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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"

JOB'S LESSON

THE SUPPLANTER

DO NOT DESTROY

A BIBLE CLASS -
BE NOT HIGHMINDED, BUT FEAR

REMEMBER GOD'S COVENANT

WHEREFORE DOTH THE WAY OF THE WICKED PROSPER

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JOB'S LESSON

In reading Job chapter seven this morning, he expresses his depth of despair. He had been the greatest of all the men in the East - perfect and upright. He feared God and eschewed evil. Then very hard times came to test him. The natural reaction of our flesh when something of this magnitude happens is to despair! He had lost his servants who were slain; his animals were destroyed by fire; a great wind smote the four corners of the house where his Sons and daughters were feasting, and all were killed. He had nothing left! And yet he could utter:

“... Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither:
the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.

In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.”

Job 1:21-22

There always is the constant warfare between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent - our flesh.

After all this, physical affliction came on Job. His wife said, “Curse God, and die.” Also Satan answered to God:

“... Doth Job fear God for nought?

Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land.”

Job 1:9-10

God created everything in the beginning, and saw that it was very good, including man. But it was man who did evil and disobeyed God’s word. Yet Job did not curse God! He was perceptive and trusted in God. Even so, with all his tribulation, he despaired:

“When I lie down, I say, When shall I arise, and the night be gone? and I am full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day.

My flesh is clothed with worms and clods of dust; my skin is broken, and become loathsome.

My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle, and are spent without hope.”

Job 7:4-6

Job agonized with the sores upon his flesh. He realized he was being sorely tried, and his mind wandered:

“Therefore I will not refrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.
Am I a sea, or a whale, that thou settest a watch over me?
When I say, My bed shall comfort me, my couch shall ease my complaint;
Then thou scarest me with dreams, and terrifiest me through visions:
So that my soul chooseth strangling, and death rather than my life.
I loathe it; I would not live always; let me alone; for my days are vanity.”
Job 7:11-16

These are feelings that we might have at times. It confirms the words of Peter:

“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you:
But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings;
that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.”
I Peter 4:12-13

Here is the realization that trials are not strange, but circumstances come about to try one’s faith and belief in God. Peter further helps us:

“... the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried by fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:
Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory:
Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.”
I Peter 1:7-9

How are we to look upon the various trials that come upon us? God knows what we need, and these experiences are precious! Trials allow us to turn to God for His guidance and mercies:

“Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.
For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?
And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?
Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of the souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.”
I Peter 4:16-19

Our minds are taken back to the Creation. There would be trial and testing because man is flesh. It allows one to recognize the need, and express one's desires and thinking to God, showing a trust in Him. There is a remedy! Let us heed Peter's words:

"Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.
Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you.
Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:
Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.
But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you." I Peter 5:6-10

Humility is what Job exercised, and it was to work as a benefit:

"I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee.
Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me.
I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Job 42:2-6

Job came to realize more fully his place in the sight of God. God knows our lives, each one of us, just as He knew Job. He comprehended what he had gone through, and what God was showing him.

Paul advised Timothy:

"... godliness with contentment is great gain.
For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. I Timothy 6:6-7

This message is very similar to Job's words:

"... Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." Job 1:21

Let us ponder these words: "godliness with contentment is great gain." God knows, and we are to realize this each day of our lives. We need to

find that contentment! This also is the conclusion to which Job came. Throughout his trial he had three so-called friends who didn't help him. But in the end, God said unto Eliphaz, the Temanite:

“... My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends: for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath. Therefore take unto you now seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you: for him will I accept: lest I deal with you after your folly, in that ye have not spoken of me the thing which is right, like my servant Job. So Eliphaz ... Bildad ... and Zophar ..went, and did according as the LORD commanded them: the LORD also accepted Job.”

Job 42:7-9

Here is a lesson: there is a need for perception and care, in an endeavor to help one another. Job's three friends made matters worse - they had not given love! Job interceded for his friends, and allowed true love to shine:

“And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.”

Job 42:10

Great were God's blessings for Job:

“Then came there unto him all his brethren, and all his sisters, and all they that had been of his acquaintance before, and did eat bread with him in his house: and they bemoaned him, and comforted him over all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him:

So the LORD blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning: for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she asses.

He had also seven sons and three daughters.”

Job 42 11-13

Such was the outcome for Job, this godly man who eschewed evil. After all he had experienced he could now see more clearly the ultimate grace given of God. Even though Job was perfect, he needed to see and realize more - a greater trust in God.

We, too must be content in our living, and apply that contentment in our lives. It can help us to gain in the spirit's way to reach life everlasting. Let us humble ourselves so that we can be acceptable in God's sight, and have hope.

M.C.S.

THE SUPPLANTER

As we read about Jacob's life we can understand why he was named Jacob, which means supplanter. Jacob also means to take by the heel, to trip up, or to restrain. From his birth Jacob struggled with his older brother Esau, as we see when Rebekah gave birth to the twins:

“And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb.

And the first came out red, all over like an hairy garment; and they called his name Esau.

And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob:...” Genesis 25:24-26

We know that Esau became a skillful hunter, and Jacob was a peaceable man who dwelt in tents. One day as Esau came home from the field, he was famished and requested that Jacob give him some pottage. It was here that we see Jacob taking full advantage of the situation, as he asked for Esau's birthright:

“And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright.

And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me?

And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he swore unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob.

Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright.”
Genesis 25:31-34

It is obvious from this example that Jacob understood the value and the blessing of the birthright, and the power it gave to the sibling who possessed it. By comparison, Esau gave it up for a pot of stew. Jacob took advantage of the situation and supplanted his brother.

The next circumstance when Jacob trips up his brother occurs as Isaac is getting old and becoming blind, and wishes to bestow his blessing on his favored son, Esau. Isaac requested that Esau go and kill some venison and prepare the savory meat that is his favorite; and upon his return with the savory meat Isaac would bestow the blessing on Esau. Rebekah overheard the discussion and told Jacob to hurry and get two kids of the goats so that she might prepare the savory meat as Isaac liked it. Then Rebekah and Jacob used the goat skins and Esau's clothes to deceive Isaac into giving the blessing to Jacob instead of Esau:

“And Jacob said unto his father, I am Esau thy firstborn; I have done according as thou badest me: arise, I pray thee, sit and eat of my venison, that thy soul may bless me.
And Isaac said unto his son, How is it that thou hast found it so quickly, my son? And he said, Because the LORD thy God brought it to me.”
Genesis 27:19-20

Jacob approached and his father felt the goat skins upon his hands and neck and believed that it was Esau. Isaac also asked that Jacob come close so that he might kiss his son, and he smelled like Esau because of Esau’s clothes that he wore. So Isaac was convinced by the deception and gave Jacob the blessing that was meant for Esau:

“Therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine:
Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother’s sons bow down to thee: cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee.”
Genesis 27:28-29

Esau returned soon after Isaac had given Jacob the blessing, and became angry with Jacob when he learned that Jacob had received the blessing, and Esau sought to take his life. Rebekah heard of her elder son’s plans and told Jacob to go to Laban, her brother, and stay there for a time while Esau’s anger diminished. Rebekah then came to Isaac and told him that she was weary because of the women of the land and did not want Jacob to take one as his wife. Isaac called Jacob and told him to go to Laban and find a wife among his mother’s people and then, once again, blessed him and sent him away.

As Jacob journeyed, he rested one night and dreamed he saw a ladder that reached to heaven, with the angels of God ascending and descending on it. God then spoke to Jacob in the dream:

“... I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed;
And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.
And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.”
Genesis 28:13-15

Even though Jacob and his mother had used deceit to obtain the and

blessing, God still blessed him there at Bethel, and promised him that He would be with him until God's work with him was completed.

While living with Laban, Jacob worked seven years so that he could marry Rachel, but he was deceived and given Leah first. Jacob had to work an additional seven years to eventually marry Rachel. After many sons and daughters were born to Jacob, he wanted to leave Laban and asked to go. Laban asked him to stay and care for the cattle because he realized that God had blessed him as long as Jacob had been living with him. Jacob chose his wages to be of the flock, and he segregated his from Laban's by color, as they had agreed upon. Jacob removed the bark off branches of trees and placed them within the watering troughs to make the cattle conceive:

“And it came to pass, whensoever the stronger cattle did conceive, that Jacob laid the rods before the eyes of the cattle in the gutters, that they might conceive among the rods.

But when the cattle were feeble, he put them not in: so the feebler were Laban's, and the stronger Jacob's.

And the man increased exceedingly, and had much cattle, and maidservants, and menservants, and camels, and asses.

Genesis 30:41-43

It was soon after these events that Jacob heard Laban's sons declare that Jacob had taken all of their father's wealth; Jacob realized that Laban's favor was no longer with him. God told Jacob to return unto the land of his kindred. So Jacob gathered up his wives, his children, his servants, and all his cattle, and left.

As Jacob approached his kindred's land, he sent servants to Esau to find out how he would react to Jacob's return. When the servants returned, they informed Jacob that Esau was coming to meet them with four hundred men. This distressed Jacob and he divided his family and possessions into groups, so that if Esau attacked one, the others would be able to escape. Before he met with Esau, Jacob sent gifts of cattle and then sent his family in groups to meet Esau; Jacob, with Rachel and Joseph, would come last of all.

That night Jacob wrestled with an angel, and Jacob would not let him go. Jacob declared that he would not let him go until he was given a blessing. The angel then told him that his name would no longer be Jacob but would now be Israel, which means “A prince of God”. By the time Jacob and Esau did finally come face to face, Esau embraced his younger brother and they wept together.

In all these previous circumstances, Jacob often took the initiative and used his wives to help make the conflict come out in his favor. Jacob's

method reminds us of Jesus' words to His disciples as He was about to send them out to teach the Gospel to the world:

“Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.”

Matthew 10:16

Jacob used these characteristics throughout his life as he supplanted those he had to. He never caused harm, yet often reacted to circumstances in a way that appeared deceitful, but obviously was blessed by God all along the way. His faith in God allowed him to take advantage of certain circumstances, not waiting for God's direction. This is a different way of thinking for most of God's faithful, but we can have no doubt that God blessed him greatly.

Jacob was allowed to take both the birthright and blessing from Esau; he took four wives and the majority of his cattle from Laban; he became a great people in the land of Egypt, and escaped with their wealth; and will in the future have his family's land be the capital of God's Kingdom on earth. There can be no doubt that Jacob was blessed in his supplanting ways, and he gives us an example of how we can act with faith and react to our surroundings rather than always waiting for God to show us what to do.

E.J.M.

DO NOT DESTROY

In our portion of the Psalms this morning, we have read two of the four Psalms with the title:

To the chief Musician, Altaschith, Michtam of David.

Or as it is translated:

To the one who overcomes, I PRAY DO NOT DESTROY, the pure gold-like faith of David.

In these particular Psalms, David expresses his need for God's help and mercy to defeat the enemy, both within and externally. In Psalm 57 we see particularly Saul's desire to kill David, who sought refuge. Let us turn back to the record in I Samuel 24:

And it came to pass, when Saul was returned from following the Philistines, that it was told him, saying, Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi.

Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and went to seek David and his men upon the rocks of the wild goats. And he came to the sheepcotes by the way, where was a cave; and Saul went in to cover his feet: and David and his men remained in the sides of the cave. And the men of David said unto him, Behold the day of which the LORD said unto thee, Behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand, that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good unto thee. Then David arose, and cut off the skirt of Saul's robe privily.

And it came to pass afterward, that David's heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt.

And he said unto his men, The LORD forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the LORD'S anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD.

So David stayed his servants with these words, and suffered them not to rise against Saul. But Saul rose up out of the cave, and went on his way." I Samuel 24:1-7

What great temptation for David, with his enemy by him, near enough to cut off a piece of Saul's garment! The internal and external enemy was at David's hand.

Going back to the 57th Psalm, David cried out to God:

"Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast.

I will cry unto God most high; unto God that performeth all things for me." Psalm 57:1-2

"Performeth" also means to complete. David's faith allowed him to see that the word of God would come to pass; so he was not to take things into his own hands. It speaks of David's great faith and belief in God's mercy - so much so, that he would not destroy himself. He would wait, and one day he would be king. Further, David could say:

"My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise." Psalm 57:7

We know that David was a man after God's own heart. His desire was not to be destroyed by his enemies without and within himself. There were times in his life when he should have been destroyed, but knew God's great mercy as he acknowledged his sin and greatly repented. His was a gold-like faith, pure and unadulterated, but one which allowed himself to turn only to God.

In looking at Psalm 58, similarly titled, David sought God's mercy

and grace, to be safe, and not destroyed, as David describes the nature of the wicked:

“Do ye indeed speak righteousness, O congregation? do ye judge uprightly, O ye sons of men?
Yea, in heart ye work wickedness; ye weigh the violence of your hands in the earth.”
Psalm 58:1-2

There is only One who can judge, and so David appealed to God that he would be sustained, but only as he allowed his heart to be fixed on the things God looks for!

We turn now to Psalm 59, again with the same title as the previous two Psalms - I pray do not destroy - when Saul's men were to watch the house in order to kill David. Let us go back to the record in I Samuel 19:

“And there was war again: and David went out, and fought with the Philistines, and slew them with a great slaughter; and they fled from him. And the evil spirit from the LORD was upon Saul, as he sat in his house with the javelin in his hand: and David played with his hand.

And Saul sought to smite David even to the wall with the javelin; but he slipped away out of Saul's presence, and he smote the javelin into the wall; and David fled, and escaped that night.

Saul also sent messengers unto David's house, to watch him, and to slay him in the morning: and Michal David's wife told him, saying, If thou save not thy life to night, to morrow thou shalt be slain.

So Michal let David down through a window: and he went, and fled, and escaped.

And Michal took an image, and laid it in the bed, and put a pillow of goats' hair for his bolster, and covered it with a cloth.

And when Saul sent messengers to take David, she said, He is sick. And Saul sent the messengers again to see David, saying, Bring him up to me in the bed, that I may slay him.

And when the messengers were come in, behold, there was an image in the bed, with a pillow of goats' hair for his bolster.

And Saul said unto Michal, Why hast thou deceived me so, and sent away mine enemy, that he is escaped? And Michal answered Saul, He said unto me, Let me go; why should I kill thee.”

I Samuel 19:8-17

David fled and escaped through God's being able to reveal the mind of his enemies. David wrote of this:

“Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God: defend me from them that rise up against me.

Deliver me from the workers of iniquity, and save me from bloody men. For, lo, they lie in wait for my soul: the mighty are gathered against me; not for my transgressions, nor for my sin, O LORD. They run and prepare themselves without my fault: awake to help me, and behold.” Psalm 59:1-4

David again knew that God would help him not to be destroyed! He sang praises and could rejoice:

“... I will sing of thy power; yea, I will sing aloud of thy mercy in the morning: for thou hast been my defence and refuge in the day of my trouble. Unto thee, O my strength, will I sing: for God is my defence, and the God of my mercy.” Psalm 59:16-17

David valued his place in the sight of God, and was not destroyed.

These Psalms help us, so that our prayer and understanding can establish our hearts in believing we will not be destroyed. We are helped to know His refuge and great mercy.

Turning to Psalm 75, we find the title is similar to the ones we have considered:

To the chief Musician, Altaschith, a Psalm or Song of Asaph - or,

To the One who overcomes, I pray do not destroy, A Psalm or Song for the gatherer.

Those who are found acceptable when the Lord Jesus returns, will not be destroyed, but will know salvation:

“For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south.
But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another.”
Psalm 75:6-7

It is God who will judge in the final judgment.

Our prayer, like David's, should be in recognition that we fail, and fall far short; yet we trust in God. So David prayed faithfully not to be destroyed. There is one other Psalm 50, entitled “A Psalm of Asaph (the gatherer):

“THE mighty God, even the LORD, hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof.
Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined.
Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him.

He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people.

Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.

And the heavens shall declare his righteousness: for God is judge himself. Selah.”
Psalm 50:1-6

This is why David appealed to God, in allowing Him to guide and direct his life in the way of Truth.

He sought repentance, revealing his faith — a belief in God, and God only. For it is only God Himself who will judge.

M.C.S.

A BIBLE CLASS

“Be not highminded, but fear”
Romans 11:20

Paul here speaks to his Gentile brethren at Rome, concerning their relationship to the Jews- those first offered the hope of eternal life. He refers to Israel as the original branches which because of unbelief were broken off, allowing the Gentiles to be grafted in:

“And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree;
Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee.

Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I grafted in.

Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear.”

Romans 11:17-20.

Some of the Roman brethren may have thought themselves superior to the Jews who had spurned the Lord Jesus as the Son of God, thus losing their hope of life. Paul explained that God’s grace was extended to any - Jew or Gentile, who would grasp the gospel message through a confessed belief In the Lord Jesus Christ

“For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.

And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:"
Romans 11:25-26

He had reminded them earlier of what defined a Jew according to the Spirit:

For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:
But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God."
Romans 2:28-29.

No flesh may glory before God and a true Jew is one circumcised not after the manner prescribed by Law, but as the Spirit dictates - a heart endeavoring to cut off all fleshly impulses.

As the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul's work was to bring any who might hear and fear to the hope of Israel. This meant first perceiving God's special relationship with Israel, and the resulting blessing now extended to any desiring to be in spirit, a Jew. Our verse, "Be not highminded but fear", warns of how fleshly pride can rear up and if not subdued, eventually rob one of life eternal:

"For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.
Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off."
Romans 11:21-22.

God knows man's natural inclinations, and that a Gentile brought into the hope of Israel could feel superior towards those who had lost this same hope through unbelief. Therefore, Paul under God's hand instructed that they "Be not highminded but fear".

An example of high-mindedness can be seen in Paul's epistle to Timothy:

"Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy:"
Timothy 6:17.

The rich may become highminded, feeling their wealth an achievement that sets them above others, unless there is spiritual understanding and restraint which brings forth gratitude and generosity. The Lord Jesus also warned of high-handedness as He addressed the Pharisees, "certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous,

despised others.” This attitude was targeted by Jesus as He spoke through the parable of the Pharisee and publican:

“Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying God be merciful to me a sinner.

I tell you, this man 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 18:10-14.

The Pharisee considering himself righteous, looked on the publican in contempt, displaying pride and high-mindedness. He thought being a son of Abraham entitled him to the hope of Israel, irrespective of his behavior. The publican on the contrary would not so much as raise his eyes heavenward, feeling himself unworthy of God’s forgiveness, leaving him a sinner. These two men were used by Jesus in His teaching as examples of pride and humility. The publicans were Jews used by the Romans to collect taxes from Israel and were hated by other Jews. Matthew, one of the twelve apostles, was a publican called by Jesus:

“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.” Luke 5:27-28.

The other apostles could have looked down on Matthew (Levi), but the spirit of the Truth counteracted these fleshly feelings, ever reminding not to be highminded but fear.

This is also a warning that we should be ever aware of the Truth as both a wondrous privilege and a great responsibility, and in gratitude should display a humble spirit in the fear of God:

“For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves; but they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.” II Cor. 10:12.

We have but one perfect standard with which to compare ourselves - the Lord Jesus Christ, who in humility and godly fear submitted to the will of His Father. As we honestly examine ourselves, we realize how far we fall short and need to apply the Spirit’s counsel to be not highminded but fear.

REMEMBER GOD'S COVENANT

As we read in the Chronicles of the various kings which ruled over God's people, the righteous reign of Hezekiah provides an important lesson to us who are striving to serve God today. We find in the record of II Chronicles 29 that Hezekiah was twenty five years old when he began to reign and his reign lasted twenty-nine years. Further in verse 2 we are told, "He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord."

Immediately in the first month of his first year of rulership, he repaired and opened the doors of the house of God and ordered that the priests and Levites sanctify themselves as well as the temple. In these important initial activities of Hezekiah, he sought to lead the people of Judah and Jerusalem by example. We are told in II Chronicles 29:10:

"Now it is in mine heart to make a covenant with the LORD God of Israel, that his fierce wrath may turn away from us."

By these words, Hezekiah was asking the people to consider the position they were in because God's wrath was upon them. They were in trouble, they were a source of amazement and scorn to those around. He said to them as verse 8 says:

"Wherefore the wrath of the LORD was upon Judah and Jerusalem, and he hath delivered them to trouble, to astonishment, and to hissing, as ye see with your eyes."

Hezekiah knew if he could instill in the people a desire to remember the promise of God's covenant with them, He indeed would turn the cursing into blessing. Hezekiah did certainly inspire the people to turn from their waywardness and again embrace God's Truth. The response of the people in verse 31 was:

"... And the congregation brought In sacrifices and thank offerings; and as many as were of a free heart burnt offerings."

They brought sacrifices in abundance and kept the Passover to signify their desire to be at one with God. In this turn of events, verse 36 tells us:

"And Hezekiah rejoiced, and all the people, that God had prepared the people: for the thing was done suddenly."

The immediate response of the people pleased God and so the course was set to once again make God foremost in their living. The Lord quickly responded with blessing. Victories over the Philistines and the Assyrians were won, and now Instead of being captives, they were free.

How much difference the actions of one faithful man can work in the sight of God. Does this not speak to us of the responsibility we have likewise to move in faith? When we consider all those faithful spoken of in Hebrews, yet with the promise and reminder in regard to the need of faithfulness today, we must be awed as verses 39 and 40 of Hebrews 11 reminds us:

“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.”

How marvellous is God’s covenant, and how critical it is for us to respond in faith as we struggle each and every day. We must be constantly mindful of this hope which can inspire us in the midst of trial and testing.

Even though Hezekiah’s initial actions were righteous, his testing by God did not stop there. We know of his failure in regard to showing the ambassadors of Babylon all his sustenance and wealth, as well as that of the house of God. He constantly tries His children to know all that is in their hearts, to test the bond and the strength of their ties to Him. This is a life long effort, yet there can be help given to overcome if God’s mercy can be brought to mind. He will forgive if we again seek to do our part in the covenant relationship. If we can humble ourselves, God can help us to prosper, as obviously Hezekiah’s example reveals in II Chronicles 32:26.

“Notwithstanding Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the LORD came not upon them In the days of Hezekiah.”

Further in II Chronicles 31 verses 20-21 we read:

“And thus did Hezekiah throughout all Judah, and wrought that which was good and right and truth before the LORD his God.

And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered.”

He prospered because he sought God. To prosper literally means, “to push forward”. The thought of pushing forward reveals there is no room for sitting back or being complacent, but rather speaks of the life long effort there must be to please God.

There are many examples in the Word of those who pushed forward or prospered by remembering their covenant relationship with God. We

can look at David for instance in I Chronicles 22:11-13 as he spoke to his son Solomon:

“Now my son, the LORD be with thee; and, prosper thou, and build the house of the LORD thy God, as he hath said of thee. Only the LORD give thee wisdom and understanding, and give thee charge concerning Israel, that thou mayest keep the law of the LORD thy God.

Then shalt thou prosper, if thou takest heed to fulfil the statutes and judgments which the LORD charged Moses with concerning Israel: be strong, and of good courage; dread not, nor be dismayed.”

The message of these words is similar to those of Hezekiah. We can see the key to prospering can only be achieved as God is sought, and His word followed. David counselled Solomon to “dread not, nor be dismayed” because he realised the trials which life bring may do just that. It takes a heart of courage to push forward, trusting in God to guide and direct. As David confirms also in verse 14 of Psalm 27:

“Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.”

On the surface these words mentioned above, instructing one to wait on the Lord seems to contradict the need to push forward. However, we must consider that God gives guidance in which way to push forward, so that waiting upon Him displaying an alertness for indication, is the means by which the strengthening of faith occurs. James confirms this in the first chapter of his epistle verses 2-4:

“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into diverse temptations: Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”

Here we see the importance of patience, for growth in faith is not a one time effort. We see that pushing forward and waiting upon God, through seeking Him, go hand in hand. This was how the faithful of old found success, how Hezekiah was able to prosper when he moved in accordance with God’s word.

The message to us is unmistakable. Our heart must be intent upon seeking to maintain that covenant which God’s Truth provides, a relationship which depends upon our faithfully seeking His help towards the hope of serving Him eternally.

“WHEREFORE DOTH THE WAY OF THE WICKED PROSPER?”
(Jeremiah 12:1)

How understandable it was for Jeremiah to ask the above question in relation to the circumstances in which he found himself, while striving to respond to the call and work given him of God. God’s charge to Jeremiah is recorded in Jeremiah 1:5 saying:

“... I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.”

Jeremiah did this work faithfully, and suffered for it at the hands of those against whom he witnessed. In Jeremiah 11 verses 19 and 20 his inner thoughts are revealed:

“But I was like a lamb or an ox that is brought to the slaughter; and I knew not that they had devised devices against me~ saying, Let us destroy the tree with the fruit thereof, and let us cut him off from the land of the living, “that his name may be more remembered.

But, O LORD of hosts, that judgest righteously, that triest the reins and the heart, let me see thy vengeance on them: for unto thee have I revealed my cause.”

Jeremiah may well have wondered, when will God deliver His judgment on those who were evil? Indeed, why do the wicked seem to prosper?

Jeremiah was not the only one of God’s chosen people to question in this manner. David, a man after God’s own heart, reveals in Psalm 73 verses 3-5 this same mind:

“For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm.

They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men”.

Job likewise pondered this question in Job 12:6:

“The tabernacles of robbers prosper, and they that provoke God are secure; into whose hand God bringeth abundantly.”

Such can be the thinking of those struggling to be righteous, in the midst of sore trial and persecution, at the hands of those who are wicked.

Yet, upon reflection, each of these righteous men was aware of the ultimate conclusion seen in God's purpose, as David's words state in Psalm 73:17:

“Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their (wicked) end.”

and verse 27

“For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee.”

David, Job and Jeremiah all knew that the wicked would come to the same end - death without hope.

God has, since the time of the fall in the garden, placed the curse of death on all flesh, upon the wicked as well as the just. But in God's sanctuary there is hope. Such a perspective allows His people to value their calling and understand this as a trial of their faith. Since the beginning, the wicked have appeared to prosper as the flesh has reigned unrestrained. God has given time to work out the salvation of those few who in each age die in hope. Many more in the world die in their wickedness but without hope. How evident it is that evil will be paramount in the world, because it is a world that lives to itself and not unto God's ways. Such prospering, however, is destined only to the emptiness of the grave. This brings to mind the words of Paul in I Timothy 6:7-9 as he speaks of the wicked and their lust for possessions in this life:

“For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.

But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.”

Jeremiah's true understanding of his position in the sight of God and particularly in relation to the world around him, cannot be questioned. In verse 3 of chapter 12 he reveals this mind:

“But thou, Q LORD, knowest me: thou hast seen me, and tried mine heart toward thee: pull them out like sheep for the slaughter, and prepare them for the day of slaughter.

Jeremiah knew why the wicked prospered, but his desire was to be

found acceptable with God and therefore he spoke these words to Israel, who were in a wicked and rebellious state. He knew that prosperity in this life was temporal at best, a fleeting memory. David relates this same thought in Psalm 37 verses 1-2:

“Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity.
For they shall seem to be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb.”

and verses 9-11 also:

“For evildoers shall be cut off; but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth.
For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be; yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be.

But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.”

How important then it is to be mindful, as was Jeremiah, of the natural prospering of the flesh and its evil intents. It is through such understanding that God’s people can realise, as did David in Psalm 37 verse 34 of the necessity to:

“Wait on the LORD, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land: when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it.”

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