-3

God declared that it wasn't He who turned away from His people, but it was Israel who did not seek the Lord for deliverance. God's hand is not weakened, and He will assist His faithful when they seek and rely on Him. Isaiah further develops this idea by stating that God also provides knowledge so that those who trust Him may assist those who are weary:

“The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned. The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back.”

Isaiah 50:4-5

With the knowledge that God gives, comes an understanding that all adversaries and circumstances can be overcome when we trust in the Lord. We can be helped to withstand great trials with God's help:

“I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting.
For the Lord GOD will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded:
therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed.

“He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord GOD will help me; who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up.”
Isaiah 50:6-9

Those who trust in God have a firm foundation on which to stand. They can be assured that those who seek to condemn them, will, in turn, be condemned by God. The words of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, to his people was to believe in God, just before God destroyed the army of their enemies:

“... Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper.”
II Chronicles 20:20

Isaiah asks who is it, that believes in God, yet walks in darkness, knowing that those who trust in God live in the light:

“Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD. and stay upon his God.”
Isaiah 50:10

Trusting in God is our way of showing that we believe in His care for us. It demonstrates our faith in Him, as we acknowledge that our fleshly ways are not capable of delivering us from death. To trust in ourselves, in regard to our eternal life, will only bring us sorrow:

“Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks:
walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled.
This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow.”
Isaiah 50:11

These final words of the chapter warn us not to rely on light of our own creation, because it will bring us to sorrow in the end. God has provided us with the Light that does not burn out; it is His word made flesh — the Lord Jesus.

Paul’s words to his Roman brethren exhort us to beware of our own righteousness, and to trust in God’s righteousness:

“Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.

For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.

For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth.”

Romans 10:1-4

As we think back to those who trusted in the Lord, we look to the faith chapter in Hebrews eleven, for examples of those who had great faith, and of their trials. Not all of their stories ended in ways that we would call “happy” - but their faith has given them a place in God’s blessed kingdom:

“And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise:

God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.”

Hebrews 11:39-40

Our faith and trust in God is what gives us the understanding, that no matter what circumstance comes upon us, we can be strengthened by it, with God’s help. Whatever path we are on, for good or bad, our trust in God is the most important, because to trust in our own ways will likely only bring us sorrow in the end. Because we do not know what God intends for us, our trust in Him cannot steer us wrong — unlike trusting in ourselves or man!

E.J.M.

IN NEWNESS OF LIFE

In recent studies from the book of Luke, we read of the scribes and Pharisees disputing with the Lord Jesus and the disciples. After Levi, known as Matthew, a tax collector for the Romans was called by the Lord Jesus to follow Him, he made a great feast in celebration:

“And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me, And he left all, rose up, and followed him. And Levi made him a great feast in his own house; and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them. But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?” Luke 5:27-30

When the Lord Jesus heard their comments, He answered:

“...They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice; for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”
Matthew 9:12-13

The scribes and Pharisees lacked any feeling of kindness or mercy towards others who they felt were beneath them in status. Not discerning the spiritual aspects of the law they upheld, they had no association with those not within in their own circle. In self-righteousness they looked on themselves as holy and in no need of spiritual healing. Without love for their fellow man in a spirit of humility, they failed to see the Lord Jesus as the Messiah promised from God’s word. Their own man-made righteousness fell far short of the spiritual righteousness that God looked for. The Lord Jesus pointed out the differences in these two viewpoints when he taught the parable of the Pharisee and publican who went up to the temple to pray, that we find in Luke’s record chapter 18:

“And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others:”.

(verse 9)

The Pharisee stood in the temple praying and began by thanking God that he was not like other men - “extortioners, unjust, adulterers or even as this publican”. He went on to proudly extol his own perceived virtues - “I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess”. While in true humility - so lacking in the Pharisee, the publican would not even lift his eyes unto heaven but, “smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner”. Because of the Pharisee’s total lack of humility the Lord Jesus said:

“I tell you, this man (the publican) went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”

Luke 18:14

The publican’s spirit was of one striving to be found approved, who knew he needed God’s mercy and forgiveness - while the Pharisee was so self-righteous he thought himself above correction or forgiveness. The Pharisees steeped in the law was devoid of the spirit of love as taught therein. Because of our flesh nature, it is easy to forget what we are like - that we are in desperate need of God’s mercy, forgiveness and grace.

The Lord Jesus made this clear, speaking to the scribes and Pharisees as recorded in Matthew:

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.” Matthew 23:23

They tithed those things that were minor in God’s eyes yet part of the law, while overlooked the weightier matters of the spirit message within His word, that were truly important in God’s sight. To illustrate this with a practical application, Jesus taught a parable of mending an old garment with a new patch:

“No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse, Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved.” Matthew 9:16-17

He was speaking of the difference between the old and new thinking of those who endeavored to follow after God’s word. He taught that the old must be replaced entirely with the new - replacing the letter of the law with the spirit of love as taught by the gospel of Christ.

The scribes and Pharisees were used to the old ways or how they had interpreted God’s word through the application of the letter of the law. It was what they were used to and didn’t want to change, for they failed to perceive the work of the Lord Jesus and His work, within the very law they followed. Had they heeded His word, turning from self-righteousness to love and humility, they would be helped to be preserved and not perish.

They revered their own positions as teachers esteemed among the common people more than they did for God and His Son.

Paul writes about this newness of thinking that all must adopt:

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”

II Corinthians 5:17

It is through this newness of life that the gospel of Christ is preached to us today, through the reconciliation of His sacrifice:

“And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;”

vs. 18

Paul was called to preach unto the Gentiles the new way - to be part not of the old Israel (as he had been taught as a Pharisee) but spiritual Israel, through belief in the Lord Jesus - to become a new creature in the manner that God proscribed, not after the manner of the scribes and Pharisees but in the spirit of that publican, seeking His mercy and forgiveness.

We are told by John in Revelation, that this newness of life as perfectly applied by the Lord Jesus in His life and ministry, will one day be found throughout the whole world, when He returns to establish the kingdom of God on earth:

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new.

And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. Revelation 21:1-5

M.C.S.

A BIBLE CLASS

“The Spirits of the Prophets

The subject under consideration is taken from I Corinthians 14:31-32 which reads:

“For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted.

And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.”

From reading the entire fourteenth chapter, we see Paul was exhorting those at Corinth to remember that whatever is done in the ecclesia, whether it be the speaking of tongues, teaching, or prophesying, it should all be done in a manner which edifies or builds up the church of God. We read of the confusion there was as Paul says in verses 26-28:

“How is it, then, brethren? When ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.

If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret.

But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church...”

It would seem from this record that many wished to impart their thoughts or knowledge to those assembled in the ecclesia. If all spoke or prophesied at once could any receive help in the confusion that would result.?

Paul also informs that even though some had the ability to speak in tongues, it did not serve God’s purpose if others could not understand. This is why Paul said, if one did speak in tongues it must be interpreted for all to comprehend. Without an interpretation, it was only words — bringing attention to the speaker and not to the word of God spoken. But if one prophesies or speaks in an inspiring manner (as the word prophesy means), teaching the word of God, this edifies or strengthens those that hear it.

Perhaps the key here is that all must be motivated by love as Paul elaborates in chapter 13 verses 1-3:

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing.

And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing.”

Paul reveals here that all work done in the house of God must be established in love—a love for God and His word, and a love for those who wish to be joined to Him. There are many examples in the Scriptures of prophets who were given the work of witnessing by God. Ezekiel was told that if he did not prophesy to the wayward of Israel their blood would be required of him. Can we imagine him speaking in a manner in which no one could understand?

“Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore, hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me.

When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to save his life, the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.”
(Ezekiel 3:17-18).

Returning to Corinthians 14:3 confirms what a prophet, or one who speaks with an inspiring message should be like:

“But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.”

To edify means to build up, and makes us think of the natural process of building a house. Just as there were many gifts given to the members of His house such as prophesying, teaching, healing etc. there was the need for balance. Is a house built solely of windows or doors or masonry? — no, but rather a pleasing balance using all of these basics in proper fashion, just as verse 40 of this chapter reminds:

“Let all things be done decently and in order.”

How would things be kept in order? Only by those with the gift of prophesying containing their own desire to speak out in deference and

love one to another. What confusion it would be if all who wanted to speak did so, giving no thought to others who also had ideas to share. Is this what is meant by “spirits being subject”? Though one may have a valuable thought or doctrine to impart to others, he would be careful to speak when appropriate, always remembering that the word of God he was privileged to share was to honor not himself but its Author.

WITNESS WHILE IT IS DAY

In our endeavor to partake of the word of God, we are helped in the book of John to see how to better understand and apply it as we use that word to witness. How much the witness of the Lord Jesus reveals what human nature is like in those who hear the word of God. We read in John 10:20-21:

“And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him?
Others said, These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?”

It is obvious that the witness by the Lord Jesus caused many to be convinced of the Truth, while others felt He was an imposter. Looking upon these circumstances, we know that the Lord Jesus was aware of what was in their minds. As situations were presented to Him, He could use them to witness of God’s Truth.

Going to John we read of a circumstance recorded in the ninth chapter which tells of a man blind from birth. The disciples asked Jesus in verse 2:

“... Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?”

Jesus answers in verses 3-5:

“... Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.
I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.
As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

The Lord Jesus recognized this as an opportunity to witness to the power of God through this blind man — one who was known to be blind from birth by his friends and neighbors. Jesus' work in life was to testify of God and turn the Jews back to the light of God's word. How much this speaks to us of the need to grasp the opportunities that are presented to us and speak of the word of God while it is yet day to any who will hear.

At the time this blind man was healed, there was a great controversy, for the Pharisees sought to discredit the Lord Jesus because He did this miracle on the sabbath day, as the 16th verse says:

“...This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath day. Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them.”

The Pharisees did not gain the support of the man's parents so then called upon the man himself in an effort to gain support for their viewpoint. We read of this in verses 24-25:

“Then again called they the man that was blind, and said unto him, Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner.

He answered and said, Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.”

How blind they themselves were that they refused to see the powerful witness before their eyes, and because of their foolish pride endeavored to cast doubts on the great healing done by the Lord Jesus.

We remember in the early days of Jesus' ministry that He said in Matthew 5:17-20:

“Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

Jesus’ work was to teach of the kingdom of God and the repentance needed so that those who would turn from their waywardness could have the hope of this promise. But to do this they needed to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. We read of an example of their righteousness in the example of the blind man. They were not interested in repentance but only thought to build their own esteem, not God’s. How much more pleasing to God was the heart of the blind man who said in defense of Jesus:

“... Why herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes. Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth.

Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind.

If this man were not of God, he could do nothing.”

(John 9:30-33).

In these few words, the Truth shone forth and frustrated the wickedness and unbelief of the scribes and Pharisees. The blind man’s heart was touched by the Lord Jesus and He sought him out later, (verses 35-38):

“Jesus heard that they had cast him (the former blind man) out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God?

He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?

And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee.

And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshiped him.”

Going back to our thought of using an occasion which presents itself for witnessing, we see how the Lord Jesus used these circumstances to frustrate the scribes and Pharisees, yet to those sensitive to the power of the Word, it was a powerful witness to strengthen their belief in the things of God. We can see how the scribes and Pharisees own self - righteousness prevented them from seeing the Truth, yet the faith and simple belief of

the blind man helped him to see in a practical way and also healed him spiritually. The Pharisees' problem was that they would not recognize the infirmity of their own flesh. Jesus' work was to bring men to repentance, break down the power of the flesh, recognizing its weakening effect on faith.

Jesus said, "the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4) warning that the time of opportunity is limited and emphasizing the need to redeem the time now by witnessing in every way provided, that there may be a seeing of God's way and an applying of it. We are used only as tools to work out His purpose.

We are provided with much help in this example of the blind man which can encourage in the work given. Can we respond in a way that gives glory and praise to Him? Only as we recognize the infirmities of our flesh, and seek atonement for our failures, can we take God's word into our heart and allow it to be a witness in praise of His glory.

GOD WILL NOT FORSAKE

Ezekiel was a prophet taken with the other captives of Jerusalem to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. While there, he was given a vision and a work by God and told to witness to the lost house of Israel. This record preserved can be a help to us as we read in Ezekiel chapter 8:12:

“... Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? for they say, The LORD seeth us not; the LORD hath forsaken the earth.”

In this verse we see illustrated the thinking of the flesh -”The LORD seeth us not.” How easy it is for the flesh to cause us to think that God does not see or hear, especially when we are in difficult circumstances.

There are other examples of this lack of trust recorded in the Scriptures, such as Gideon who, when God’s angel came to assure him of God’s presence in Judges 6:13 said:

“...O my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our father told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt? but now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.”

We see how natural is the thinking of the flesh that the Lord had forsaken. The circumstances of Gideon and Israel were sore, yet the work of the Lord came to comfort and instruct him as the 14th verse continues:

“And the LORD looked upon him and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?” And he (Gideon) said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house. And the LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man. And he said unto him, if now I have found grace in thy sight, then shew me a sign that thou talkest with me.”

Gideon’s struggle was a human one in thinking that God had forsaken because of his dire circumstances. Yet we know that though Gideon needed reassurance and asked for a sign, he is included in the faith chapter in Hebrew 11:32-34:

“And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; and of David also, and Samuel and of the prophets:

Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouth of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.”

In the circumstances of those mentioned above, there was warfare, not only against the armies of the aliens, but also against their own flesh, which caused some to question that God was with them, yet their faith did not fail.

To overcome the flesh and recognize God’s strength and help is important and a test of our faith. How much this was brought out in David’s life—a man after God’s own heart, yet one who struggled with his flesh. David cries out in Psalm 22:1;

“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?”

How easy it is to think one’s circumstances are so bleak that God has forsaken. Though David struggled, he was able to say in the 24th verse of this chapter:

“For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard.”

David cried to God. How important is this aspect of communicating with God. As we cry, we recognize that God is there and does see and will help, yet our cry must be consistent with God’s purpose.

As we refer to Ezekiel’s vision in Ezekiel 8:18 we read of God’s sentence upon Israel, where we are reminded that prayer (crying) alone is not all that is needed:

“Therefore will I also deal in fury: mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them.”

This reveals that there can be a problem in approaching to God, if there is a lack of spirit and understanding, rather than an awareness of ones' circumstances and the true desire to have God hear.

The cry of the Lord Jesus just before His death reflects this right spirit as we read in Matthew 27:46:

“And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, Eli, Eli, lama sa bach-tha-ni? That is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

In His hour of need, the Lord Jesus cried to God for added strength to carry on until the end. Although his flesh cried out for deliverance, His spirit was able to say with assurance -” It is finished”. The Lord Jesus was heard, as were David and Gideon. This was their spiritual victory. They recognized that God did see and hear them in their particular dire circumstances.

In Ezra 9:1 we read of a further example of God working with His people:

“Now when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying, The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Cananites, Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians and the Amorites.

For they have taken of their daughters for themselves and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass.”

Ezra's response is read in verse 3, 4 and 6:

“And when I heard this thing. I rent my garments and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished.

“Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away; and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice.

“And said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up into the heavens.”

Ezra recognized Israel’s dire circumstances, therefore he cried to God, recognizing that He would help and not forsake them even though they had grievously failed. We read in verse 9 of that same chapter:

“For we were bondmen: yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem.”

Ezra knew that God’s hand would be upon them to help, and to hear their cry when made by those who feared and trembled at His word. How much this speaks to us today as we look at the examples of these faithful of old, whose spirits were toward God. He looks for those who struggle against the flesh and strive for that spiritual victory of overcoming the adversary within so clearly illustrated in the example of the Lord Jesus who did not fail, abhorring His flesh and putting it under His control. We are given help as we recognize our position and “cry unto God” in the spirit of hope for that help, which will come from a God who does indeed see and hear and will not forsake.

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