

BOOK 10

**The Path
of Truth**

Bible Lessons for Youth and Adults

the Path of Truth

Volume 10



Mesoamerica Region

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Presentation

Welcome to a new year of challenges to continue studying and teaching the Word of the Lord! We know, through the shared exercise of this valuable task, that it's not always easy to carry out, but we can confidently say that God is faithful, and will never leave us alone. So we encourage you in the name of Jesus Christ to start this year entrusting yourself into the hands of the Lord, asking for his guidance for the effective fulfillment of the great commission: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. ..." (Matthew 28:19-20). Don't doubt that God wants to make you his instrument in the area of teaching/discipleship.

This year we begin the first quarter with the study of two Pauline letters: Galatians and Ephesians." You'll see that it's very gratifying and edifying to learn what the Holy Spirit inspired the apostle Paul to write to the early churches of the first century. The second quarter presents a series of lessons that are very consistent with the needs of the current Christian church. Every day, we see how stress assails many lives; how conflicts are at the door of interpersonal relationships; how the diagnosis of an incurable disease has to be heard; among other matters. So we shouldn't ignore that God wants to guide us, through his Holy Spirit and his Word, so we can face these situations wisely.

The other two quarters, the third and fourth, contain a series of lessons based on the books of 1 & 2 Chronicles and Daniel, respectively. Studying these Old Testament books will be a blessing to our Christian walk. They'll help us reflect upon the impact of the decisions made those servants who lived before Christ came. Likewise, the lessons based on Daniel will help us remember that faithfulness to God at all times brings promise of eternal life in the present and in the future. Let's live in such a way that we bring gladness to the heart of the Lord!

This Christian education material has been developed with each of you in mind. God has placed in our hearts that feeling of working with passion and boldness to bring this resource into your hands. Our prayer is that you find in this teaching material a great help to give your classes. And remember that in each lesson you share, our beloved Lord and Teacher will be there. He's always close to his own!

To conclude, we ask that you keep in your heart the zeal to live sincerely and humbly, and prepare your classes with excellence, so that the name of God may be glorified.

Patricia Picavea
Literature Coordinator, SAM Region

Recommendations

Preparation of the lesson:

1. Pray to the Lord asking for wisdom and discernment to understand the biblical passages as you study, and to be able to apply them first to your life. Also, pray for your students to be receptive to the teaching of the Word of God.
2. Prepare a place without distractions to study the lesson, where you have a table or desk. It's important to have some tools such as paper, pens, pencils, eraser, etc.
3. As far as possible, in addition to the book *The Path of Truth*, have a dictionary, a Bible Dictionary and some good biblical commentaries.
4. Read the lesson of *The Path of Truth* as many times as necessary at the beginning of the week. This will help you prepare the materials you may need for the class, and be aware of news and other information that you might include in the lesson you are preparing.
5. Search the Bible and read each passage indicated.
6. Read the objective of the lesson to know where to direct your students.
7. Write on a sheet the name of the lesson, the points that you will develop, then write the title of the first point and develop your own summary as you study the lesson. Write and highlight the Bible quotations that will be read during the class.
8. Write down the meaning of words you don't know and look them up in the dictionary so you can understand the lesson better to explain it to the members of your class who may ask you questions.
9. If you do research on the Internet, be careful to get information from reliable pages that support the information. Remember that the Internet is an open space where all people can upload the information they want. Unfortunately, not all the information found there's true and reliable.
10. Prepare the lesson as dynamic and participatory as possible. This is a very special time where sharing experiences will help to enrich the learning process. By doing so, people will be more interested in the class; They will remember more of what they participated in or did together, and will appreciate being heard and taken into account.
11. Go through the Optional Questions that are provided at the end of each lesson. This will allow you to make the class more participatory. Select in what time you will be answering the questions.

PRESENTATION OF THE LESSON:

1. Arrive early at your classroom. It's important that when the first person arrives you are already there.
2. Change the position of the chairs (semicircle, circle, groups, etc.). This will make the group feel more comfortable to participate and thus break the monotony.
3. Before beginning the lesson, welcome your students. This will allow you to create a pleasant study environment. Be interested in people and you can pray for those who have needs.
4. Begin the class with a prayer, asking the Lord that He will allow you to understand His Word and give you the willingness to obey it.
5. Write on the board: The title of the lesson and the memory verse. Read the memory verse with your students several times. Once you start the lesson, write the main points of the lesson on one side of the board. This will allow you to keep in view the sequence of points you will teach.
6. Make the introduction as attractive as possible. Try to vary it in each class.
7. Keep an order in the development of the topic. Write the title of the first point and begin to explain it. Use the blackboard as a teaching resource to write down key words, answers to questions, etc. When the first point ends, write the title of second point and so on.

8. As you explain each point, you can guide your students to answer the questions. Allow them to provide answers and raise questions.
9. You can form working groups to answer questions. This will allow everyone to participate. Don't force anyone to participate, but make sure everyone knows that you want and appreciate their contributions. On the other hand, don't let a person dominate the session. In a kind manner, lead the class to listen to the opinion of other people.
10. Take a few minutes to discuss how we'll apply biblical truths to our daily lives.
11. Read the conclusion and encourage your students to study the biblical texts of the lesson at home during the following week. Invite them to attend next Sunday. Encourage them to invite other people to the Sunday School class. Finish the class with a prayer.

Other suggestions:

1. Goals and Prizes: You can offer a simple prize for the students who during each trimester learn all the memory verses and say them to the class.
2. Certificate: If you want, for the students who were faithful or didn't miss more than one or two classes in the quarter, you can give them a certificate. This can motivate others to attend faithfully.

Two Special Letters: Galatians y Ephesians

First Semester

The Gospel Brings Freedom

Living Only By Faith In Jesus

Blessed Freedom in Christ!

Guided By The Holy Spirit

Doing Good To Others

Chosen to be Blessed

The True Riches Of The Believer

Growing In The Knowledge of God

Saved By Faith To Do Good

God's Wonderful Love

The Church: God's Team

Making The Most Of Time

Each Other



The Gospel Brings Freedom

Macedonio Daza (Bolivia)

Passage to study: Galatians 1 and 2

Memory verse: “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God’s curse!” Galatians 1:8

Lesson Aim: To learn to apply the gospel and its benefits to our lives as believers.

Introduction

In the middle of the first century A.D., Galatia was a Roman province located in the central region of Asia Minor, part of what's now Turkey. In the letter to the Galatians, Paul speaks of the Galatian churches without specifying the name of any city. Paul defended the authenticity of the gospel he had preached to the Galatians, insisting that he had received his mission from God through Jesus Christ, and not from men. He also showed that his apostolic mission had been recognized by the apostles of Jerusalem.

As in the days of the apostle Paul, the gospel has been manipulated and perverted throughout church history by people who used it for interests foreign to the gospel. For example, it has been used to satisfy personal and institutional appetites in order to benefit some and gain from the ignorance of others. This happened in the Middle Ages, with papal authoritarianism and indulgences, with which they made a ‘business’ out of salvation. In the 21st century, ignoring the true message of the gospel, people are also taking advantage of the fact that we don’t always understand all the truth of the gospel. This lesson is important because it will help us recognize the true gospel and its benefits; and, if anyone tries to change the gospel message, “let them be under God’s curse.” (Galatians 1:8)

I. The Gospel Is Received By Revelation (Galatians 1:6-17)

A. The Gospel Is Revelation

We receive the gospel through an encounter with God, revealed through his Son Jesus Christ. He is “God with us.” The encounter that the apostle Paul experienced with the Lord Jesus transformed his life; He went from being a persecutor of the church to a preacher of the gospel (Acts 9:1-19, Galatians 1:15-16). From that

time on, Paul walked according to this revelation, as he indicated in Galatians 2:2. We can compare this to the experience of the Israelites in the desert; they moved when the cloud moved; and settled down when the cloud stopped; that was how the Israelites recognized the presence of the Lord (Exodus 13:17-22). In Paul’s case, what was important was his encounter with Christ.

B. The Gospel isn’t Received As An Inheritance

The gospel isn’t passed down through birth. Therefore, no one should declare himself an heir to the gospel just because he belongs to a Christian or Jewish culture (Luke 3:8). It’s not enough to have been born in a Christian home, or to belong to a second or third generation of Christians; although in part this helps us to get closer to the truth. Keep in mind that this gift of salvation only comes from Christ, in a personal encounter with Him (Acts 4:12).

C. The Gospel isn’t Something We Just Learn

It’s not enough to simply learn the gospel. If this were so, only a few academics would be Christians. Remember the visit of Nicodemus to Jesus (John 3). Nicodemus was a member of the Pharisees, a religious teacher, a sincere man who was attracted by the character and teaching of Jesus. But he feared what the other Pharisees would say if they knew that he was talking to Jesus, so he went by night.

So, when this Pharisee sought Jesus at night, the Master told him clearly that he needed to be born again (John 3:3). Nicodemus, as an academic and a teacher of the Jews, without a doubt knew the law was the Word of God. However, the Lord explained that this wasn’t enough; nor was it a guarantee to inherit the kingdom of God. The only way he could become a true disciple, to be transformed by having an encounter with God, was that he needed to be born again (John 3:5).

So, the gospel is a living and continuous experience that reaches all people, regardless of their social class

or the type of preparation that they may have had. The New Testament is written in the Koine Greek, in the simple language of the people, so that it could be understood by all.

D. The Gospel isn't Mere Tradition, Or Being Religious

Paul showed in his epistle to the Galatians his struggle against the Judaizers who wanted to impose the observance of the law of Moses on the gentile Christians, arguing that keeping the Jewish law was necessary for salvation. Because of this situation, the apostle Paul referred to his past with these words: "For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it." (Galatians 1:13) Paul identified himself as a persecutor of the church. This assertion is fully confirmed by Luke, who recorded that Saul (later, Paul) was present at the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 8:1).

Compared to his contemporaries with regard to Judaism, Paul surpassed many of them. Paul, in another of his letters, identified himself as "a Hebrew of Hebrews" (Philippians 3:5), which was the most zealous sect among the Jews of that time. Learning from someone who had gone from the ranks of the Pharisees to the gospel gave him authority.

Today, there are many people who want to place certain rules and norms on how Christians behave. They look only at the external things, that's to say, they're more concerned with the outside and not what's on the inside. Sacred ceremonies were emphasized in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, what's important is moral holiness. In other words, holiness should shine out from inside our hearts rather than just completing outward actions. God wants His law to be written on our hearts, as the writer of Hebrews states when he quotes Jeremiah 31:33 "...I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people."

Optional Questions

- What's revelation?
- What's its maximum expression?
- How would you explain that the gospel isn't a set of traditions, nor is it just a religion?

II. The Gospel Brings Freedom And Not Bondage (Galatians 2:1-5)

A. The Freedom Of The Compulsive Power Of Sin

In the first place, the freedom that Christ gives us is freedom from the chains of sin (John 8:34, Romans 6:5-23), and also, from the vain obsessive illusion that people can obtain life and freedom under their own initiative.

The gospel has the power to free us from sin and the consequences that sin brings with it through Jesus' death (1 John 1:7). This freedom begins and continues the process of completely liberating us mentally, physically, socially and spiritually. The plan of God's kingdom, prophesied in Isaiah 61:1-3, was confirmed by the Lord in Luke 4:18-21. All this demonstrates the complete freedom that Jesus Christ brings to mankind.

B. Freedom Is A Voluntary Act

Galatians 2:3 says: "Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek." God, through the gospel message, wants us to choose freedom, He doesn't obligate us to be free. People are free to make choices. Voluntary freedom means submitting ourselves to our Liberator. As Christians, we voluntarily submit to the principles and values of God's Kingdom. God respects each person and we're free to accept or reject His offer. Remember that salvation is by God's grace (Ephesians 2:8 John 6:44). God's gospel message is for everyone (Ephesians 2:8). Grace is a completely free gift from God, and the words 'through faith' point us to the human side where each person needs to accept that divine gift in order to be free.

C. Freedom Is Contrary To Slavery

Slavery is discriminatory, degrading and dehumanizing. While the gospel is liberating, it's not reduced to or subjected to the bondage of the law of sin. Those freed from sin come under divine fatherhood (Romans 8:15). This closeness to God causes the freed person to express that intimacy with God by calling him 'Father'.

The gospel isn't reduced to certain traditions and customs of a culture. In fact, it's cross-cultural, with a universal application for all nations and cultures.

Optional Questions

- Define what freedom is.
- Since you received the gospel, what have you been freed from?
- If you haven't experienced freedom from anything, what do you think needs to be released?

III. The Gospel Brings Justification By Faith (Galatians 2:15-17)

A. Justification isn't Gained By Works Of The Law

In the old covenant, there were general laws for the people, and also, specific laws for each transgressor, if they wanted to be absolved from guilt. However, those laws failed because humanity, because of its contaminated condition, couldn't meet the demands. Therefore, a new

agreement was necessary where nobody can be justified by human works. One of the Psalms says: *“Don’t bring your servant into judgment, for no one living is righteous before you.”* (Psalm 143:2). The New Testament Epistle to the Romans states: *“Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.”* (Romans 3:20)

Men and women in their fallen and corrupt state cannot please God by their own efforts. The illusion of legalism or moralism is that man can get himself out of his sinful predicament if only he obeys God’s commandments with sufficient seriousness. Although we cannot be saved by keeping God’s laws, it doesn’t mean they’re unimportant for us in our search for salvation. The law cannot make us righteous, but it can reveal to us what’s bad, because by knowing the law comes the knowledge of sin.

B. The Gospel Brings Us Justification By Faith

We’re justified by God when He forgives us. Through the love of Christ, God forgives our sins, our blame is canceled, our punishment remitted, and we’re accepted by God as just people. Thanks to the blood of Christ, there’s a provision to erase and absolve our sin. Through Adam, sin entered the world, and through Jesus Christ, righteousness entered the world (cf. Romans 5, 6) *“You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.”* (Romans 6:18)

The provision of justification comes through Jesus’ sacrifice, but there’s one condition, if we want to receive it - *‘It’s by faith’* (Ephesians 2:8-9). The human part is that we must accept that offer.

Optional Questions

- Write some biblical passages that mention that justification isn’t by works.
- How do you become a justified person?

IV. The Gospel Is New Life In Christ (Galatians 2:20)

A. “... I No Longer Live ...” (v. 20)

Paul demonstrated a total consecration to the Lord. This implies dying to oneself, because God perfects us when we put ourselves under His will. Consecration means offering all of ourselves to God. The power of sin in our lives is broken because we have died to sin with Christ. Death to ourselves with Christ is the only way in which those who are enslaved by the law can find freedom. What dies is the old selfish side of ourselves which is both impotent and desperately contaminated by sin.

Romans 12:1 talks about a living sacrifice, which is holy and pleasing, presented on God’s altar, to be consumed in the service of the Lord. This is the New Testament symbol of burnt offerings. Philippians 2:7 tells how Jesus gave us the example of humility by putting to the side His divine rights and taking the form of a slave.

B. “. . . Christ Lives In Me . . . ”

What immense security! This expression shows that Christ is the owner of our lives. In other words, He is no longer like the tenant who lives in the house, who at any time can be removed, rather, He comes to be the absolute owner of the house, because He already bought it with a price. There are other terms that express the essential place Jesus should play in our lives and the life of the church such as, captain, pilot, the cornerstone, and the head of the body. Consecration to Christ brings real value to our lives.

C. The Gospel Is To Live In Christ

Living in the power of the gospel implies a continuous dependence, a permanent relationship with God. If we walk with Him, we’ll lead decent lives. Living in Christ will show up in our lives as a testimony so that others may see the risen Christ; as Paul said to the Corinthians, we’ll be: *“... read by everyone”* (2 Corinthians 3:2). It’s a great challenge to be open and readable to neighbors, family, colleagues, etc. (2 Corinthians 3:3) In order to have a good testimony, to be *“read by everyone”*, we must depend on the Holy Spirit.

Christ, who overcame death, has all the power and glory. This same victorious God will also give those who believe in him the power to face the difficult situations of life; so that He may be glorified in their lives, and in that way, others may come to know Christ.

Optional Questions

- Could you say, like the Apostle Paul, the following: *“...I no longer live ...”*? Why?
- How can other people see that Christ lives in us?
- What did the apostle Paul say about the matter?

Conclusion

The gospel, which was announced by the apostle Paul, is a divine revelation and it has its maximum expression in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Only He, by His sacrifice on the cross, can give us freedom from sin in its many forms. In Christ, we’re now declared righteous. In Christ, through faith, we have been declared blameless before God. Let us not be deceived by the new indulgences of this century!



Living Only By Faith In Jesus

Sergio Solano (Ecuador)

Passage to study: Galatians 3

Memory verse: “Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because “the righteous will live by faith.” Galatians 3:11

Lesson Aim: To understand that the Spirit of God is received by faith and not by the works of the law.

Introduction

In the first verses of Galatians 3, we see that the apostle Paul was upset with the Galatian church; he called the Christians foolish. Supposedly, these brothers and sisters understood the meaning of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and were testifying to the blessing of the Holy Spirit in their lives. However, what they were doing disappointed the apostle. The Galatian Christians were allowing themselves to be influenced by some Judaizers who were making the gentile Christians adhere to ‘carnal’ practices (traditions and works of the law). Paul exhorted them not to depend on such practices established by Jewish laws. These laws contradicted the manifestation of the power of Christ in their hearts. They were encouraged to embrace, in faith and spirit, the fact that Jesus Christ had given His life on the cross out of love for them. Paul also reminded them that Jesus’ sacrifice was the fulfillment of the promise made by God to Abraham, and in the fulfillment of the promise, they would be made heirs of the blessings with Jesus Christ.

It’s through faith in God that every blessing is received, from Abraham’s time until our own. Our blessings don’t come through just keeping the law, but by faith in the redeeming sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Paul told the Galatians, correcting their distorted concept of the new life in Christ, that the condition of becoming God’s children depended on faith in Him, not on fulfilling the works of the law. Although it’s undeniable that the works of the law contribute to guiding us to a saving faith through the Holy Spirit sent by Jesus Christ; they should not replace faith.

I. The Holy Spirit is Received By Faith (Galatians 3:1-5)

A. The Unnecessary Dependence On The Works Of The Law

Paul spoke out very strongly against the Galatians’ weak faith through their constant dependence on the works of the law. They had fallen into the folly of letting themselves be influenced by religious practices (legalism) that supposedly would nourish their spiritual life. The Galatians were being influenced by Jewish traditions, possibly mixed with some pagan elements, and these were affecting their testimony.

We too must learn that although we have traditions and certain ‘attractive’ forms of devotion in our Christian congregations, these should not replace the legitimate faith demanded of us by the Lord. Many times, the vain effort of trying to be religious replaces true and humble communion with the Lord of glory.

The Galatians’ desire to keep religious practices that were not required by the gospel, for example, special dates or observing historical events (Galatians 4:9-10), had diverted their attention from the spirit of dependence and devotion on Christ. Having been justified by God, we don’t need to follow legalistic systems or traditional rites. Popular religion or mere spirituality aren’t the pathway to living in the freedom of the gospel.

B. The Necessary Dependence On The Holy Spirit

Sin separates people from God. The sinner, through his repentance before God, accepts the sacrifice of the blood of Jesus Christ as the only payment for his sins. God justifies the repentant sinner, regardless of

whether he keeps the law (works of law or Jewish traditions). Justification is received by faith in that unique and miraculous redeeming work of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is accomplished by the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:17, 8:11).

The church of the Lord should encourage congregations to live according to the works of the Spirit and not by the law. We must be motivated by faith and communion with God, who has adopted us as his children. The evidence of that communion must be demonstrated by the spiritual disciplines of devotion as a means and not as an end. This is what Paul was trying to communicate to the Galatians in order to correct and overcome the false spirituality that reigned in some of their hearts.

Paul was very firm in confronting this problem, reminding them, in no uncertain terms, of the justifying power of God in their conversion. Likewise, the apostle reminded the Galatians that when God worked through his Spirit in each of them, it wasn't because they followed the law, nor by any other religious or traditional element, but it was by faith in the God of promise and reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-19, 6:1).

Optional Questions

- Why do many people fail to understand the power of the cross and turn to other vain doctrines or philosophies? (Galatians 3:1, 1 Corinthians 1:23-24, 2 Timothy 4:3-4).
- How do we receive the Holy Spirit? (Luke 11:13, John 16:7, Galatians 3:2, Ephesians 1:13).

II. The Covenant Of Faith With Abraham Is Ratified In Christ (Galatians 3:6-18)

A. Abraham Reached The Blessing Through His Faith

The Old Testament also bears witness to the fact that Abraham was justified by his faith, not by his works. This experience took place during his encounter with God and obedience to His call, obeying all that God had asked him to do. Genesis 12:7 says: *"The LORD appeared to Abram and said, 'To your offspring I will give this land.' So, he built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him."* Abram, who God later re-named Abraham, left his country to go to the land that God had promised to show him, "... even though he didn't know where he was

going" (Hebrews 11:8). After Abraham arrived in the land, God announced that He would give that land to Abraham's descendants. As Abraham obeyed and grew in faith, God continued to reveal to him the blessings he and his descendants would receive. God told him that his descendants would be very numerous and that he would give the land to him and his descendants forever (Genesis 15:18-21).

God's promise of blessing to his servant Abraham was extended to all mankind, on the condition that they served, worshipped and obeyed the Lord. It's in Genesis 12:1-3 where the era of the redemption of mankind began: *"The Lord had said to Abram, 'Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.'"*

God had chosen Abraham and his descendants to be channels of blessing to the whole world. Since then, the key to being blessed has been obedience, separation from evil, and fellowship with the Lord. That's why the Scriptures also refer to Abraham as *"God's friend"* (James 2:23). This call implies leaving everything in obedience to the Lord.

Genesis 15:6 says: *"Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness."* Paul used the example of Abraham in his Epistle to the Galatians. Abraham didn't receive merit for his works but rather for his faith.

B. We're Blessed Through Faith In Christ

In the light of God's plans for Abraham and his descendants, there's no doubt that his moral character, and not his works, would constitute the basis of his obedience and constant validity of the many blessings of the Almighty to humanity, through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, God's blessings and promises for his children are still valid. Our mission as a church is to secure those blessings of redemption and provision for all those who join the divine purposes by faith in Jesus Christ.

Even today, we're brothers and sisters of Abraham because we too profess faith. We're blessed by receiving the grace that leads us to believe and to receive justification. Living by faith means that both Christ's redeeming and justifying work operates in each one of us for salvation, and frees us from every

yoke, whether they're legalistic laws, false doctrines, traditions or paganism. Jesus is the fulfillment of every blessing that the Lord planned to give to the world through Abraham, our brother. But this experience must come from a sincere heart, and not from superficial knowledge or merely keeping the law.

Optional Questions

- What's the promise that God gave to Abraham? (Galatians 3:8-9, 14, 22-23)
- Are you sure you have been justified before God? (Galatians 3:6-7)

III. The Law Comes Before The Promise (Galatians 3:19-29)

A. The Purpose Of The Law

Our inheritance as believers is based on the promise, and we'll receive it by faith, just as Abraham did. This inheritance doesn't just come from keeping the law. In the Old Testament according to the law, a man was considered cursed for dying on a tree, yet the One who died for us on the cross brought great blessing. In Christ Jesus, we're blessed and free from every legalistic or traditionalist yoke that the Old Testament covenant had placed over the people. The law isn't against the promise, but it acts as a catalyst to help us understand divine justice, based on Christ. The law manifests the external work of man, but in Christ, what's happening deep in our hearts will become evident.

Paul offered a clear explanation and understanding in Galatians 3:2,5 and Romans 3:20-26 regarding the role of the law. The term *erga nomou* ('works of the Law') is used by Paul to denote deeds prescribed by the Mosaic Law. Paul said that while just keeping the law cannot offer us spiritual justification, God the Father, and Jesus Christ demand every believer, guided by the Spirit, to fulfill the law of God's love to others. *"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ"* (Galatians 6:2). The law and justification by faith have different purposes. But justification doesn't annul the law. The purpose of the law is to guide us to Christ, pointing out to us what sin is, and showing us our inability to earn our own salvation. The law also leads us to an awareness of our Redeeming God and of a new path to eternal salvation.

B. The Privilege Of Being Co-Heirs With Christ

We have the joyful privilege of being free in Christ, the new law in Christ no longer represents a heavy yoke. He leads us in love through his Holy Spirit to put the commandments into practice as a result of the justification of our lives. Christ has baptized us by His Spirit, we're clothed with his holiness, and enabled to fulfill the redemptive purposes for which God has called us. The essence of our blessed heritage doesn't distinguish us from other races, cultures, etc. but rather, it unites us and strengthens us in communion with others, without prejudice.

The nature of this so-called 'New Covenant' commits us to a unity of true faith in Christ, as heirs of His liberating grace. We must be very clear that the Spirit of God in us covered us with His mercy when we believed in Jesus Christ and accepted His unique and wonderful work that freed us from all bondage to the flesh. So, let's be consistent with this gospel of truth, holding on to its sound doctrine, and living out the faith that unites all true believers. Let's return to the basic message of the gospel so that all those who are lost may come to know about Jesus, and through our faithfulness and spiritual authority, discover the true Creator and Savior, God.

Consider the illustration recorded in Luke 13:10-17 and reflect on the legalistic critique of the leader of the synagogue and on the miracle worked by Jesus. That woman wasn't only a slave to her illness, but also to the prevailing traditionalism of her people and her times. Because of this, she couldn't get up on her own, and was tied to 'religious laws' that prevented her from attaining the full blessing and healing of the Master.

Optional Questions

- Are you sure that you have already been redeemed from the curse of the law (by not having to fulfill it)? Comment (Galatians 3:10-14).
- Do you consider yourself, in Christ, as blessed and a co-heir of the promise? (Romans 4:13-2, Galatians 3:9, 29).

Conclusion

Currently, our traditions, although they may seem lawful and helpful, can weaken our faith in the Spirit, and prevent us from reaching the precious and great promises of our Lord Jesus Christ.



Blessed Freedom in Christ!

Raúl Soto (Chile)

Passage to study: Galatians 4-5:13

Memory verse: “It’s for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and don’t let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” Galatians 5:1

Lesson Aim: To know and express our gratitude to God for the freedom we have received as His children; to understand that nothing is by our merit alone, but we’re freed by Jesus Christ.

Introduction

Many times as human beings, we tend to forget who brought us to the state in which we are currently. In this lesson, we’ll study the true meaning of freedom in Christ, focusing on those issues that prevent us from fully enjoying this freedom.

To do this, we’ll inquire about the bases of a well-founded freedom, and how this must be part, not only of some moments of our life, but of every area of our being. Our essence as children of God is forged in the light of this freedom. We’ll start this lesson by understanding the magnitude of the greatest benefit of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross of Calvary, our freedom from sin.

The apostle Paul visited Galatia on his first missionary journey, establishing churches there as he had already done in other places. Unfortunately, some years later, he learned that the Judaizers had infiltrated the churches he had begun. The Christians were being deceived to such an extent that some ended up moving away from true Christianity by accepting Jewish rites and ceremonies. Paul realized that there was a serious crisis in these churches, which brought him much pain and worry.

That’s why the apostle Paul decided to reaffirm the doctrine of justification by faith, explaining to the Christians in Galatia the meaning of justification so that they could understand the true meaning of freedom in Christ and not make mistakes. Paul writes at the precise moment when this discussion was greatest. They needed to understand that they were living under grace and were not subject to the rite of circumcision. This discussion brought serious consequences to Paul’s ministry because he

was being falsely accused of preaching about grace without teaching these gentile Christians the need for circumcision

I. We’re Redeemed By Christ And Adopted As Sons (Galatians 4:1-7)

A. Slaves Under The Elements Of The World

The apostle Paul used symbolisms, such as the freedom that a child receives when he reaches the age of adulthood, and the symbolism of slavery. When we were children, we lived under the rules established by our family. When we reached adulthood, we no longer were obligated to comply with the rules imposed on us when we were minors. Galatians 4:1 says: “*What I am saying is that as long as an heir is underage, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate.*” Thus, a child doesn’t differ from a slave in terms of dependence on the rules established in the house, even when the child owns everything in the house.

As people, we’re slaves to the laws of this world, such as children who are subject to the established rules, or as a slave is subject to the rules of their master. Only the father or the master can say how long they were obligated to follow the rules, and only the master or father can say when they can be independent or free.

B. The Fulfillment Of Time

Galatians 4:4 says: “*But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law...*”

When the time was right, the one who could lead us from childhood to maturity, from slavery

to freedom, came to our world. This wonderful freedom came when the Lord decided it was time, because the conditions were right.

The Lord leads us from slavery to freedom. But, we don't gain this freedom on our own merits. Only Christ can give us this freedom when we recognize Him as the Son of God and surrender our lives to Him. The Father frees us and receives us as his children.

Questions

- Who were we slaves of before we met Christ?
- To whom should we attribute the merits of our freedom?

II. We're Free From Human Traditions (Galatians 4:8-11)

A. Influence Of Traditions

There are many people who are influenced by traditions. However, when Christ comes into our lives, He makes us new creatures (2 Corinthians 5:17), and this implies a change of direction in our whole way of life. Today we struggle with Christian syncretism, where many who, having known Christ, haven't yet left past pagan and idolatrous traditions behind. Many sing to God on Sunday, but on Monday, they dance to 'Baal', and they continue as if they never knew God. In Galatians 4:8, we read: *"Formerly, when you didn't know God, you were slaves to those who by nature aren't gods."*

When we accept God's freedom and give him our life, He becomes the only Lord of our lives. There shouldn't be space for anyone or anything else. When Christ gives us freedom from the bondage of the world, he opens our eyes and we realize who God is. Galatians 4:9 states: *"But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?"* There are many who, though free, are once again enslaved by past worldly influences. Also, many Christians, although they have known the glory of God, live tied to traditions.

B. Christ Cut The Chains

By receiving the freedom of Christ in our lives, we're free in an integral way. That's to say that we aren't freed from only some things, but it's a complete freedom. Therefore, we must recognize that Christ doesn't share His place in our lives with anyone, especially not with someone who kept us in bondage for so long. We must always bear in mind that Jesus Christ is the only Lord, and we must recognize Him as such.

The freedom of Christ over our lives enables us to cut all worldly ties, including ties with traditions, as well as our past, that have been contaminated by our cultural heritage. We're people transformed by the grace of Jesus Christ. He paid a high price for our freedom. When we're Christians who continue to live tied to the world, when even the culture and the idolatrous traditions are still part of us, we invalidate the work of Christ (Galatians 4:11).

The work of Christ is wonderful. The freedom that only He can give us had a high price, for He gave his own life so that we could be free (John 3:16). So, when we live a double life, letting ourselves be dragged down by the world, we invalidate the work of Christ in us.

Questions

- When are we really free from human traditions? (v.8)
- What things can keep us from being totally free?

III. We're Children Of The Promise (Galatians 5:1-13)

A. Signs In Freedom

In Galatians 5:1, we read the following: *"It's for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and don't let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."* Christ made us free and He expects us to be subject to Him and not to the beliefs of this world. He doesn't want us to live under the yoke of slavery. He wants us to live as true children of God, free through the blood of Jesus Christ.

Freedom doesn't come from belonging to a congregation, or from doing two or three things within a church. Freedom doesn't come from what we do or from the merits we may have, but it comes through the work of Jesus Christ.

There must be security in our hearts that we have been made free by the Almighty King, and that in that freedom, we shouldn't be afraid or retreat. Christians who have been liberated by the grace of the eternal Father must show firmness in maintaining their freedom, in spite of the temptations of this world.

Freedom is based on faithfulness. We're free, because Jesus Christ was faithful to God's purpose. To stand firm in the freedom of Christ requires extreme faithfulness.

Galatians 5:6 states: *"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love."* The firmness of the freedom that Jesus Christ provides for us comes from the faith that works through love; the love with which Christ freed us; the love that we must have for the freedom that Christ gave us.

B. A Little Bit Of Yeast Affects All The Dough

Galatians 5:9 tells us: *"A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough."* The 'yeast' in this text doesn't represent evil, but the false teaching about circumcision and the 'dough' represents the churches. The Message version of Galatians puts it very clearly: *"You were running superbly! Who cut in on you, deflecting you from the true course of obedience? This detour doesn't come from the One who called you into the race in the first place. And please don't toss this off as insignificant. It only takes a minute amount of yeast, you know, to permeate an entire loaf of bread. Deep down, the Master has given me confidence that you will not defect. But the one who is upsetting you, whoever he is, will bear the divine judgment"* (vs. 9-10).

Many permit a little element of false teaching into their lives and think that because it's something little, nothing will happen. You don't need much yeast to affect all of the dough. Similarly, for a life to be destroyed, great sins aren't needed.

Let's be careful not to leave a small door open for wrong teachings to come in! Sometimes, we spoil the work of Christ by granting ourselves the freedom to think or believe that sin can coexist with the holiness to which we have been called to live. Once we have been called to freedom by Jesus

Christ, He transforms us to live in holiness. In the life of holiness, there's no room for evil. And if we want to try to allow it, the only thing we'll achieve is that holiness will move away from us, and with it, freedom in Christ.

Galatians 5:13 states: *"You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But don't use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love."*

We have been called to live in freedom and not in slavery to the world, nor to culture or traditions. Once we have come to Christ, we no longer have to remain the same as we were in the world. And no matter how difficult the past in which we lived was, now we belong to Christ. He paid the price for our freedom.

The freedom that Christ gives us is complete, it's integrated into our whole life. So, He demands that we break all links with the past, with the world or with the traditions of this world. Now we belong to Jesus Christ; we owe him loyalty. We'll prove it by living firm in this freedom, knowing that we're children of the King of kings, and that we don't have to continue living as slaves of the world.

We must not give the devil any opportunity to be in any part of our lives. Remember, all he needs is a little space in order to betray us and make us fall back into the slavery of the world that seeks to destroy us.

Questions

- What attitude must we have in regard to the freedom that Christ gives us? (v. 1)
- What's the basis of our freedom? What's the element that will allow us to be firm in our freedom? (v. 6)
- What's the purpose of the freedom that Jesus Christ gives us? (v. 13)

Conclusion

Christ paid a high price for our freedom, and only He can give us that freedom through faith. It doesn't matter who we are; there's no way to achieve that freedom by our own merits. We need Christ to truly be free.



Guided By The Holy Spirit

Loysbel Pérez (Cuba)

Passage to study: Galatians 5:16-26

Memory verse: "So, I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh." Galatians 5:16

Lesson Aim: To motivate ourselves to experience what it means to live guided by the Holy Spirit.

Introduction

Every person who becomes a Christian begins to experience a struggle in their inner being: desires arise from hearts not given completely over to Christ, an insatiable thirst to satisfy the flesh, a struggle against what's being produced in our hearts by the action of the Holy Spirit. While God is making us new, we face internal struggles which end only when we totally surrender to God and God's Spirit fills us. This is made visible through the manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

Believers remain in this intense struggle, one day gratifying their selfish worldly nature, and another day trying to please God. This struggle occurs when a person has not yet allowed Christ to be the Lord of their lives by experiencing the fullness of the Holy Spirit. This doesn't happen in violation of our wills, but it occurs when we decide freely to give God complete control of our body, soul and spirit.

The Holy Spirit guides us and fills us, but we have to choose to let him do it. Because some people haven't made that choice, we can observe in the church long time believers who are up and down in their Christian lives and frequently fall into sin again and again. One of the main reasons is that they haven't surrendered their lives completely to Christ, thus impeding the work of the Holy Spirit.

Paul makes a clear distinction between those who are dominated by the flesh and those who are led by the Spirit, saying: "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Galatians 5:24). Next, we'll study the distinctive features of those who are guided by the Spirit.

I. They Don't Satisfy The Works Of The Flesh (Galatians 5:18-21)

Paul was clear in his message to the Galatians in chapter 5 verse 8; if a person is guided by the Holy Spirit, he isn't under the law, and won't carry on living in a worldly way.

Unfortunately, we have believers inside the church who give bad testimonies by practicing sin. They may be church members, but their behavior is carnal. These people aren't of Christ. Although they possess earthly membership in the church, they lack heavenly membership. On the contrary, those who are guided by the Spirit don't practice the works of the flesh.

A. What Must Be Crucified? (vs. 19-21)

The Lord's church should be composed of people who walk by the Spirit and have repented and been forgiven of all the things in their lives that displeases God (the works or desires of the flesh). We have to die to the former way of living. The Holy Spirit, through the Bible message, teaches us how to live in the kingdom of God.

Paul said that those who keep on sinning won't inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:21). It's not enough to go to church, be a member in good standing, tithe, be baptized, be a leader, etc. All this is important, but we must crucify the flesh, because practicing the works of the flesh will impede us from inheriting the kingdom of God. God wants people guided by His Spirit and living the fullness of the life that He offers. People who disobey His will, who don't put God first, will have to pay the consequences.

B. Crucifying The Flesh

It's good to understand what's on the list of things which Paul calls 'flesh.' They're found in verses 19-21. The Message version of Galatians expresses them in the following up to date manner: *"It's obvious what kind of life develops out of trying to get your own way all the time: repetitive, loveless, cheap sex; a stinking accumulation of mental and emotional garbage; frenzied and joyless grabs for happiness; trinket gods; magic-show religion; paranoid loneliness; cutthroat competition; all-consuming-yet-never-satisfied wants; a brutal temper; an impotence to love or be loved; divided homes and divided lives; small-minded and lopsided pursuits; the vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival; uncontrolled and uncontrollable addictions; ugly parodies of community..."*

There are many people in congregations who love God, want to please Him, and are struggling to crucify the flesh and its passions. They advance a bit then fall again, and feel ashamed before God. When this happens, it's a good sign, because it's a sign that the Holy Spirit is working in their hearts. Before they were Christians, they sinned and never thought about it, but now they feel uncomfortable because God is with them. We're all vulnerable in this sense, but young people are a group in which the area of sexual sins are hard 'to crucify', and they may fall constantly.

Here are some recommendations of things we can do to obtain victory:

1. Seek to have a real experience with the Holy Spirit.
2. Live daily in the fullness that He imparts.
3. Surrender the selfish desires to God in personal times of prayer.
4. Avoid places, people, and situations that can tempt you to fall or backslide.

People in our churches need to know God personally and have experiences with Him that will impact their lives. This is the only way the process of transformation into the image of Christ can take place.

Questions

- Are there things in my life (works of the flesh) that bind me to the world? What are they?
- What steps can I take to crucify the flesh?

II. The Fruit Of The Spirit (Galatians 5:22-26)

The manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit in one's life is the most tangible evidence of the presence of God in the life of a believer. In many churches today, people seek supernatural experiences, moving worship, speaking in tongues, euphoric experiences, among others. However, these events don't necessarily change the human heart, and many people continue life without being transformed. The supreme goal is for Christ to dwell within us. It's the transformation of the person that becomes visible through the manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit. Paul said: *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there's no law"* (vs. 22-23).

When we have really experienced the fullness of the Holy Spirit, we'll demonstrate the fruit mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23 in our lives.

- 1. Love:** The love expressed in this text is 'agape' love. This Greek word is used mostly in the New Testament and it means the following: a universal, unconditional love that transcends and persists regardless of circumstances. Agape love will always wish for the best. With agape love, we don't just love 'because of', but 'in spite of.' God wants believers to love with agape love. If we're full of the Holy Spirit, our lives will show love towards God and those around us. Let love be what distinguishes our lives as believers! (1 Corinthians 13:1-2)
- 2. Joy:** The Greek term implies that joy comes from what the believer experiences spiritually (Romans 14:17). True joy is acquired in God, and isn't produced by the circumstances of life. A believer may be having a bad time, and still have joy. This joy has to do with the fulfillment of God's purpose in our lives. When that's happening, the Holy Spirit keeps us joyful. A clear example is Jesus: *"For the joy set before him he endured the cross"* (Hebrews 12:2).
- 3. Peace:** Usually in the New Testament the Greek word 'eirene' corresponds with the Hebrew word 'shalom' and means not just freedom from trouble, but everything that makes life good. Peace is the tranquility of heart that stems from having faith that everything is in the hands of God.

4. **Forbearance:** Implies waiting for God's timing in every area of life. The Holy Spirit guides us to be still, and allow God to work. If we're patient, we'll know when to walk ahead and when to wait.
5. **Kindness:** Those who are led by the Spirit always have a kind and gentle character. They treat others with affection, tenderness.
6. **Goodness:** It is an active virtue; the willingness to always do good, to give to others. A good person puts his personal interests aside and cares for his neighbor. The parable of the good Samaritan exemplifies goodness very well (Luke 10:25-37). There we see the good Samaritan going out of his way to do good to someone without calculating whether he deserved it or not. It's a continual attitude of giving.
7. **Faithfulness:** Means to be trustworthy.
8. **Gentleness:** Closely linked to humility, gentleness is grace of the soul. It's not weakness, but instead it's strength under control. Jesus gave us the greatest example of gentleness or meekness (Matthew 11:29). Gentle people aren't violent and are humble. Violent believers haven't yet been filled with the Spirit. Meekness is tested in the way that we respond to criticism. An indignant response, or the thought that we know more than others, will fail the test. When this 'fruit' of the Spirit is in our hearts, no matter

what people might have done to us, we'll seek the forgiveness and the well-being of the other person.

9. **Self-control:** It's the power that God's Spirit gives us to control our sinful desires and say "no" to our flesh. It's used in the disciplines of an athlete (1 Corinthians 9:25) and in the domain of sex that characterizes the Christian (1 Corinthians 7:9). Self-control gives us the power to say "yes" to the Spirit and foster a beautiful, bountiful harvest of spiritual fruit!

Questions

- List the fruits of the Spirit.
- How are the fruits of the Spirit evident in your life?
- Take some time to self-assess in this regard.

Conclusion

If we say we're a child of God but are still constantly struggling with sinful desires that lead to stumbling and backsliding because we want to satisfy the desires of the flesh, we must seek urgently to settle accounts with God and give him our whole being sincerely and totally. For God, nothing is impossible! (Luke 1:37). A committed Christian will produce a harvest of Christlike fruit in their lives.

Notes:



Doing Good To Others

David Balcázar (Peru)

Passage to study: Galatians 6:1-10

Memory verse: “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we’ll reap a harvest if we don’t give up.” Galatians 6:9.

Lesson Aim: To understand that the gospel of Christ implies doing good to others; and that the true life in the Spirit does good deeds out of love.

Introduction

What does it mean to restore someone who has fallen into sin or difficulty? Do our churches really do this? What happens when we discover that a brother or sister is at fault? Do we criticize them or even expel them from the congregation? Or do we restore them with a loving gentle spirit?

I. True Spirituality Restores (Galatians 6:1-2)

The apostle Paul challenged the Galatian Christians on this issue. What does restore mean? The word ‘restore’ means to return something to its former condition. An analysis of this definition leads us to ask ourselves: In how many churches is this a reality? Apparently, the Galatian churches needed to be reminded that this practice is in keeping with the true Christian spirit. As has been seen in previous lessons, some members of the Galatian churches had been turning away from life by faith in the Spirit, returning to the Jewish ideas of justification by the works of the law. Apparently, this attitude was making them judgmental, condemning those whom they considered had erred in regard to the law, or with regard to any matter they deemed to be correct. For according to the law, if a person failed to keep the law, they had to be judged.

However, the true gospel, the gospel of grace, isn’t like that. When the Holy Spirit rules in the church, there shouldn’t be a tendency to condemn those who have fallen, but rather to restore them. So, when a member of the church is caught committing a sin, they shouldn’t be judged or condemned, but restored through the appropriate process leading to a renewed and full relationship with God.

A. “... You Who Live By The Spirit ...” (v. 1b)

Consistently with the discourse in the epistle, Paul assumed and established that those who want to help people should live by the Spirit, because a person who doesn’t live in the Spirit doesn’t have God’s power to help people recover from falling.

The person who lives by the Spirit is called ‘spiritual.’ Those who don’t live full of the Holy Spirit of God are dominated by flesh and sin (Galatians 5); and Paul has called these sort of people ‘carnal.’ Someone who’s carnal cannot restore others, because he himself needs to be restored first. Therefore, those God can use to restore those who have fallen need to be ‘spiritual.’

Paul says it needs to be done “gently” (v. 1c) referring to the care, patience and love that the restorer should put into this ministry. This restoration process needs to be done lovingly, putting aside feelings of superiority which could cause despair or discomfort. Paul warns those who seek to restore others: “But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted” (v. 1d). There’s no place for spiritual superiority. We’re no better than others, and God has not made us their judges; we’re only brothers and sisters who aren’t saved by obeying the law perfectly, but by faith in Christ.

For this reason, when we see a fellow Christian commit a sin/fall away, we must approach them with love and help them put their faith back in Jesus so that they will be forgiven and saved. We too have received grace through the love of Jesus.

This consideration is even stronger when we recognize that we also are weak human beings, and that we might be tempted to fall as well. Hence the need for humble dependence on our Almighty God who can help us have victory over sin and has given us His Holy Spirit to help us overcome.

When we're seeking to restore a fallen fellow Christian, we should consider that we're dealing with a weak brother or sister like us, who although they fell, can get up again, and who once on their feet again, could be the instrument to help us when we need it. We need to ask ourselves if we fall into some fault, would we like to be restored? How would we like it to happen? (Matthew 7:12).

B. "Carry Each Other's Burdens" (v. 2a)

In this Christian journey, we cannot deny that we need each other's help. If we see a fellow Christian in some fault, we have to restore him. If they see us in any fault, we'll also need to be restored with love. Therefore, we always need to help each other. This doesn't mean that we're always going to be sinning. However, when we're going through problems, when we're tempted, we should know that our brothers and sisters will support us; and if we fall, we'll be restored, just as we would do for others.

By helping people recover, and giving and receiving mutual help, we're fulfilling the true law of Christ, who gave himself up for us so that we may be forgiven and saved (1 John 2:1). In his great love, Jesus Christ wants the sinner to be restored!

Questions

- How would you define a spiritual Christian?
- Why do you consider it necessary for those involved in the process of restoration of a brother or sister to be spiritual? (v. 1)

II. True Spirituality Is Humble And Pleasing (Galatians 6:3-6)

A. Recognize That Without Christ, We're Nothing (v. 3)

It's not always easy to see the relationship between verse 3 and the previous ones; but by understanding the context, the difficulty dissipates. Obviously, we do need each other in the Christian walk. Without the presence of the Holy Spirit, we cannot overcome the works of the flesh. From these statements, we can easily understand that *"... If anyone thinks they're something when they're not, they deceive themselves"* (v.3).

We Christians, without Christ, are nothing. Therefore, we have no right to condemn the one who is in need and regrets what they have done. Rather than condemning them, we must do the opposite and help them enter into a restoration process. For just as we need Jesus, our brother or sister also needs Him. If we think that we can win or overcome by our own strength, we're fooling ourselves. We can only overcome sin in the power of the Spirit of God.

Nobody is free from being tempted. The most faithful believer can end up falling. But the right attitude of dependence on Jesus will lead to victory and compassion for our fellow Christians. For all this, we must not deceive ourselves ... We all need Jesus!

B. "Each One Should Test Their Own Actions" (v. 4)

If we really live by the Spirit, we must test our own actions or deeds. The best we can do to help others to be restored is to test ourselves, and first consider whether we're truly spiritual and living in the love of God (Matthew 7:4). The Christian needs to examine his own spirituality before considering what others have done and if they require restoration. To be able to help others, we need to take a look at ourselves and our attitudes courageously.

C. "...Each One Should Carry Their Own Load" (v. 5)

We all have our own loads that we must carry with care. When we understand the difficulties and efforts involved in carrying one's burden, then we'll understand and be more empathetic to help others bowed down by their loads. It's very important, if we want to be used by God in the restoration of our neighbors, to understand that in the Lord, we're all in the fight and we're companions on this road towards the heavenly homeland.

D. "The One Who Receives Instruction In The Word Should Share All Good Things With Their Instructor" (v. 6)

We might ask, what does this verse have to do here? It's important to consider the concept of gratitude. The expression: "the one who receives instruction..." could be in this context, the one who's being restored. So, it's good that the one who's being restored should learn to be grateful to the one who's teaching him, and even share some of God's material blessings. This is also pleasing to God.

This teaching about gratitude could be applied to the following cases:

1. The giving of our goods to the church for the blessing of the servants of the Lord who work in setting up and restoring the 'sheep' that move away from the fold.
2. Sharing with one another and helping each other as the Lord has prospered us, and as we're helping each other materially, we also help in spiritual aspects.

So, in the true spirituality of the gospel, we need to be grateful and share our material goods as well. We must not forget this!

Questions

- In your own words, define the term “humble.”
- How can you test your own actions? Comment (v. 4).

III. True Spirituality Does Good (Galatians 6:7-10)

Finally, it's necessary to consider in this context that the true spiritual Christian does good. This has a lot to do with what we have been considering, because restoring one's neighbor is an attitude that's part of the generality of doing good. Paul began talking about restoration after he broadens the theme to conclude the fact that the true Christian does good to his neighbor.

A. “A Man Reaps What He Sows” (vs. 7-8)

This passage stands as a warning. It's true that we aren't saved by the works, however, it's also true that real faith will become evident in our actions (James 2:18). We cannot deceive God. What we sow, we'll reap in due time.

But what do we sow and what do we reap? Frequently, this passage has been used to manipulate people and ask for money. Analyzing the biblical text, we find two types of sowing and two types of harvest.

I. Two Types of Sowing (v. 8)

A. Worldly planting would involve:

- 1.) Not sharing our assets, but thinking only about ourselves, being selfish (v.6).
- 2.) Not restoring the brother or sister when they fall. Deciding not to help them or show interest in their restoration, being judgmental instead of guiding them to a process of restoration, turn our backs on them, leaving them alone.

This kind of worldly attitude shows what it would be like to sow for the flesh.

- 3.) Keeping on sinning and not fleeing from evil in our personal lives.

B. In contrast, sowing in the Spirit implies:

- 1.) Lovingly sharing that which you receive from the Lord.
- 2.) Restoring the fellow Christian when they undergo a surprise attack, but always doing it with a spirit of gentleness and meekness.
- 3.) Abandoning the life of sin and live practicing what pleases God (Galatians 5:22-23).

2. Two Types Of Harvest (v. 8)

If you sow for the flesh, you'll reap corruption. “Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction” (Galatians 6:8). That destruction refers to self-destruction, the loss of personal salvation, and finally, loss of eternal life.

If you sow for the Spirit, you'll reap eternal life! This appreciation of the harvest is key to a correct perspective of justification by faith, because although we're saved by faith, what we sow becomes a determining factor. As we mentioned earlier, faith is evidenced by our actions, and this implies living a life of holiness. Although we aren't saved by what we do, if we insist on living in sin and sowing for the flesh, we'll lose our salvation! For this reason, it's important to emphasize: “whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life” (v. 8).

B. “Let Us Not Become Weary In Doing Good” (v. 9)

Now the importance of not giving up in the way of doing good can be understood better. Doing good brings great joy to the soul, but also, sometimes it will be difficult and even be a cause for persecution, mockery or other difficulties while we're in this world. But still, we shouldn't get tired, the harvest of eternal life will be our best reward.

Let's do good to everyone as we're given the opportunity (v.10) To close this passage, Paul concluded in a logical and comprehensive way. He asks us, then, whenever we can to do good to everyone and especially to those who belong to the family of faith.

How can we do good? Restoring, with the help of the Spirit of the Lord, fellow Christians who have fallen by the wayside, always with the correct gentle attitude. Sharing our what we have with those who restore us and teach us. Of course, when we can, helping our fellow Christians and reaching, if possible, all those in need in the community.

Living in holiness and doing good to our neighbor is the practical expression of how to keep the law: “For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Galatians 5:14).

Questions

- What does sowing and harvesting refer to in this biblical passage?
- Mention practical examples of how to do good to our brothers and sisters in the faith.

Conclusion

The true gospel of Christ is the gospel of the Spirit that fills the believers so that they live in perfect love. The believer who lives in the perfect love of God does good: Restoring with gentleness those who have fallen; sharing what they have with those who are their teachers and all that are within their power to do so; and living a life of holiness, apart from sin. Our harvest will be eternal life through faith in Jesus.



Chosen To Be Blessed

Macario Balcázar (Peru)

Passage to study: Ephesians 1:3-6

Memory verse: “For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.” Ephesians 1:4

Lesson Aim: To know about and enjoy God’s blessings for us as believers.

Introduction

Walking along the pathway of the gospel of Christ, we get to know little by little who God is, and what he has for his sons and daughters. In this lesson, we’ll see that all human beings have been chosen to be blessed. God is like a loving father and mother who designate for all their children their respective inheritance, with the sole condition that they are their children.

Pray that the Holy Spirit will direct us as we enter into what the Epistle to the Ephesians teaches us in these three verses.

I. Blessings By God (Ephesians 1:3)

Remember that the apostle Paul was a Jew, a Jew who professed fidelity to the Word of God. However, after his conversion and being a Christian Jew from that moment on, his purpose was to glorify the heavenly Father, who in his mercy chose him to be his instrument of blessing to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15), including the Ephesians.

A. Can Human Beings Bless God?

First, we’ll examine verse 3: “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.”

Immediately after greeting the Ephesians, Paul prayed a prayer of gratitude and blessing to the Father: “Praise be to the God and Father...” Let’s look at this prayer:

1. It’s common to read in the book of Psalms expressions of this nature. Psalm 34:1 says: “I will extol the Lord at all times; his praise will always be on my lips” (see also, Psalms 41:13; 96:2; 103:1-2).

These and other passages show us how we can praise God! That’s what Paul did in Ephesians 1:3.

2. We can bless God by praising him and giving him glory. In other words, we bless God when we worship Him. What Paul taught us is that the first duty of every

Christian is to worship God. We need to give Him first place in our lives, recognizing that without Him, we have nothing.

3. Christians in the twenty-first century need to bless God, worshiping Him daily in everything we do. Without Him, we’re nothing.

B. Father Of Our Lord Jesus Christ

1. The Bible confirms that Jesus is God’s son: “and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22); Jesus is part of the Trinity and we must worship Him too (1 John 5:20).
2. We must insist on the deity of Jesus Christ since many people who don’t read the Bible with care end up affirming ideas contrary to His deity, or denying the existence of the Father and the Son as two different persons. God is one God in three persons.
3. For Christians, Christ is central to everything we do. That’s why, in praising God, we do so to the whole Trinity, whether we refer directly to the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit separately, or to the three persons together. May our voice rise up gratefully to always bless our good God.

C. “...Who Has Blessed Us In The Heavenly Realms”

Let’s continue with our study of Ephesians 1:3.

1. God created us to worship Him. His creation was varied, beautiful, teeming with life, and exuberant. He made a wonderful garden and created Adam and Eve to enjoy this new world, and they were very happy doing what God wanted (Genesis 1:31). God was present with them (Genesis 2:15,22). From the dawn of this world, God wanted to bless His creatures, and spared no effort to do so.

2. God made the new covenant with us through his Son to bless us. Our human disgrace is that sin entered the world in the form of the rebellion against God. Nevertheless, God's love has no limits. The highest expression of His love was in sending His son to die on the cross so that the question of sin could be dealt with and so that we can approach God (Romans 3:23). Christ isn't only the bridge between us and God, but He is also the mediator that makes it possible for human beings to appear before the presence of God (1 Timothy 2:5).
3. The "heavenly realms" must be understood in the present as the marvelous taste we savor when we're in the presence of God, when we worship Him, and also because our name is written in the book of life (Luke 10:20). In the future, there will be an eternal inheritance for the children of God, bought for them through the shedding of Jesus' precious blood.
2. The great deceiver Satan, in his eagerness to make fun of God and bring destruction to all humanity, has been and continues to be the great promoter of religiosity without Christ. Therefore, all (except the gospel) speak of being saved through our own personal merits. Satan knows that no humans can do enough to save themselves. For this reason, Satan promotes this falsehood that has affected Christianity, either through Catholicism or even in so-called evangelical churches, where many seek to gain merit by fasting, good deeds, donating for a series of human projects, etc. This is what we call 'salvation by works,' something that's not what God planned for us (Ephesians 2:8-9).
3. Jesus is the only way (John 14:6). Before Christ, there was the law of God, with the idea that whoever obeyed it would be accepted by God (Deuteronomy 28:23). But the truth is that nobody could obey the law to the letter. Therefore, the sacrificial work of Christ was necessary so that we could be redeemed and become children of God (John 3:16).
4. God's redeeming provision through his Son was for ALL humanity. It doesn't exclude anyone (John 3:15-17). No race, culture, human group, no sinner is exempt from being a beneficiary of God's redemptive plan. Simply, you have to accept it. We thank God for this wonderful blessing in Christ Jesus!

Questions

- How can we bless God?
- What did Paul mean by the expression "heavenly realms"?

II. Chosen To Be Holy And Without Blemish (Ephesians 1:4)

Verse 4 states: "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight." After praising God, Paul said that the children of God have been chosen in Christ, before the foundation of the world, to live holy lives.

A. God Wants All Mankind To Be Saved

1. There's no better Father than God. He created the first couple in his image and likeness (Genesis 1:27) to love and adore him, to be His stewards, and even more importantly, to be His children (Malachi 2:15). But God wants us to love and worship Him voluntarily. His plan was that not only Adam and Eve were to be His children, but also all their offspring.
2. God's plan was broken by Adam and Eve's disobedience which brought death in its wake (Romans 6:23). But God's original plan didn't change. He continued to find a way in which mankind wouldn't need to be entirely condemned, but saved, hopefully including everyone (2 Peter 3:9). Let's make the decision to obey and not reject Him.
3. God's redemptive plan finally came through Jesus Christ (Luke 3:23-38).

B. Salvation Is Through Jesus Christ

1. There are thousands of religions in the world. Many speak about methods that lead to salvation, but except for Christianity, none speak of the true way to salvation.

C. God Saves Us So We Can Be Holy And Without Blemish

1. Holy God likes to dwell in the midst of saintly followers. The holiness of God cannot admit other types of companions. His angels are saints, the servants of God have been and are holy.
2. We're "blameless in His sight" through Christ's redemptive work removing the stains of sin by the shedding of His blood. Everyone is tainted by sin (Romans 3:12). The wonderful message of redemption is that Christ, with His sacrifice on the cross, cleanses us from all sin. Jeremiah warned the people that they couldn't do anything about their sin on their own: "Although you wash yourself with soap and use an abundance of cleansing powder, the stain of your guilt is still before me" (Jeremiah 2:22).
3. The redeeming sacrifice of Christ was made so that we could be holy and without blemish here and now on earth. We cannot just say "well everyone sins, so what?" Sin has been dealt with and we too must deal with it, allowing God to cleanse our hearts so that we can live in holiness before Him.
4. The life of holiness is the lifestyle that God wants for all His children (1 Thessalonians 4:3a). For that reason, he spared no expense, even to the point of sending His beloved Son, Jesus Christ to die for us. He

has made all the provision and it's a wonderful blessing. If people aren't living a life of holiness, it's because they don't want to. Everything is at hand, we just have to believe, place our faith in the Lord, and ask that He sanctify us with the baptism of the Holy Spirit (John 1:33).

Questions

- What was the experience of salvation like in your life?
- How do you share the salvation message with others?

III. Predestined And Adopted By Love To Praise Him (Ephesians 1:5-6)

The last passage we're going to study says: *"In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves"* (vs. 5-6). Many people say 'We're all children of God' but this isn't strictly true. We're all God's creation, that's true (John 1:3). But we aren't all children of God. The condition to be sons or daughters of God is to follow the path that God himself has given for salvation: Faith in Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world (John 1:12).

A. "In Love He Predestined Us..."

1. In the general biblical context, God has predestined all human beings for heaven. But this predestination is conditional. It depends on whether we want to surrender to God and accept the ONLY WAY to Him through Jesus Christ (John 14:6).
2. God's predestination is based on his love (John 3:16). If it weren't for the love of God, Christ wouldn't have come. Had it not been for His love, his sacrifice on the cross of Calvary, or the resurrection, this never would have happened. So, if it were not for the love of God, this world would have no hope (2 Peter 3:9).

B. We Were Predestined To Be Children Of God

1. Paul used the expression 'adoption'. We understand that a family may adopt children originally born into another family. For this, a judicial process is followed. Once all the legal requirements have been met, the judge declares that from that moment on, the child is their adoptive child. So, for us to be adopted as children of God, Christ fulfilled all the legal requirements. So we need to say: "Yes, Lord. I accept that you adopted me as your child". People without Christ aren't children of God. Those of us who now call ourselves children of God are because we have been adopted by love, through Christ our Lord, by repenting of our sins with all our heart.
2. He who is adopted as a child of God receives all the benefits that Jesus Christ has. For this reason, as Paul said, we're co-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:15-17).

First, we're saved from sin, condemnation and eternal death. Second, God adopts us as His children with all the rights of His Son, Jesus Christ. Third, He opens the door to entering a different life where we're "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation..." (1 Peter 2:9).

So, the life of a child of God is totally different from that moment on. We have entered into a new world, a new reality, a new dimension, a new unique opportunity. It's a wonderful blessing. Ask your students if they have entered into this dimension.

C. The Children Of God Praise Their Creator And Savior

1. For the most part, every child is loved by his birth parents and loves them too. Very often, they speak well of their parents, and often the parents are very proud of their children. We who have been adopted as children of God, to whom God has shown His immense love, cannot do anything else but praise, exalt and glorify our beloved Father who has adopted us as His children, through Jesus Christ.
2. Praising God is more than just singing praises. As children of God we worship with praise songs, words of thanks, prayers and tangible expressions of generosity, but above all, we worship God by the way we live. The way we conduct ourselves is the greatest testimony of our love and loyalty to God. Anyone who sings praises to God, but lives lying, committing adultery, etc. is an imposter. Those people aren't true children of God. They're false Christians, infiltrated by Satan to disturb and soil the good testimony of the church of Christ, His body.
3. All children of God who worship Him will be blessed by their beloved Father, who lavishes care, infinite tenderness and daily promises that will be fulfilled in their life, to help them serve Him. There's a great blessing in the continued presence of God, who through His Holy Spirit, walks with His children (Exodus 33:14).

Questions

- What benefits did we receive by grace when we were adopted as children of God?
- Explain what this lesson teaches about predestination

Conclusion

As God's sons and daughters, we have the great privilege of having been chosen for present and eternal blessings in Christ. Therefore, as His children, we must worship our Creator continually and serve Him in this world and then afterwards for eternity.



The True Riches Of The Believer

Eduardo Velázquez (Argentina)

Passage to study: Ephesians 1:7-13

Memory verse: “And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit...” Ephesians 1:13.

Lesson Aim: To understand the dimensions of divine grace is, in the person of Jesus Christ.

Introduction

Salvation is the central and most important theme in the entire Bible. Around this doctrine, our condition as disobedient humans is described, which brought death in all its dimensions. The Bible also shows us the blessing of a loving and merciful God who redeemed us in His quest to restore the original condition in which we were created. Our salvation becomes, then, the fundamental theme of the message we proclaim as the Church of Jesus Christ. The church needs to be very clear about the elements and processes that are part of the salvation that God offers to humanity.

In this class, we'll study Ephesians 1:7-13, where the apostle Paul mentioned some of the benefits that Jesus Christ brings to us through His sacrifice by giving His life on the cross as a price for our redemption.

I. What Does Redemption Mean? (Ephesians 1:7-8)

The term “redemption” emphasizes the outcome of the liberating action that our Lord Jesus performed. Our redemption is a real experience, procured for us through the shedding of His holy blood. Also, the word redemption, like adoption, is a legal term and refers to an external aspect of our salvation. Jesus fulfilled the necessary requirements to rescue us.

In the New Testament, redemption refers both to deliverance from sin and freedom from captivity. In Leviticus 25:47-52, we read about how a slave could be redeemed and gain his freedom. The children of Israel were rescued or redeemed from slavery in Egypt by God's mighty actions. In redemption, a person is freed from a situation of which they were unable to free themselves, or from a debt they could never have paid back on their own.

A. Redemption Requires Bloodshed

We have been redeemed by the liberating act of Jesus who shed His blood on the cross. It refers to both what Jesus did, and the result of His action. In the first century, referring to the blood of Jesus was an important way of talking about His death. His death points to two wonderful truths: Redemption and forgiveness. Redemption was the price paid to obtain the freedom of a slave (Leviticus 25:47-54). Through His death, Jesus paid the price to free us from our bondage to sin. This price was His blood. One should not think that Jesus had to pay this to someone like Satan, but that it's what it cost him to free us from the penalty of sin.

In the New Testament, blood is a biblical symbol that represents the death of Jesus on the cross. This idea is also found in Leviticus 17:11 where we read the following: “*For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it's the blood that makes atonement for one's life.*” Jesus gave His blood to atone for our sins. This reminds us of what Hebrews 9:22b says: “*without the shedding of blood there's no forgiveness.*”

B. Redemption Requires Forgiveness

Forgiveness was guaranteed in the Old Testament times on the basis of the blood of animals (Leviticus 17:11). Now, we receive forgiveness based on the shedding of Jesus' blood because He died for us and it was the perfect and true sacrifice. That is, in Jesus, all believers have redemption through His death on the cross. Redemption is ours through the death of Christ.

In Ephesians 1:7, the expression “*the forgiveness of sins*” is closely linked to the idea of our redemption, but, they aren’t identical concepts. This last concept means the remission of our sins in the sense of dismissing them. Transgressions here are all our sinful acts, such as accumulated wrongs and offenses, along with their guilt. These are remitted, that is, completely done away with through the redeeming act of Christ. So, in a single loving act, Jesus got rid of our sins, along with their guilt, and rescued our souls from the hands of the devil. Thus, we see the parallel and simultaneous actions of forgiveness and redemption.

C. Redemption Requires Grace

Grace is the voluntary and loving favor given by God to everyone. We cannot win it, we don’t deserve it, and no moral or religious effort can earn it. Salvation comes only by the mercy and love of God. Without divine grace, no one can be saved. To receive it, we must recognize that we cannot save ourselves, but only God can do it, and there’s only one way, through faith in Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9).

The measure of this redemption is expressed by the phrase “*according to the riches of his grace*” (Ephesians 1:7). This means that the grace of God is abundant, broad and more than sufficient, and it doesn’t depend on our own merits. It’s immeasurable and undeserved.

This should lead us to appreciate and enjoy our redemption. We need to praise, thank and serve God in response to His love and grace as a sign of our recognition and gratitude for such a great salvation.

Questions

- Define redemption.
- How can we experience the redemption that Christ has given us?

II. We Have Spiritual Knowledge (Ephesians 1:8-10)

This divine grace is “...*lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding*” (v. 8). Paul tried to communicate the profound meaning with which God has given us the wisdom and practical knowledge necessary for us to lead upright lives according to His purpose. Thus, the expression ‘lavished’ suggests an overabundance. The results of the outworking of His divine grace helps us understand His ways and comprehend His will for our lives as well, as opening our minds to know something of His purposes for this universe. Paul hinted that the source of this wisdom and understanding isn’t human but divine.

There’s a difference between wisdom and knowledge. While knowledge is intellectual, mental understanding, wisdom implies prudence, discernment, and practical understanding. It has to do with practicing what we know, understanding what God has shown us, and what to do

about it.

The expression “*he made known to us*” indicates that God has revealed His plans to us. He has allowed us to know the content of something very important. Paul recognized the importance of “*the mystery of his will*”. This mystery contains the eternal purpose of the divine will that has been revealed in Christ. It’s not a hidden and obscure secret made known only to initiates, as in the secret and mystery religions of the Middle East of that time. On the contrary, it’s the divine truth that has been revealed in Christ and must be spread throughout the world.

For Paul, the marvelous thing is that God has made it known to us. It’s not something we can discover on our own. Thus, the mystery of the will of God was previously a secret, hidden from the general knowledge of the people and only made known by revelation through the prophets and patriarchs, and this incompletely. Now, this mystery has been revealed in Christ Jesus. It’s no longer a guarded secret. It’s a fact, a truth exposed and communicated as Paul explained it (Ephesians 3:3-9). This revealed mystery refers to the Redeeming Work in its totality. It’s the explanation of all that God has done in Christ, and that couldn’t be explained or understood until Jesus’ complete work for our salvation was revealed.

What a wonderful gift and what a blessing we have in Christ that we can know through the Scriptures God’s total plan for the redemption of mankind, and also to receive the wisdom and spiritual knowledge to live an abundant life that is pleasing to God! We must remember that Proverbs affirms that wisdom is more valuable than all the riches of this world. Let’s pray to the Lord that He’ll allow us to grow in wisdom, helping us face any personal, family, social, ministerial circumstance, etc., in the way that Christ would.

Questions

- Reflect on a personal situation that you are experiencing that requires wisdom to solve it.
- How do you think Jesus would face such a situation?

III. We Have An Inheritance (Ephesians 1:11)

We have already studied that in Christ, we have been wonderfully redeemed, and that in Him, God has revealed his plan of salvation for mankind. Through the sacrifice of Christ, we receive the following blessings:

A. Inheritance As Adopted Children (v. 5)

This idea is found only in the New Testament, and it means that we have been chosen as His inheritance or portion, and it’s derived from the concept presented in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 9:29; 32:9-10; Psalm 116:6) regarding the tribes of Israel that were chosen by God to be His people.

As adoptive children, we inherit everything that the Father has for us. It brings us many blessings and it was made possible through Christ. The initiative and actions are exclusively God's.

B. Our Inheritance Is Because We Were Predestined (v. 11)

The inheritance (portion) has been defined and determined in advance, and we were chosen as its recipients. The limits and conditions have been predetermined in the heavenly realm before the creation of the world. Those who respond are those who enjoy this inheritance, and are already the chosen portion of God, although now only partially until this divine plan is fully realized when Christ comes in the definitive fulfillment of the times. The expression "In him" at the beginning of verse 11 explains the content of the rest of the verse. It's not that God has arbitrarily chosen certain people for salvation, but that Christ is the chosen one, and those who receive Him as their savior obey him and serve him, and are also chosen by God in Him.

Paul confronts us with the reality of an inheritance that we cannot imagine what it will be like when it's revealed in its entirety, but he also encouraged us to enjoy from now on the benefits that are included in the presence of the Holy Spirit in us, as heirs of the heavenly Father.

Finally as God's people, we must announce this good news to all. The church was commissioned to announce the message of this redemption by God's grace to everyone.

C. We're Sealed With The Holy Spirit (v. 13)

The apostle stressed that when saved by believing in Christ, believers receive the Holy Spirit. This had been according to the promise of Christ. Let's remember what He said to His apostles: *"I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high"* (Luke 24:49a). This promise was repeated in Acts 1:8 when Jesus Christ said: *"But you will receive power, when the Holy Spirit has come on you ..."*; and this was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Paul recognized that the believers who received this letter gave evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives, according to the promise of Christ.

God keeps His promises. The promise of the Spirit marks the believer as someone who believes in Christ and is being transformed into His image. We belong to the Lord, we're His, and as a result, we live in this World according to what He taught us in preparation for heaven. To be sealed with the Spirit is to be declared as one who belongs to God. Rightly, Paul said: *"And if anyone doesn't have the Spirit of Christ, they don't belong to Christ"* (Romans 8:9b).

The seal used in Paul's time meant a mark of identity and authenticity. It was the custom of a monarch or a person of authority to fix their seal on documents and valuables. In today's legal and diplomatic circles, the official seal is used in the same way. Similarly, thinking about being sealed with the Holy Spirit means that we have been identified and authenticated as belonging to God by faith in Christ. The presence of the Spirit in believers is the guarantee of this fact. This sealing represents a deposit in anticipation of all that will be fulfilled in us by the grace of God. Being sealed with the Holy Spirit is the beginning in us of that good work which God will perfect in us through Christ Jesus in due time (Romans 8:23). This idea is extended with the following words: *"who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory"* (Ephesians 1:14).

The word 'deposit' or 'guarantee', which is a legal and commercial term that represents a deposit or initial payment, like an advance of *"our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory"* (Ephesians 1:14). The use of the word 'our' is inclusive for both Jews and Gentiles, for we're all gathered together in Christ by a common and saving faith. God has always wanted everyone to enjoy salvation. Compare verse 11: *"In him we were also chosen"* with verse 13: *"And you also were included in Christ ..."*

Clearly, we observe that in both verses the inheritance of God is inclusive. Heritage is a concept that reminds us of the land promised to the people of Israel, which here represents what God has prepared to give to those who believe in Him. What a blessed assurance the Word of God gives us in describing the guarantee we have of having salvation! This security must give us the strength we need in the dark and difficult moments of life. It's what underwrites our hope that we're in God's hands and He will help us and guide us on our way.

Questions

- Name three blessings that are part of our inheritance as children of God, and which you are experiencing in this life. Use Bible verses to explain them.
- How do you understand the following expression: "You were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise"?

Conclusion

Although it's impossible to gauge the magnitude and depth of the salvation that God gave us in Christ, we must be grateful for all that the Lord did to rescue us from the bondage in which we were kept in sin. On the other hand, we must enjoy this salvation that gave us freedom from what enslaved us and implies doing good and loving others with the same love with which God loved us, loves us now, and will always love us.



Growing In The Knowledge Of God

Marco Rocha (Argentina)

Passage to study: Ephesians 1:17-23

Memory verse: “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.” Ephesians 1:17

Lesson Aim: To grow in our knowledge of God.

Introduction

One of the reasons why the apostle Paul wrote this epistle was to explain the eternal purposes of God, a key concept to understand in the letter. This is true not only for the believers of the city of Ephesus, but also for the entire Christian community of his time, since they were in a formative stage. In this period, the foundations of the Christian faith were being laid. In our day, the challenges that believers face also require that we base our hope on solid foundations that help us strengthen our faith so that we'll grow in faith more and more.

Upon receiving news of the church in Ephesus, the apostle was mobilized to pray. Prayer that, far from becoming a list of requests to satisfy some material need of the Ephesians, focused on asking what he considered indispensable to prevent the Ephesians from deviating from God's purpose for their lives. Moreover, he asked that the Lord would enable them to know Him more deeply. In his prayer, he emphasized what was really important, eternal, and which would consolidate the foundations of their faith, giving them the power to live out the gospel fully.

Many times, the circumstances and conflicts of life tempt us to blur the purposes of God and give up. Hence, the importance of the passage in Ephesians 1:17-23 where we're challenged to grow in the knowledge of God. For this, we need to realize our calling, as well as the power God wants to give to His church.

I. A Unique Call (Ephesians 1:17-19)

In these verses, Paul began to describe the reason for his prayers for the believers, first revealing God as the God of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Father

of glory. The apostle recognized that it's Jesus Christ who shows the way to the Father, who has glorified him, and who has given humanity the privilege of being able to be reconciled with Him and enjoy a new life full of faith and hope in our Savior. Hence, the importance of having a spirit of wisdom and revelation. In this passage, we must understand by the “spirit of wisdom and revelation” (v.17) the ability to perceive what has been revealed to us, understanding the direction and meaning of what God wants us to know. Many people know about God, and some even say they believe in Him, but their actions are far from reflecting this assertion. They know of His existence and admit that He is real, but they don't know him because they haven't experienced Him in their lives. So, their knowledge is merely theoretical or academic.

For the disciples of Christ, knowing God means recognizing Him as the source of life and truth, experiencing His revelation through Christ, and recognizing that He illuminates our mind with the power of His Holy Spirit, helping us to understand deep eternal truths. For the Jews, it was typical to ask for a spirit of wisdom and revelation. Therefore, Paul prayed not for them to receive special information, but that those who had already received the Holy Spirit would learn to perceive and know God more deeply as He is revealed in Christ. Gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as wisdom, enlightenment and revelation, were the typical gifts that the Jews could expect.

At present, there are different theological currents that place special interest in this spirit of wisdom and revelation. But not in the sense that we develop in this lesson, but presenting it as a gift that allows some people to receive new truths, even above and beyond the Scriptures, which has led some leaders

and congregations into errors. The light that illuminates the eyes of our understanding is the action of the Holy Spirit who, in a supernatural way, allows us to understand reality from a moral and spiritual perspective, not only from the intellectual perspective.

This illumination now allows us to see more clearly the benefits of growing in the knowledge of God, which are the following: a. The hope to which he called us; b. the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and c. the super-eminent greatness of His power towards us.

Although Paul tried hard to present his theology in a rational way so that the people could understand it, he also recognized that this was incomplete without the work of the Holy Spirit who transforms the wills and lives of the believers. For this reason, he prayed that the Ephesians would understand that God wished to make them an inheritance, just as Israel is presented in the Old Testament as an inheritance from God. Paul used the term 'inheritance' to refer to the glorified church.

The hope of God's calling allows us to face the pains of life. The riches of His glory make it possible for us to rejoice even if the circumstances are adverse. We can overcome discouragement when we remember the power of God demonstrated in the resurrection of Christ, our Lord and Savior.

The Ephesians, who lived in a religious context where the magical occupied a transcendental place, could possibly have considered the power of the pagan goddess Diana as imposing and fearsome. But that, in Paul's words, was insignificant in the face of the unique and incalculable greatness of God and His call to live in hope of life, looking forwards to eternity.

In our current context, there are also false gods who present themselves as fearsome and, through situations and circumstances, tempt the believer to believe that they're greater than God's greatness and call. This is why it's vital get to know God and understand His greatness and call. This will help us to be strong when tempted and have the courage to face adverse circumstances of life, even the most difficult ones and those that seem like big walls that stop us on our way.

To live without Christ is to live without a clear purpose. Many don't know why they exist, and others enter into crisis as they approach death. Deceived by Satan and the pleasures of this world, their lives have no ultimate goal, and many just keep on simply existing. Some look for magical solutions or momentary escapes when faced with the pain of the adverse circumstances that affect them, but they can't avoid the feelings of loneliness and helplessness.

This passage reminds us too of the importance of always remembering who called us, who we are, and where we're going. It's for this reason that this call is unique and special, incomprehensible to a part of humanity, but real and powerful for us as believers.

Questions

- What does it mean to know God more deeply?
- In what situations of life is it especially urgent to remember the greatness of God and his call? Why?

II. Unparalleled Power (Ephesians 1:20-21)

In these verses, Paul highlighted how the power of God is mediated through Christ for Christians. The main theme of this part of the passage is the manifestation of God in Christ through His resurrection and exaltation. Regarding His resurrection, although we recognize that the death of Christ is the main demonstration of God's love, we also know that the resurrection is the main demonstration of His power. In Ephesians 3:20, Paul gave more details about this concept by declaring that the power that resurrected Jesus is the power that acts in us. Hence the importance of the resurrection for the knowledge of God and His power.

The passage shows how the power of God was made manifest by calling Christ from the tomb and seating him at His right hand. In the East, the right hand of the king was occupied by his prime minister or principal officer, a symbol of honor and also a delegation of power. Thus, Christ was invested with sovereign lordship and universal power.

The statement which affirmed that Jesus had risen and was exalted at the right hand of God was a tradition in the early church, a paraphrase of Psalm 110: "The Lord says to my lord: Sit at my right hand..." The cosmic government and the place of honor in the heavenly places, which is the place where God is working, were granted to Jesus, who has been enthroned with incomparable power because He is over all. Both Paul's contemporaries and the church today must understand by this passage that there's no power comparable to that of Jesus Christ.

Deepening our knowledge of God implies understanding that the power that raised Christ acts in us and enables us to live according to that reality. When we experience that power in our lives, it's possible to fully live out the gospel. That power impels us to preach and have compassion for the lost and those who suffer. It enables us to live in holiness and serve our neighbor. It

moves us to seek the Lord from the heart, to obey Him and love Him with our whole being. When we learn to experience that incomparable power in our lives, we fill ourselves with faith and hope in our Savior and, although circumstances may bring us problems, we don't lose heart.

Every day we have a choice, to live according to the power of God manifested in the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus, or to give a place to those things which weaken our faith and don't edify us.

Questions

- What's the evidence that the power of God acts in us?
- What practical actions can we take to live according to the power of God?

III. A Triumphant Church (Eph. 1:22-23)

Just as Psalm 110:1 is an invitation from God to the Lord to sit at His right hand until He puts his enemies as His footstool, Eph. 1:22-23 affirms that God has already put all things under Jesus. Psalm 8:6 presents Adam as the crown of creation, with dominion over creatures, by affirming the following: "You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet." Now, Jesus Christ, the second Adam, has broken the power of the fall, and with His Redemptive Work, has become Sovereign as head of the new creation. To understand more deeply the power that acts in the church, the apostle used two images, the one of the body and one of plenitude.

Paul presents the church as a body that belongs to Jesus and is intimately united with Him. Hence, Christ presides over the church in all things. Christ is the head, in the sense of being the basis of the very existence of the church, its source of life and ruler (Ephesians 5:24). The church is also the object of the atoning death of Christ. Just as the Father gave his Son for the world (John 3:16), Christ gave himself for the church (Ephesians 5:25-26).

The church as the body of Christ doesn't refer only to a society, but to the redeemed community of whom Christ is the head. It's not a body of Christians, but the body of Christ.

Like the body of Christ, the active or evangelizing aspect of the church must be emphasized. Under this symbol, we pay attention to the unity, growth and varied types of ministry of the church. The unity of the church is the unity of the Spirit.

This concept should help us make a difference in our Christian commitment as part of the community of faith

in which we serve. We're the body of Christ, not only when we congregate in worship services, but in all areas of our life, such as in our homes, in relationships with our relatives and neighbors, our society, etc. Although things often don't happen as we expect them to, we still continue to be the body of Christ, the triumphant church that, obedient to Him who preside over it, preaches with power through witness and service.

Verse 23 says that Jesus is: "...the fullness of him who fills everything in every way." The concept of filling includes the task of bringing all things to unity and harmony in Christ, who is the head. Paul prayed that the believers would understand that the power that acts in the church will also produce a new harmonious and united universe under Christ. So, the union between Christ and the church is a foretaste of that end.

As a church, we have the unique opportunity to live fully, and in everything we do, be the triumphant church of which Christ is the head. As an anticipation of what's to come, today our faith communities can experience love, forgiveness and mercy, and this, not only among the believers, but also in the society in which we're immersed, illuminating even the darkest places where sin has veiled people's wills. We must be believers who, day by day, coexist with dark situations, shining with their faith and good works, allowing the world to know Christ through them. When Jesus walked among villages and towns, people were impacted by His power. Today, our church must also walk triumphantly with the gospel that transforms lives, in the power that raised Christ.

Questions

- What does it mean that the church is the body of Christ?
- Mention a series of actions that you do, or can do, as a member of a triumphant church in this society.

Conclusion

Today we can grow in the knowledge of God! To do this, in the first place, we must keep in mind who has called us, understand and experience that call, and know who we are and where we're going.

Secondly, we must keep in mind that the same power that raised Christ from the dead now acts in us.

And finally, be aware that as the body of Christ, we bring light to this world wherever we go through our witness and service.



Saved By Faith To Do Good

Macario Balcázar (Peru)

Passage to study: Ephesians 2:1-10

Memory verse: “For we’re God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Ephesians 2:10

Lesson Aim: To take a good look at the doctrine of salvation in Christ, how to persevere, and the importance of doing good deeds.

Introduction

“Salvation isn’t a last-minute plan, it’s the preconceived manifestation of God’s love” (Cleverdon, Frederick T. , Encyclopedia of Moral and Religious Quotations, pg. 391).

Only a heart that has experienced the love of God can appreciate the great love of God fully manifested (Ephesians 2:4) to save us from a terrible and eternal condemnation. Let’s look with a diligent eye and grateful heart on this precious passage from Ephesians 2:1-10.

I. Salvation From A Life Of Sin (Eph. 2:1-3)

When someone is rescued from a rushing stream by someone who loves him, it’s inevitable that the rescued person praises and thanks his rescuer and surely will always remember him. Those of us who have been saved from the condition of spiritual death and the condemnation of our sin don’t have enough words of praise, love, and above all, gratitude to God who has rescued us. Let’s always thank Him for His great love for us which has rescued us from spiritual and eternal death.

A. “You Were Dead In Your Transgressions And Sins” (v. 1)

The apostle Paul reminded the Ephesians that their life in Christ was the result of a tremendously transcendental act. Before they knew about Christ, (including everyone who is without Christ today), they were spiritually dead. Death, in biblical thought, implies separation. The scriptures speak of three types of death:

1. Physical death, which is the separation of the material and the spiritual or soul of the person. We’re all going to have go through this;

2. Spiritual death, which is the separation of the person from God because they haven’t submitted to Him. Everyone without Christ is in this group, but they can choose life and finally,
3. There’s eternal death, which is the perpetual separation of God or the condition of those who reject the eternal salvation offered by Christ; and here there’s no way out.

To live without Christ is to live in “*transgressions*” or infractions of the law of God and “*sins*”, doing things against the will of the Lord. In other words, to live without Christ is to be in perennial problems with God and neighbor.

B. “You Followed The Ways Of This World And Of The Ruler Of The Kingdom Of The Air” (v. 2)

In the spiritual world, there are only two kingdoms: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. So, either we’re in the kingdom of God or we’re in the kingdom of Satan. People who think they’re free in every way because they aren’t subject to a pastor, to a church or to a denomination, or even to God, are only showing that they’re obedient to the prince of the kingdom of the air, and of darkness. And they’re certainly Satan’s slaves.

In verses 1 to 3, all the verbs referring to the condition of the Ephesians are in the past: ‘you were’, ‘you walked’, ‘you lived’ (etc.), which means that by the time Paul was writing the epistle, they were already in Christ. But when they were subject to the prince of the kingdom of the air, four conditions characterized them:

1. They lived in the desires of their flesh, by passions that governed their wills.

2. They lived in the will of the flesh, in other words, they weren't able to submit to the will of God.
3. They did what they wanted to, and their thoughts were continually bent toward evil, contrary to the holy will of God.
4. They were children of anger, like the rest.

Ephesus was located in the southwestern part of Asia Minor, and there were many cities in that sector. Paul was telling them that their sinful condition, before they met Christ, had been the same as that of all the inhabitants of those pagan cities devoted to idolatry and sorcery (Acts 19:18-19).

Questions

- Explain what the expression “dead in transgressions and sins” means.
- What kind of death does the one mentioned in the previous expression refer to?

II. Heavenly Salvation Through God's Love (Ephesians 2:4-7)

Although many deny it, human beings have a special desire for heaven. However, they repress it out of pride or ignorance. God, who knows the most intimate desires of our beings, has provided a satisfaction for that longing through his Son, Jesus Christ. And the offer is for everyone.

A. “God Who Is Rich In Mercy” (v. 4)

God's love has no measure. Humans, with much effort, are trying to measure the expansion of the universe, but no matter how hard we try, we cannot measure God's love. Because of this love, He shows mercy to all, without distinction (John 3:16). Every day that passes in this world, when we see the news, we hear about crimes against babies, mothers, fathers, etc. Some are terribly cruel, bestial crimes that humanly have no forgiveness, but the love of God reaches incomprehensibly to all, including all those murderers, rapists, thieves, exploiters, etc. God's love is very rich.

B. “He Made Us Alive With Christ” (vs. 5-6)

Here the statement made in verse 1 is emphasized. God gave us life despite being dead in sin. That life is given to us through Jesus Christ, and just as Christ was raised from the dead, we who believe in Him have also been resurrected from spiritual death, and will one day be seated in heavenly places with Jesus Christ.

What does this mean? It means that having believed in Christ and having a new life in Him, we're heading to the antechamber of the celestial homeland. This is beautiful! We enjoy a special relationship with God, we live in His presence, we're sure of His presence, we know that Christ is our faithful and firm companion, and the Holy Spirit guides us daily in everything. Therefore, as children of God, we're different and no longer of this world, although we're in this world (John 17:14-16). Whoever lives in the presence of God need not be discouraged, let alone despair. For the Christian, there's no place for those things.

C. “To Show The Incomparable Riches Of His Grace...In The Coming Ages” (v. 7)

The time will come when everything that's invisible today will become visible. God has a lot to show us. People in the present cannot perceive clearly how the love of God will be shown. It's written that in the centuries to come, at the end of time, God will show us the “*incomparable riches of his grace*”. Verses 5 and 7 tell us about the grace of God; verse 5 tells us that we're saved by grace. This means there's nothing we can do to be saved. God has done it all because He loves us and freely gives us his salvation. The goodness of God for us in Christ Jesus will be shown when the Lord pleases, but for now, we should show our gratitude by being obedient and loyal to our Savior.

Questions

- Give an example of an act of human mercy, and another of divine mercy.
- What do you expect God to show you in the future?

III. Salvation By Faith, But For Good Works (Ephesians 2:8-10)

Without exception, all non-Christian religions speak of salvation by human merit. Verses 8 and 9 are like huge beacons that show us the true path of salvation.

A. Saved By Grace, Through Faith (v. 8)

Humanity is saved by the gracious gift of God in Christ Jesus. As John 3:16 says: “*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*” That's grace, to receive everything freely, but we must bear in mind that this grace cost Jesus His life on the Cross!

We're saved 'through faith'. We aren't saved because we have paid something for our salvation. However, God does require that we do something to receive that salvation: that we put our faith in Christ. Faith is believing, trusting. If someone doesn't believe and place their trust in Christ, the gift of God is without effect. It's like when someone is sick, and the family brings the doctor who prescribes medicine, but if the patient rejects the doctor and refuses to take the medicine, it has no effect. This is the case with our salvation. God offers it to us freely, but we must make the decision to believe in Him and accept His blessed salvation. Salvation is a gift from God. We don't get it through something we have done.

A certain evangelist was talking to a person who had gone to the altar after a message inspired by God. After the pastor had talked a lot with the gentleman, helping him recognize that he needed salvation, this man, who was seeking God shouted: "I had better leave it. I won't be able to receive what you say. I cannot receive it. It's impossible!" "But why is it impossible?" the evangelist asked. "Because I know I'm lost, irretrievably lost; there's no salvation for me" was the answer. "Thank God" the evangelist sighed. "And why do you thank God?" replied the man. "Because Christ came precisely for that, to seek and save the lost. This is the only condition that's asked of you, that you believe that you need the help of this admirable Savior."

B. "Not By Works, So That No One Can Boast" (v. 9)

We ask ourselves: "and those who say that we must do works to save ourselves?" But these verses are very clear. The truth is that many don't submit to the Word of God, but to the doctrinal slogans of their leaders. Paul said clearly that salvation is free and it's not because of anything we have done. We cannot earn salvation with our good deeds. If we could, people would live boasting of their works deserving of salvation. Or they would be anxious to know if what they do is enough to merit salvation. The salvation that Christ offers isn't by works, but by trusting in the sacrificial merits of Christ on the cross, and by the deep love of God who freely offers us salvation through His beloved Son.

C. Saved To Live Doing Good Works (v. 10)

When we become new creatures, we're also regenerated. That's what the expression implies: "For we are God's handiwork created in Christ Jesus to do good works." 2 Corinthians 5:17 testifies: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come." We're made new creatures, we're heavenly creatures living on

earth to give testimony of Him who has called us "out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9).

The apostle James told us that faith must be complemented with works: "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it's not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. You believe that there's one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Wasn't our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone. In the same way, wasn't even Rehab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead." (James 2:14-26)

Not doing works would be like being idle. Good works are the natural result of the regenerated nature of the children of God. Paul said that these good works were prepared by God for us (Ephesians 2:10). And so it is, we have to live engaged in good works that show that we're citizens of the kingdom of heaven, and that our priority is to please our beloved God.

Questions

- Why do you think God doesn't allow salvation by works?
- Name five things that you are expected to always do as a Christian.

Conclusion

Because of His great love, God gave us life in Christ Jesus by his grace, through faith. By giving us life, He has transported us to a new dimension, to the kingdom of God. And in that Kingdom, we must live doing the works that God has prepared for us to honor Him and testify powerfully of His work in us and for all of humanity.



God's Wonderful Love

Fernando Mounier (Puerto Rico)

Passage to study: Ephesians 3:14-19

Memory verse: "... to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." Ephesians 3:19

Lesson Aim: To understand the apostle Paul's prayer and make it a part of our lives.

Introduction

Ask your students the following questions:

- What is love?
- How can we know that someone loves us?
- How do we love others?

Then, write on the blackboard some of the answers and reactions that you observe during the dialogue. This will help you initiate the subject of the lesson and perceive the concept of love that your students have.

In this letter, the apostle Paul addresses to God two prayers for the Ephesians. In the first one (Ephesians 1:16-23), he asks that the Ephesians could deeply understand God's greatness, and in the second prayer (Ephesians 3:14-19), the request was for them to receive personal empowerment which would lead them to deeper knowledge of God, and as a result, they would be able to experience fully the spiritual privileges that God had for them.

The focus of this lesson will be on the second prayer. The study passage is found in Ephesians 3:14-19, which begins with the following expression: "*For this reason...*" referring back to chapter 2 which deals with the redeeming action of Christ for Israel and for the Gentiles, giving the latter the opportunity not only to know Him, but to receive the spiritual riches available to those who place their faith in Christ. It's important to mention this context because it shows us the apostle's thought when he directed this prayer to God. Before making a study of this prayer we need to understand Paul's reason for praying.

I. Strengthening In The Inner Being (Ephesians 3:16)

A. What's The Inner Man?

The theme of the inner man refers to the elements that constitute our human nature. In order to explain human nature, we can make the distinction between the spiritual and the physical aspect. There are two main theories which try to explain our human nature; as a dichotomy or a trichotomy. It's enough to know that the dichotomy presents the human being with two different elements: the physical (body) and the immaterial (spiritual). While in the case of trichotomy, the human being is made up of three elements: Spirit, soul (both immaterial) and body (physical).

However, for the purposes of this lesson, it's sufficient to know that we're made up of two natures: a physical one, which interacts with the material world, and an immaterial one, which gives us life, can communicate with God and where our personality is located. These aspects of our being are integrated and work as a single unit. Thus, we're whole people but with different dimensions.

B. Strength In The Inner Being

In this prayer, the apostle Paul prays to God as the source of spiritual riches and whose purpose is to strengthen, through His Holy Spirit, the creatures that are the object of His care. Here, the element 'riches' is a Pauline term used to describe grace, the undeserved favor that comes from God. John Wesley expressed the element 'riches in his glory' as follows: "The immense fullness of his glorious wisdom, power and mercy."

(From <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/wesleys-explanatory-notes/ephesians/ephesians-3.html>, December 14, 2017).

Let's not forget that verse 16 tells us that that strength comes with power. This isn't just an abstract concept, it's real. It's the experience of a crisis that occurs at a given moment in the person's life which continues as long as we maintain the vital relationship with the Giver of life. This experience is reflected in the daily life of those who have experienced it. This reminds us of the words of Jesus Christ: *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."* (John 15:5)

C. A Second Work Of Grace

In this prayer, it seems that Paul also asked for the second work of grace so that the believer's heart would be cleansed and strengthened completely. It's in this crisis, when the inner struggle of the heart that's divided between its loyalty to the Father and this fallen world ceases, and the inner man begins to delight in God *"For in my inner being I delight in God's law."* (Romans 7:22)

This experience or crisis impacts the totality of the person in their spiritual, mental, emotional and moral aspects. This strengthening is what allows us to move ourselves forward into the future with confidence. It enables us to live victorious lives, that is, a life in which we can overcome the chains and fears that bind and paralyze us, and thus be truly free: *"So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."* (John 8:36)

Questions

- What's the inner man?
- How and who can strengthen the inner man?
- What visible evidence confirms this strengthening in a person's life?

II. "That Christ May Dwell In Your Hearts..." (Ephesians 3:17)

A. "...By Faith" (v. 17)

This verse is key in the interpretation of this lesson. The Apostle was initially addressing all those who had confessed Christ as their personal Savior. However, we must remember that that Word also applies to us, that is, those who have confessed that Jesus Christ is our Savior.

Returning to the prayer, no aspect of this can be realized unless each person has a real experience of Christ in their life. Lip service won't do.

Keep in mind that when verse 17 says, *"so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love..."*, the term "rooted" refers to something strong and lasting. Roots ground the plant or tree and give it stability.

B. The Experience Of Christ And The Holy Spirit

In this section, we need to emphasize that Christ and the Holy Spirit work simultaneously in the life of the believer. The strengthening by the Holy Spirit and the indwelling of Christ in the believer aren't separate experiences. When we experience the Holy Spirit's presence, we're also experiencing the presence of Christ. That is, where the Spirit of God is, Christ is also (Matthew 28:20, John 14:15-20, 2 Corinthians 13:14).

In this passage, 'to dwell' refers to the fact that Christ enters the heart of the believer, not as a guest but as their Lord, and occupies their whole life in a constant and sensitive way. This fact doesn't mean that we stop being ourselves and become puppets but rather that we're complete in Him.

In fact, this relationship isn't static, it's dynamic and involves the active participation of our wills and our whole being in relation to Christ. Furthermore, we must not forget that for this relationship to be a reality and not a mirage, the apostle Paul mentioned the only necessary requirement: faith in Christ (Romans 1:17, Hebrews 12:2).

C. A Life Rooted And Grounded In Love

A life rooted and grounded in love is one that's blessed and strengthened daily through its relationship with Christ. The tangible result is a stable and constantly growing spiritual life. Taking this into account, Paul exhorts us not to be like the double minded man of James 1:8. The prophet Jeremiah tells us: *"But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It doesn't fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit."* (Jeremiah 17:7-8)

Questions

- What's the necessary requirement in the heart of the person for Christ to dwell in their being?
- What does the following expression mean: "... rooted and grounded in love"?

III. Knowledge Of The Love Of Christ (Ephesians 3:18-19)

A. The Dimensions Of The Love Of Christ

The sense of sight allows us to perceive four dimensions, the width, length, depth and height of objects and landscapes in nature. In these verses, the apostle Paul uses these dimensions to express the magnitude of the splendid panorama that's presented before us as we reflect on the ways of God.

Paul invites us to understand that reflection about God's ways doesn't occur in isolation but it's an experience that's cultivated in communion with all the saints, those who profess the same hope in Christ. Therefore, trying to live a solitary spiritual life is foreign to the Christian experience. Decidedly, it is to be incomplete.

B. Understanding The Incomprehensible

Is it possible to know the love of Christ? Is it possible to understand the love of Christ? Will it be within our reach? Or it will be a chimera, a vain illusion outside of our possibilities?

The statement of the apostle Paul in verse 19 presents a paradox, trying to explain the incomprehensible. In order to explain this statement, the Message version of the Bible brings more clarity to this verse: *"And I ask him that with both feet planted firmly on love, you'll be able to take in with all followers of Jesus the extravagant dimensions of Christ's love. Reach out and experience the breadth! Test its length! Plumb the depths! Rise to the heights! Live full lives, full in the fullness of God."* (Ephesians 3:19 MSG)

Notes:

Through our mind, we have the ability to order and understand the evidence of the revelation of Christ's love, but not to understand it in all its vast breadth. We have to remember that the Christian religion is based on the principle of faith. Our experience and relationship with God are fundamental aspects (Habakkuk 2:4, Romans 1:17). Therefore, it's through our daily relationship with God that we can comprehend the love of Christ as personal experience, unique and made alive for us by his Spirit.

C. The Fullness Of God

As our capacity to receive grows, God fills us again and again. The idea of fullness implies that we subject our minds, our emotions and our will to God in Christ. Wesley interpreted that the phrase *"all the fullness of God"* (v. 19) to mean: "With all His love, His light, His wisdom, His holiness, His power and His glory" (Taken from <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/wesleys-explanatory-notes/ephesians/ephesians-3.html>, December 14, 2017).

This fullness doesn't mean that we'll have the capacity to be like God, or be deified. Nor does it imply that we're better than those who haven't yet come to know God. Rather, it reminds us that humanity is constantly searching for love in sources that are only temporary, and imposes on us the responsibility of proclaiming the message of reconciliation and hope in Christ.

Questions

- How can we grow in God's love?
- How would you explain your experience of God's love to a non-Christian person?

Conclusion

If we wish to grow into spiritual maturity, we need to come to the knowledge of the perfect love of Christ for us. If we do this, we'll develop our potential, that is, we'll achieve what we're capable of in Christ.



The Church: God's Team

Elvin Heredia (Puerto Rico)

Passage to study: Ephesians 4:1-16

Memory verse: "But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it."
Ephesians 4:7

Lesson Aim: To understand the implications of the new life in the Lord, and the practical and functional sense of belonging to the church as the body of Christ.

Introduction

For some years, I belonged to a bowling team. I remember that when they accepted me on the team, they told me that this was a high ranked team that participated regularly in championship tournaments. This status imposed on its members the commitment to maintain the high position they had earned over the years.

When I think of the church, I like to compare it to a team, because many characteristics of a team are similar to the characteristics that distinguish the church. The main implication of comparing the church with a team is to suggest two important considerations:

1. Our personal formation in the experience of the faith and the body of Christ, and
2. How our training collaborates with the rest of the body in achieving the team's objectives.

I. Personal Formation (Ephesians 4:1-3)

In Ephesians 4, the apostle Paul presented us with a series of characteristics that we should observe, in line with what he called "*a life worthy of the calling you have received*" (v. 1). Paul emphasized the characteristics that must be manifested in all of us who have responded by faith to the call of God in Jesus Christ, by virtue of which, we're now part of His body, that is, the church.

A. Humility

Humility, according to an on-line dictionary "is the quality of being humble and means putting the needs of another person before your own, and thinking of others before yourself. It also means not drawing attention to yourself, and it can mean acknowledging that you aren't always right." The humble person is one who voluntarily submits his character in order to

encourage good relations with others. The humble person ties his character to an initiative of service, detachment and love. Just like Jesus did! The humble person gives the best of himself so that peace reigns with his neighbor.

B. Meekness

In the book I wrote about the fruit of the Spirit, meekness is described as a controlled power: meekness is a characteristic of a docile person, and it's manifested in dealing with others. However, today we'll learn a new consideration in the definition of this virtue: "Meekness is a power, because it's part of the fruit of the mighty Holy Spirit. But it's a power that we must strengthen in our spirit. It's a power that has to become part of our whole being, so that our whole being is subdued and controlled by that power" (Dr. Elvin Heredia PhD (2015) "La Teolosis y el Fruto del Espiritu: La manifestación y evidencia de la presencia del Espíritu Santo en la experiencia de vida cristiana." pg. 139).

Meekness, then, becomes an element of harmony through which peace is maintained with those around us. Therefore, "human kindness is a power that we must practice. We need to practice and rehearse it constantly. We cannot be meek ... if in practice we're not. In that sense, meekness is a routine that we must do and practice daily. Meekness is part of our lifestyle" (Dr. Elvin Heredia PhD (2015) "La Teolosis y el Fruto del Espiritu: La manifestación y evidencia de la presencia del Espíritu Santo en la experiencia de vida cristiana." pg. 139).

C. Patience

Like meekness, patience also is part of the fruit of the Spirit. Patience is part of the character of every believer because faith feeds on patience. Patience is the practical exercise of a firm and unwavering faith. The person who is patient knows how to wait. For this reason, faith in God makes us wait patiently for his answer. In my book, I present the following practical definition of patience: "Almost by accident I discovered this reality. If we combine the word 'peace' with 'science', we'll find an interesting relationship between the two. Science has always sought to prove its theories empirically, that is, through investigation and proven facts. The case of patience isn't the exception. Don't forget that patience is the anchor of our faith. Our faith, on the other hand, is anchored to the confidence and security that we have confirmed in God through the things He has done for us in the past. Therefore, this science of peace deals specifically with security. If we're sure of something, we can be at peace knowing that no matter what happens, our faith is assured. Patience, then, is the proven science of peace that's not lost, even if the storms of life overwhelm us. This science doesn't fail. That's why we can be at peace. Patience is 'peace-science' or the science of peace" (Dr. Elvin Heredia PhD (2015) pg. 88. 90).

Now, why do we need to emphasize these personal characteristics of the believer? Why is it necessary for our personal formation to consider these elements of character? The answer to these questions will allow us to identify the practical and functional sense of belonging to the body of Christ.

Questions

- What are those three characteristics that Paul highlighted in the biblical study passage?
- Give some practical examples of humility, meekness and patience?

II. Integration Into The Body Of Christ (Ephesians 4:4-16)

The main idea of the apostle Paul in Ephesians 4 was to emphasize the importance of growing healthily in the experience of faith because the health and maturity of each believer would be manifested in the healthy growth of the church. That is, the church would show the world the efficacy of the gospel to the same extent that each of the believers and/or members of the church would have assimilated the

effective power of the gospel in their own character. This, in turn, leads us to consider three fundamental truths about who we are as Christians, and how they allow us to be part of a community of Christians, part of the church and part of God's team.

A. Definition Of Character (Ephesians 4:7-10)

Paul emphasized that *"to each of us grace was given according to the measure of the gift of Christ"* (v. 7), implying that we have all been impregnated with the same characteristic elements of Jesus to resemble Him in character and conduct. Jesus himself told us: *"learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart..."* (Matthew 11:29). Paul returned to that definition of Christ's character in the church to emphasize the importance that this has at a functional level. In other words, to the extent that our personal character is defined as that of Jesus, so will the character of the church of Christ in the world be so defined. The church of Christ, then, must resemble the Christ of the church.

I have always affirmed that we're 'God's showcase.' For through the church, God shows the world what He can do with the world and what He can do in the life of the sinner. Are we reflecting that transforming work of God to the world?

B. Commitment To The Team (Ephesians 4:11-13)

Recalling the initial anecdote, we can make a practical application to the apostle's intention: We must also have a commitment to God's team. We must all be perfected in our character. We must all strive for complete sanctification. The reason for this is explained in the biblical passage of study. Each member of God's team is committed to perfect growth, because in this way the whole body of Christ will also grow equally. Each one of us is committed to being a part of the body and must represent optimal growth.

As we can see in verse 11, each of us has a definite participation in the functioning of the body. In turn, each part of the body functions for the benefit of the body in general. As verse 12 indicates, the individual function of each one of the members of the team fosters *"the edification of the body of Christ."* That is, we're all blessed to fulfill the particular function that each member of the body has, and as a result, we'll reach the goal of *"equipping His people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up"* (v. 12).

This leads us to consider another commitment that we have with God's team, we must try to achieve our objective. Our bowling team always tried to reach the championship. We as Christians have two objectives based on the biblical passage of study: The first of these is to build the body of Christ, perfecting it through our various ministries, so that the whole-body functions properly.

The second of these objectives is to become mature Christians. Paul used this term to describe Jesus. *"The measure of the stature of Christ's fullness"* suggests progressive growth until reaching the goal of maturity as a Christian. Paul affirmed this experience of growth as progressive in character, an experience in which he considered himself to be in process: *"Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me"* (Philippians 3:12).

The goal of the great commission is the rescue of the lost. Now, those who are lost have to be rescued, just as we were when we were without Christ. Those who become Christians will also become part of the team, and therefore, discipleship becomes an essential part of that goal in which we all "reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God" (v. 13).

The church is also a 'championship tradition' team. As God's team, we must seek excellence. The Holy Spirit helps us respond in character and function to the excellence of Christ.

C. Body Functioning (Ephesians 4:14-16)

Finally, we have arrived at the part of the passage that describes the rationale for this rigorous training and function. In the first place, this intentional formation of the body of Christ helps us to be strong and resilient against every wind of doctrine, against the stratagems or cunning traps of men, and against the tricks of error, *"Then we'll no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming"* (v. 14). Paul presented this reason as a first line of defense of the body against threats that could weaken or endanger the good health of the body.

The second reason literally points to the head of the body, which is Christ. The apostle pointed to Christ as the head to which the whole body responds. Paul affirmed in Christ the pattern of true direction

and of love that we must all follow: *"Instead, speaking the truth in love, we'll grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ"* (v. 15). So, we must grow and develop following the example of the head.

The third reason points to the concerted efforts of the body, united to the head. Verse 16 summarizes the proper effect of growth and development of the body as Christ, the church. The body must be united, well concerted (synchronized in movements and purposes), perfectly fitted into its connections, where each one carries out what has been assigned to them on the team, helping each other to achieve the objective and the mission.

We need to recognize who we are within the body of Christ so that we can grow and function with the gifts and maturity we have acquired in Christ. We must walk worthy of the vocation to which we have been called. This leads us to consider this call within the concept of the unity of the body or team that we call the church of Christ. The call points us to reflect personally about the way in which our character is defined. Those who listen to the call, obey, and are committed to the church will define the character of the church, the body of Christ.

Could it be that we aren't very healthy Christians? Are we not living in a constantly changing world? How can we keep up the pace if our spiritual condition isn't at its best?

Questions

- What are the implications of being members of the body of Christ as God's children?
- What's the importance of growing healthily in the experience of our faith?
- Are we trying to grow according to the stature of Christ? How can we do it?
- What are the three fundamental truths about who we are as Christians?
- How are they allowing us to be part of the church as God's team?

Conclusion

Let's assume our commitment to grow and mature properly as the church of Christ. If we do, we'll reflect to the world the Christ who lives in the church, and we'll fulfill our objective and our mission. The award and the championship await us!



Making The Most Of Time

Daniel Pesado (Spain)

Passage to study: Ephesians 4:25-5:20

Memory verse: “Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children.”
Ephesians 5:1

Lesson Aim: To understand that, as disciples of Jesus, we’re called to express the unparalleled renewing potential of the gospel.

Introduction

Of the many ways in which the Bible expresses the sublime potential of the gospel, perhaps, the broadest or most inclusive are those that Luke left us recorded in Acts: “Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets” (Acts 3:21); and the one that John left us recorded in Revelations, where we read that a voice that came from the throne of God said: “He who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making everything new!’” And, to emphasize the firmness of those words he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” (Revelation 21:5) These words reveal that God didn’t renounce the original purpose of creating the universe and the human being with harmony, balance, functionality and beauty; in other words, perfect.

But between that purpose and the reality faced by Paul, and also the one we face today, there’s a great deficit; a tremendous need for renewal or transformation. That’s why God sent His Son. The goal of the gospel is that we can live fully and renewed when the kingdom of God is fully established.

Meanwhile, Paul understood that there’s a lot of work to be done. The apostle used his preaching, teaching and letters to teach the believers, who had been reached by the gospel, how they should live and testify in their contexts. A new order comes into being when the gospel is preached, received in our hearts and established as a norm of life in every place in which it penetrated.

The apostle insisted in the Epistle to the Ephesians and in the rest of his letters that this renewal that manifests the potential of the gospel begins with the transformation of the life of each believer: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

For this reason, it’s of fundamental importance to apply the gospel practically. And in Ephesians 4:25-5:20, we find four recommendations that if obeyed, will make it possible for the Gospel to be expressed effectively, renewing us.

I. “Don’t Grieve The Holy Spirit” (Eph. 4:25-32)

To grieve God’s Spirit implies much more than ignoring or making Him sad. The Holy Spirit is the person of the godhead who is imminent, and is working amongst us. Not paying attention to the Spirit of God will numb our consciences, and if we persist, will cause us to stop listening to His voice. It’s this rejection that drives many away from God. If we grieve the Spirit, our relationship with God is interrupted, and our participation in God’s plan collapses.

A. God Works Through The Third Person Of The Trinity – His Spirit

The Holy Spirit participated with the Father and the Son in creation (Genesis 1:26). The Holy Spirit is active in the restoration of creation (Acts 3:20-21). He always exalts Christ (1 John 5:6). And we can point out that from the death of Christ until this day, it’s He who shows us how to live and in what way we can cooperate with God in this purpose (John 14:16-17).

B. The Holy Spirit is Part Of Our Daily Life

He reminds us of everything Jesus taught (John 14:26, 16:13), constantly updating God’s will for us. One of the ways He does it is by speaking to us through the Bible. So Paul in Ephesians 4:25-32 gives us very specific instructions to help us avoid corruption and its continual influence. Taking some examples, we can see the usefulness of this advice. For example:

1. Lying (v. 25). One of the greatest damages caused by lying is distrust. Without trust, we can’t work together. The church as the body of Christ needs to work together to function effectively (Ephesians 4:16).

2. Anger (v. 26). Anger can have a positive aspect when it leads us to oppose injustice, lies, etc. But in real anger, our ability to reason and solve problems is annihilated. When the Holy Spirit doesn't control our emotions, anger becomes a totally negative emotion. As a result, Christians and the Church will lose their effectiveness.
3. Bitterness, anger, loss of temper, bad words (v. 31). All these emotions mentioned in this verse are symptoms. The cause lies deep in the heart of the person. As Jesus said in Mark 7:21-23, these manifestations come from our hearts. Since the message is inseparable from the messenger, these negative attitudes are an obstacle to the propagation of the gospel and render the gospel of power ineffective.

Questions

- In what ways can the Christian grieve the Holy Spirit, and what consequences can this generate?
- How will sins like lying or falsehood affect relationships in the church?
- What effects could be observed when we speak the truth?

II. "Be Imitators Of God" (Ephesians 5:1-13)

Paul presented us in the previous verses much of what we need to avoid. Then, he inspired us to look for the highest model we could find, so that by imitating Him, our life will display the efficacy of the gospel. The model is God himself (v.1). The problem is that no one has seen God (John 1:18). So how can we imitate Him? The apostle left us two unmistakable signs:

A. We Need To Walk In Love (v. 2)

This is the true guarantee that the gospel is the most powerful weapon in the history of mankind, and the only one that can save us from failure and eternal perdition. Love is the reason that moved God to send His Son, and also led Jesus to die on the cross. Without fear of making mistakes, we can say that love is the fuel that moves the universe. At the same time, love is the unmistakable sign of all that God promotes and, for the same reason, must be the motivation of every true disciple of Jesus. Love is what characterizes us. In fact, it is by grace or love that God sustains us, and moved by this is why we serve him. Thomas Merton (a Trappist Monk, 1915-1968) was right when he said: "To say that I am made in the image of God implies that love is the reason for my existence because God is love. Love is my true identity. Resignation and delivery is my lifestyle. Love is my character. Love is my name."

Paul referred to this principle in Ephesians 4:15, but here he gave us a concrete example of how to apply it to daily life. So, we need to look at the list of sins that are

pointed out in this part (Ephesians 5:3-7). And also, keep in mind that the time will come when being neutral, or politically correct, in the face of sin will not be an option. How should we act as children of God? We affirm the truth of God, we're clothed with the love of God, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

B. Walk As Children Of Light

A simple way to describe the life of those who are God's children is to live every day, moment by moment, in the light of the Word of God. The psalmist testified long before: "*Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path*" (Psalm 119:105). Walking in that light is what protects us from evil. Walking in the light allows us to be in communion as children of God, and be cleansed from our sins (1 John 1:7). In making this possible, the gospel shines in all its splendor and efficacy; because "*everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that's illuminated becomes a light*" (Ephesians 5:13).

Questions

- What other expressions do we find in the Bible that allow us to understand the meaning of being imitators of God, whom we haven't seen?

III. "Be Filled With The Spirit" (Eph. 5:14-19)

The Christian life is life in the Spirit. It wasn't in vain that Paul called Him the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:2). We're born by the work of the Holy Spirit (John 3:5-6), but we also live sustained, moment by moment, by the work of the Spirit (Galatians 5:25). When Jesus' followers today reach the point of understanding, in the light of all of Scripture, the complete and deeper message of the gospel, they will understand that being filled with the Holy Spirit is not an option, it's an essential issue. It's a question of spiritual life or death.

Wherever the Spirit brings life, it never goes unnoticed. If there's something that God desires for us, above all temporary blessings, it's the manifestation of His very nature in our lives. No one other than the Holy Spirit, who is God, can manifest what He is (Ephesians 5:9).

Light shows everything (Ephesians 5:13). In this context, the Holy Spirit himself is light. When He penetrates the minds and hearts of those who humbly seek to know God, He sheds light on their lives. But walking in the Spirit also means concrete things, very practical aspects of daily life that we must put into practice, and others we must discard. "Holiness is the intrinsic and transcendent purity of God; it's the standard of justice to which the entire universe must conform. God doesn't conform to any other standard. He is the standard" (Evans, Tony, *We Can Trust God in the Midst of Tests*, USA: Editorial Unilit, 2006).

The Holy Spirit is the one who orders our system of values according to God's standard, telling us what we should avoid, and also, how and when to act. Walking is synonymous with living (Ephesians 5:15). But Paul taught that there's also a possibility of living according to the desire of the flesh (Galatians 5:17). For this reason, he recommended the following: *"Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit"* (Galatians 5:25). The flesh and the Spirit are diametrically opposed. It becomes clearly obvious if someone is controlled by the flesh or the Spirit.

The Spirit not only helps us in our weakness (Romans 8:26), he also transforms us into effective collaborators with God in His work in the world. As the Lord's disciples, we must live lives filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:16-19) that demonstrate it on a day-to-day basis.

Questions

- What differences do we find between what the apostle Paul told us in Ephesians 1:13 ("... marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit") and the imperative that we find in Ephesians 5:18 ("Don't get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit")?
- What does the Christian have to do to be continually filled with the Holy Spirit?

IV. Giving Thanks Always And For Everything (Ephesians 5:20)

Normally, expressions such as 'always' and for 'everything' are too broad and encompass to we need to use them with great care. But here, they're used in the Word of God, therefore, we cannot and should not put them aside. So, is it possible praise God for everything the name of Jesus Christ? It's not only possible, but also, it's necessary and just.

A. Always Means At All Times

We recognize what He has done in our lives. We must never forget that God has freed us from sin and given us everything that has contributed to our spiritual well-being even if we may not have been aware of it (Ephesians 2:8). Everything good is a gift comes from God.

We must accept all that God has done here and now, realizing that God is fully active in motivating, instructing, and correcting us. In other words, He works intensely to complete His purpose in our lives (Psalm 138:8).

We should always express faith and hope. Thankfulness for the future means accepting that God is already there. He is working so that when 'we get there', each and every one of His promises will come true. In other words, it's to believe that everything that comes from God, no matter how it appears in the present, is good

and will bring peace to our life. It also means that God is never late (2 Peter 3:9).

B. Everything Means Everything That Happens In Our Life

Paul reminds us of this in 1 Thessalonians 5:18. Also, the psalmist was very expressive in this regard and helps us understand why we should be grateful to God.

1. We need to be grateful, because God is God (Psalm 136:1-3): He is the only true God. Psalm 136 reminds us that His works give powerful testimony of His divinity and power.
2. We must be grateful for creation (Psalm 136:4-9): Everything is the work of His power. He created and sustains creation, of which humanity is His highest creation. He has promised to relate to us and demonstrated the most genuine love voluntarily. These are very powerful motives for which we should thank God.
3. Grateful, because He forgave our sins (Psalm 136:10-22): The liberation of Israel is analogous to our deliverance from sin. God did something unthinkable and impossible. Something that the rest of creation (mythological or real) couldn't do: He sent His only Son to make it possible that our sins could be forgiven by faith. He made possible what was impossible for us (Romans 5:6-8).
4. Grateful ... *"to him who alone does great wonders, His love endures forever"* (Psalm 136:4a). 'Forever' is a way of thanking God for what He has done and what He will do. God has done amazing things but He will do even greater things. All his promises are like powerful magnets that sustain and guide us throughout this life.

In short, we're grateful because *"we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him"* (Romans 8:28a).

Questions

- How can we practice Ephesians 5:20 in daily life on a personal level?

Conclusion

The restorative power of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ announced in the gospel is what Paul experienced and taught the church. If the church wishes to cooperate with God in rescuing the human race, then, in the first place, we must accept by faith the new life announced in the gospel, and secondly, show clear signs of effectivity by witnessing tirelessly until the triumphant return of Jesus. In this way, we'll use time well, because the days are evil (Ephesians 5:16).



Each Other

Germán Picavea (Argentina)

Passage to study: Ephesians 5:21-6:9

Memory verse: “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” Ephesians 5:21

Lesson Aim: To understand the biblical model for interpersonal relationships in the home and at work.

Introduction

In this semester in our study of the Gospel of Christ in Galatians and Ephesians, we come to Ephesians chapters 5 and 6, where the apostle Paul dealt with the subject of relationships. He did it from his own sociocultural reality, a reality that, in the matter of relationships, was far removed from the divine model. The passage of scripture that concerns us today ranges from chapters 5:21 to 6:9.

In these 22 verses, Paul put on the table problems that were common in his society: The denial of the rights of women, specifically in the family as wives and mothers, the rights of the children, and the workers, who at that time would have been slaves. Note that in referring to each of these relationships, the apostle did so by first citing how each relationship had been marginalized: wives (5:22) mothers (6:2), children (6:1) and servants (6:5), denoting the writer's intention to dignify those who were being discriminated against and expose a new model for human relations.

As we have already seen, Galatians and Ephesians are two letters in which we can clearly perceive Paul's call to his readers to honor the sacrifice of Christ by living out their faith in their daily lives. From chapter 4 onwards, the apostle raised different aspects of the new life in Christ. He made a detailed and very understandable statement about how faith in Christ should be put into practice in all areas of life. Paul endeavored to make a detailed and very practical parallel between life before (4:17-19) and after Christ (4:20-21). He clearly intended the recipients of his letter to understand that they should live differently from their contemporaries without Christ. In this literary context, Paul talks about relationships, presenting a totally opposite and radical social alternative.

The memory verse is key to understanding the passage. It's like the melody that's maintained throughout a song. If we lose the melody, we run the risk of singing another song. The apostle Paul is saying to everyone that all who live in Christ are called to submit to one another

out of reverence for God. Of course, this new model for the life of relationships is reserved for those who allow themselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit (5:18).

The commentator William Barclay says that although the Christians in Ephesus were not valued in their occupations, professions, and social status, they were valued in the light of Christ, and that's why they needed to discover that everyone needs to be treated with dignity and receive respect and honor (Commentary on the New Testament, Galatians and Ephesians, William Barclay).

I. Wives And Husbands

When Paul wrote this letter, marriage was a relationship of power and male domination over women. Men had all the rights and there was no one to protect the woman. Remember that Paul wrote to those who were converting to Christianity and brought with them lifestyles and practices contrary to those of the new life in Christ. That's why the apostle addressed the husbands with very precise commands (vs. 25-33) for the marriage relationship. The weight of the action is placed on mandates (imperatives) that are addressed to the husband, and indicatives for the wife (vs. 22-24). The wife responds to her husband who lives guided by the Spirit under the fear of God (v. 21).

Already in 1 Corinthians 13, written some 10 years earlier, Paul introduced love as the most excellent way for interpersonal relationships. Consistent with his thinking, the apostle followed the same idea and introduced love into the context of first-century marriage. This was something unheard of and totally daring, and even more when we consider that he doesn't deal with just any kind of love, but with agape love, a love for those who don't even deserve it. This is the love that brought Jesus down to Earth, a love where God gave us absolutely everything, in Him (John 3:16, Philippians 2:1-11). It's striking how Paul addressed the husbands in a specific and repetitive way, using figures (church, body) to help them see the

dimension of the new concept he was introducing. Paul wrote to the husbands, (v. 25ff)

... "love your wives, just as Christ loved the church, and gave himself up for her" (v. 25)
... "husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies" (v. 28)
... sustains and cares for her, as does Christ to the church (v. 29)
... also "love his wife as he loves himself" (v. 33)

This new model was revolutionary for that time, and it also holds true for us today as we take a close look at our context. As in the first century, marriage today isn't reaching the full potential that God planned when designing it. Individualism and power struggles (explicit or implicit) are the silent hosts of marriages today. The apostle Paul was giving back to marriage the sacred value that God gave it from the beginning, dignifying the spouses as God's creation in a relationship of equals (5:21).

Paul is following his line of thinking: "there's neither male nor female", we're all "one in Christ" (Galatians 3:27-28) clothed with Him, and not only that, but "Abraham's lineage" and "heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:29). When the apostle wrote "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord" (v. 22), he did it after saying: "Submit yourselves to one another in the fear of God." Such submission is mutual and we should never think about the submission of one gender to the other. Paul wasn't thinking about authority or presenting a hierarchical line. He was setting out to restore the model found in Genesis 2:24. The relationship between spouses that the writer presents leads to the unity of a single body.

What Paul was saying is: married women need to be "a unit" with their husbands because: (1) they both share the same essence, something totally contrary to the thought of the first-century world; (2) they're part of a single body, something unthinkable for the husband of that time; and (3) they're co-responsible before God for marriage and the family, something that in that context was considered to be the husband's power that he would never share with his wife.

At this point, we need to look at verse 23, and specifically at the word translated 'head.' This word has been used to denote authority of the husband over the wife for many centuries. Unless the apostle had taken a radical turn in his thinking, it seems impossible that by using this word he wanted to establish a gender hierarchy, establishing categories between men and women, defining a line of command in the marital relationship or maintain marriage unchanged after embracing faith in Christ. Everything leads us to think that Paul used the word head in the sense of 'origin' or 'source of life.' He wrote, just as Christ is the origin or source of life for the church, man was the origin or source of life for the woman (Genesis 2:21-22).

Something that helps us to understand the conclusion that the writer used in the treatment of the same subject when he wrote to the Corinthians is: "Nevertheless, in the Lord woman isn't independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God" (1 Corinthians 11:11-12). Paul clearly shows, on the one hand, that in the marriage relationship and the family, there's only one 'chief' above all, and that's Christ, who never delegates His place and authority to any gender; and on the other hand, that the passage doesn't deal with the dominion of some over others, but it talks about mutual love (4:2).

The redeeming work of Christ is reflected in the life of spouses when they follow the principles of submission, love and service to one another.

Questions

- According to what's seen in the passage, what should the relationship between married couples be like?

II. Children and Parents

Another relationship where we need to "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" is the relationship between children and parents; a relationship that's not normally seen as "submission," a relationship that in the first century was authoritarian, despotic and violent. Absolute power was used by the father (man), without fear of making mistakes. We can say that the children resembled slaves more than sons and daughters. The mother didn't count in this relationship, and if she did, it was only to follow the father's instructions. There are even authors who speak of the infantilization of the wife, referring to the fact that she was treated as an infant or child.

Paul went against what was customary in the family relationships of that time by presenting a new model of relationship between children and parents. It was very direct and concise. He went straight to the center of the scene, those without rights and without voice: the children. Note that he spoke first to them, directly to the children! As with the women, Paul reordered the relationships and gave back to the children the place they deserved. The apostle commands the children to obey their parents (both of them), and to do so in obedience to the commandment of the Lord (v. 1-3). Put another way, submit to your parents in the fear of God.

Another possible translation of Ephesians 6:1-3 would be: "Sons and daughters, obey your father and mother as among Christians. Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment that entails a promise, so that it may go well for you and your life may reach its fullness in the land." When he addressed the children, the apostle didn't distinguish between genders; he treated daughters and sons alike. To both genders he sent the same message and to both he let them know the result of their obedience. He made it very clear that full life isn't

a right of any particular gender, but a direct consequence of obedience to both parents in the fear of God.

Again, Paul was concise in verse 4 where he addressed the parents, confronting the situation of the moment. Paul was saying, submit to your children “out of reverence for Christ.” Don’t forget that they’re God’s creation, equal to you, given by Him for you to nourish and train so that they may attain their fullness of life and serve the Kingdom (Proverbs 22:6). The apostle gave a knockout punch to the despotic authority of the father (male) and equaled the children (boys and girls) with the parents (mother and father) and explicitly pointed out their differentiated roles in the family relationship, roles with rights and obligations for both children and parents.

Paul also made it clear that both mother and father are equally responsible before God for raising, educating and disciplining their children. This isn’t just Paul’s idea but a teaching of the Scriptures (Genesis 1:28, Exodus 20:12, Leviticus 19:3, Deuteronomy 21:18-21, 27:16, Proverbs 1:8, 6:20; Luke 2-51 and Colossians 3:20). This is responsibility that neither parent should avoid, but must exercise with a fluid communication between them in order to agree on the different aspects that bringing up children entails.

Paul didn’t give too many details to the parents, he only told them to ‘raise them.’ This word at that time was very strong. For those who came from paganism, the mandate was ‘bring them up in discipline and admonition of the Lord.’ They had to break with their customs in relation to the upbringing of children. To provoke them to anger, to make them live a life of bitterness and resentment, was natural in Roman times. Hence the apostle pointed out in an absolute and imperative manner that they should not continue like this. Instead, he told them to nurture them, take care of them, educate them and promote their development. In this context, this implied looking after and loving them instead of rejecting them or killing them as was the custom, especially with daughters, or with those who presented some sign of weakness or were born with some physical deformation.

The redeeming work of Christ is reflected in the life of the family when children and parents follow the principles of submission, love and service to one another.

Questions

- Do you agree with the concept that father and mother are equally responsible before God for raising, educating and disciplining their children? Why or why not?

III. Servants and Masters

Once again, Paul went against the established order, specifically addressing the question of slaves and masters. Already, the situation about how the slaves lived was well known. Aristotle, some 300 years earlier, had developed a theory about slavery on the basis that slavery was natural,

since according to him, some were born to command and others to be ordered and commanded. The Greek philosopher maintained that slaves were living tools, that they were no different from animals and that their bodies naturally differed from free men, since they were prepared for serfdom. In the first century, in full expansion of the Roman Empire, much of the population was slaves and did almost all jobs. They had no laws to protect them and their masters had absolute power over them, even killing them without suffering any consequence. This was a totally utilitarian and dehumanizing relationship.

In the midst of this reality, Paul addressed himself first to the unfortunates of that time: the slaves. We can imagine them listening to the new model of relationships since the new faith was embraced by both masters and slaves (Philemon and Onesimus) and they lived together in community.

It can be said that this new model of relationship that Paul maintained was a pathway to abolish slavery. Already Paul had said to the Corinthians that a slave converted to Christ was free in Him, and his master too was a slave of Christ (1 Corinthians 7:22).

The slaves were freed from working for an earthly lord. Paul helped them see that their work was directly for Christ, their true Lord (vs. 6-7). In this way, the apostle elevated the slaves to a human condition they had never considered before. Paul then called the masters with an imperative, give equal treatment since Christ is the one Lord. Those masters needed to stop using the customary methods used by slave owners without Christ (v. 9). By contrast, we understand that by asking them to stop threatening their slaves, Paul is calling the masters to respect and be just in their dealings with the slaves. The apostle put the slaves and masters on the same level; both slaves and masters need to “*submit to one another out of reverence for Christ*” (v. 9).

The redeeming work of Christ is reflected in our working lives when owners, bosses, superiors and employees, hired and subordinates follow the principles of submission, love and service to one another.

Questions

- Following the relationship model that the apostle presents, what should my attitude be at work?
- What do you think about verse 9 which says: “Don’t threaten them...” What would be the equivalent of that today?

Conclusion

This passage in Ephesians teaches us that God is the only one who is above all human beings, both women and men, and that the new nature “in Christ” and “filled with the Spirit” demands a new way of building relationships in the different areas of daily life. We must “*submit to one another out of reverence for Christ*.”

The Integral Life Of The Christian

Second Semester

Our Temperament In God's Hands
Tools Against The Devil's Forces
Jesus, Our Deliverer
Christian Personality
Managing Our Moods
Don't Worry, Trust!
What The Bible Tells Us About Stress
God Forgives Those Who Forgive
Be Content!
Let's Take Care Of The Temple!
The God Who Heals
Our Greatest Hope
Living With Illness



Our Temperament In God's Hands

Natalia Pesado (United States)

Passage to study: Acts 22:1-16

Memory verse: "Better a patient person than a warrior, one with self-control than one who takes a city." Proverbs 16:32

Lesson Aim: To know and understands that nothing is impossible for God; He can change our temperament.

Introduction

At the beginning of the class, ask the students:

1. How would you define "temperament"?
2. How would you describe your own temperament?
3. How would you describe the temperament of your spouse or your children?
4. Are there aspects of your temperament that you would like to change?
5. Have you ever done anything in the past to try to change your temperament?

Based on these questions, encourage a time for dialogue where your students can chat together and share their opinions.

Temperament is a word we use to describe our personalities. This concept includes what we're generally like; how we usually feel or react (without thinking or reflecting previously). It's a very interesting topic. We're creatures of a wise God who performed an absolutely perfect creative work. During the different stages of creation, we read the following expression several times: "... And God saw that it was good" (Genesis 1:10,12,18,21, etc.). This lesson is about God's perfect plan for our temperament.

I. The Human Temperament In Psychology

Temperament is a concept of psychology that describes the tendencies of the character and behavior of a human being. Psychologists have studied the human temperament through the different stages of life, from childhood to adulthood. The authors Gartstein and Rothbart (2003), and Goldsmith and Harman (1994) say that babies show individual differences in temperament.

Some cry much more than others, some are more active. Some babies love being hugged; others twist uncomfortably when they're picked up. Some are highly reactive to the stimuli that surround them, while others remain calm no matter what they see or hear.

These scientists underline that regardless of what external influences might occur, a baby's temperament often remains stable over time. These definitions help us understand that human temperament is usually formed at an early age, and is shaped by the experiences that a fetus has from the womb of its mother and during the first years of life, in the care of the adults who raise and educate them. We can conclude, then, that at the beginning, we don't have any personal decisions to make about our temperament. Also, psychologists say that once our temperament has taken hold, it can remain imprinted on us for a long time and mark or guide our behavior and reactions.

God, as the Creator of our temperament, also gives us a guide to understand better this part of our personality which can cause problems for us in certain situations if our tendencies to react are negative. Thus, our temperaments, without due discipline, can lead us to sin against God through uncontrolled anger, disorderly habits, and choices that cause pain to others (for example: physical or verbal violence, dishonesty or infidelity, irresponsibility and lack of discipline, use of substances, etc.). The apostle Paul said in Romans 7:24-25a: "*What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that's subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!*"

In this lesson, we'll study about the power of the Holy Spirit to help us shape our temperament toward the will of God and for the glory of His name. There are four basic types of temperaments described in psychology.

SANGUINE PERSONALITY

Qualities: Warm and vivacious, have “charisma”. communicative, never lost for words. Carefree, the future doesn’t often afflict them, nor does the past bother them. Excellent storytellers. They live in the present. Their conversation has a contagious quality. It has a spark. Uncommon ability to enjoy everything. Cordial.

Negatives: They may cry easily, find it hard to find peace. They can have outbursts of anger. They often exaggerate the truth. They often have no control over themselves, make emotional decisions, and impulsive purchases. They are sensation seekers.

CHOLERIC PERSONALITY

Qualities: They make good decisions, have strong wills and are tenacious, self-determined, optimistic, bold and courageous.

Negatives: They may have problems with their violent nature. They can be stubborn and insensitive to the needs of others. They usually aren’t very emotional, often cold and don’t appreciate aesthetic details. They may lack sympathy and can be sharp, impetuous and violent. They dislike tears, can be vengeful if they perceive an injustice has been committed against them. They can be proud and find saying “sorry” hard. They can be excessively self-sufficient.

MELANCHOLIC PERSONALITY

Qualities: They’re sensitive and rich internally, analytical, tender and reflective.

Negatives: They can be depressive and pessimistic. They often like others to think that they’re suffering. They can be hypochondriacal, and introspective, proud and egocentric.

PHLEGMATIC PERSONALITY

Qualities: Reliable and balanced, of good character and easy to get along with, a happy and peaceful spirit. Sometimes they don’t talk much. They’re kind and conciliatory.

Negatives: They often have no self-confidence, can be pessimistic and fearful, grieve and worry easily, rarely manifest their emotions, are often passive and indifferent and accommodate the circumstances in a self-righteous and selfish way.

Ask you students which of these four types do they think describes their personality? On the Internet, there are different questionnaires that can be used to help us to understand our personalities. Ask your students what could be some of the consequences of the

weaknesses of their temperaments? Which “qualities” do they like most about their temperaments? It’s important to recognize that God created us, each one individually, and that He did an excellent job. However, sin can also affect our temperament. The good news is that the Holy Spirit of God is willing to help us get rid of the negative aspects of our temperaments.

Questions

- What do you think of the definition of temperament given by the science of psychology?
- What does the expressions of the Apostle Paul recorded in Romans 7:24-25 tell you?

II. The Human Temperament In The Hands Of God

In the Bible we can find several characters whom God transformed in a miraculous way (Abraham, Moses, Thomas, and Peter, for example). Reading their stories, we can see that God, our Creator, knew them intimately. He understands us even better than we do ourselves. God is the best person to do ‘heart surgery’ to bring changes to our temperament. (Here, we understand the word ‘heart as the ‘source of our decisions.’)

Let’s look at Paul’s amazing story together. The first time we see Paul (or Saul as he was called at first) is during the stoning of Stephen. On that occasion, we see how this zealous Jewish young man was prepared to use violence to defend the Jewish principles of his time (Acts 7:58, 8:1). We soon see this young man full of anger and hatred towards Christians who were causing so much change in the society of his time (Acts 8:3, 22:4). Paul worked together with the leaders of his community, asking for letters of authorization to persecute and imprison the Christians he met (Acts 26:9-11). We can clearly see that this man’s temperament was strong. In fact, Paul described his own uncontrolled aggression in this way: *“On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the Lord’s people in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. I was so obsessed with persecuting them that I even hunted them down in foreign cities.”* No one would have said that this man could change. Even after his conversion, the Christians couldn’t believe the change and feared him in case he was lying (see Ananias’ response to the Lord in Acts 9:13-14).

We can see how the power of God worked in Paul's life so that his temperament changed so much that his anger became love. Those Christians whom he had hated so much and wanted to exterminate became his new family. From that moment on, Paul was willing to suffer whatever was necessary for their salvation. In the letter to the Christians living in Philippi, Paul told them of his new love for them (Philippians 1:3-8). From his conversion onwards, this man's life changed, for instead of hatred, Paul was full of patience and advice for the spiritual growth of the believers. We see how God used his passion and emotional strength and transformed it for Christian service. What a glorious miracle! May God renew our faith so we can trust that He can make the changes that our temperament needs!

We find the last recorded words of the Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 4:6-8. What wonderful words! Certainly we can see the apostle's focus on the final goal: He wanted to be in the presence of the Father. We can also understand that it wasn't always easy to submit his temper completely to God and bow to His holy will. Paul affirmed that he had kept faith in Jesus Christ, and that the main thing, his spiritual life, was safe in the hands of God. The final verdict will be given by the Lord, who is a just judge and knows all things. We can definitely put our trust in Him. How wonderful to see the journey of this apostle! We can see his transformation in God's hands, and read of his arrival at the end of his earthly life with great peace and joy in his heart! And the excellent news is that this can also be the same for us if we wish it (Matthew 7:7).

Questions

- What was Paul's temperament like before he knew God personally? (Acts 26:9-11) Describe it in your own words.
- How was Paul's temper after knowing God personally? (Acts 26:22-23, 29). Describe it in your own words.

III. My Personal Temperament In The Service Of God

As with Paul, we can trust in the power of God today. The first step is believing that our Creator can and wants to permanently effect a change in our temperament. Many people say that our personalities are determined by genetics and that therefore they're fixed permanently. It's true that we're all different, some are strong and others are gentle. It's indisputable that we have a natural tendency to a certain way of being, just as we might have different colored eyes or a certain predisposition to some disease (for example:

Heart problems or high levels of blood sugar), which can be determined by the DNA coding. However, our personal experiences and decisions can also have an effect on genetics. For example, if I knew that I have a predisposition to diabetes, my personal struggle will be to eat healthily, avoiding sugars and starches in my diet, and exercising daily, as well as having regular medical check-ups. I may have to fight with this predisposition because I am a human being and illness is part of my earthly existence. In the same way, I believe that God can take control of diabetes and remove it from the body if He so wills to, because even genetics is under the power of God. My part is to always wait in faith and do his will daily: *"because nothing is impossible for God"* (Luke 1:37). Amen!

We must trust that God desires to use us for the glory and honor of His holy name. He himself created his children with a temperament different from others to reach different people. He doesn't want us all to have the same temperament; God is a God who creates variety. But if sin has used our temper for evil, then we know that God wants to heal us from that bondage. He wants our temperament to be useful for His ministry on earth.

Our part is to submit ourselves totally to the voice of guidance of the Holy Spirit, our excellent counselor who will guide us every step of the way. And when we fail at some point, He will help us renew strength and return to the path that God has laid out for us.

Questions

- Which temperament is the most similar to yours.
- Is your temperament very strong, given to inflexibility and anger?
- Do you have an overly docile temperament, almost unable to make any decision of your own without the influence of others?
- Is your temperament very influenced by emotions, especially sadness or pessimism?
- You can consult with people who know you. God can use the words of our family, friends and church members to see us reflected in the mirror.
- What changes do you feel God wants to make regarding your temperament?

Conclusion

The main thing is to seek God's answer in prayer; He knows specifically how our temperament can be a blessing for our lives and for others. When God does the work, He will show us how our natural responses and reactions can be according to His holy will. And all this will bring greater glory and honor to the blessed name of the Lord.



Tools Against The Devil's Forces

Marcial Rubio (Peru)

Passage to study: Mark 9:14-29

Memory verse: “. . . This kind can come out only by prayer” Mark 9:29.

Lesson Aim: To learn that demonic possession is a sad reality; and that if we aren't prepared to face it, we may end up being defeated and humiliated and bring dishonor to the name of Christ.

Introduction

Imagine that one day, a neighbor knocks on your door insistently asking for your help. You rush out to see what is happening. When you open the door, you see your neighbor hugging and holding his teenage son, who is shaking intensely and speaking in a terribly chilling voice. Then, you clearly understand that it's not the boy's voice. The neighbor tells you that his son has been playing the Ouija game, and now he is possessed by a demon, and he has brought him to you because he knows that you are a Christian who prays for healing.

Question: What would you do in that case? Would you attend to it, or would you apologize by making an excuse?

This case could very well happen to us one day. It's possible that we'll come across something, or perhaps it has already happened to some of your students. In this lesson, based on Mark 9:14-29, we'll study how God wants us to face this situation. This account is also found in Matthew 17:14-19 and Luke 9:37-42. It was a severe case of demonic possession which had withstood every effort of the disciples.

I. Humiliated By The Devil's Power (Mark 9:14-18)

A. A Troubled Father And Son (vs. 17-18)

Mark presents the case of a troubled father and his son. We don't know if the son was unique, but apparently, he was a teenager who suffered severe attacks of epilepsy that exposed him to death. Because the boy was having fits or seizures, he was in danger of falling into water or fire. He was frothing at the mouth, and apparently was suffering from severe dehydration (v. 18). This father who loved his son was keeping an

eye on him. Hoping for a cure for his son, he possibly carried him to where Jesus' disciples were, seeking the long-awaited recovery of his beloved son. How good it would be if there were more responsible parents in our countries looking after their children like this man. Surely, we would have fewer human dramas. At present, the statistics of the number of children abandoned by irresponsible parents are frightening.

B. A Father And Son Disappointed In The Disciples Of Jesus (v. 18c)

The Bible mentions what the anguished father said to the Master: “I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not” (v. 18). However, these same disciples of the greatest Master at some point had become famous when they successfully fulfilled the mission that Jesus had given them: “Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons.” (Matthew 10:8); “They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.” (Mark 6:12-13)

These were the same men commissioned and invested with authority by the Lord Jesus, and who had previously succeeded in the mission entrusted to them. But on that day, they staged a sad and embarrassing spectacle before the eyes of a multitude of priests, and especially of the scribes who were looking for any reason to mock the Lord. It looked as if all the efforts made by that father, with the only hope of being able to see his son recover, was going to fail, as his expectations vanished with the disciples' inability.

Questions

- What did the situation in Mark 9:18 show regarding Mark 6:12-13 and Matthew 10:8?

II. Released From The Devil's Power (Mark 9:14-27)

At that time, Jesus was returning from the mountain of transfiguration with the members of his inner circle, and he found that nine of his disciples were going through the worst humiliation and shame of their lives.

A. Jesus Was Present (vs. 14-15)

While the disciples suffered the shame of their failure, and the father felt helpless and full of grief and pain and disappointment, the scribes enjoyed the derision towards the disciples, and the audience enjoyed the show. At that moment, the Lord Jesus arrived. Suddenly, the mood of the party was charged with tension by the enemies of the Lord, and the father's faith who for a moment had renewed hope. How beautiful to have a Lord and Master who comes just when we need Him the most! And this wasn't coincidence because the Lord was fully aware of the situation.

B. The Cry Of A Father Troubled By His Son's Situation (vs. 17-18,21-22,24-27)

In that terrible circumstance, the boy's father, when he saw Jesus arrive, couldn't contain his despair and longer and decided to interrupt the enthusiasm of the people who began to surround the Master to greet him. So, he shouted with all the strength of his soul: "*Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech.*" (v. 17) Then he immediately told him about the resounding failure of his disciples.

C. Jesus Releases The Demon-Possessed Boy (vs. 20,26-27)

The Lord Jesus, after reproving the disbelief of all, including his disciples, ordered that the boy be brought to Him (v. 19). They had barely presented him to Jesus when the demon, upon seeing Jesus, reacted by shaking the boy violently (v. 20). The Lord asked the father for the history of the disease; and he after he told him, he said to Jesus: "*But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.*" (v. 22) Then this father cried out saying: "*I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!*" (v. 24) And before the crowd, Jesus commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the boy and never enter him again (v. 25-26).

Once again, the devil demonstrated his reason for being: "*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.*" (John 10:10) But faith isn't something beyond the reach of human beings. We were created with the ability to believe. That's why Christ told that troubled father

to only believe. However small our faith may be, if it's genuine, there's a possibility that God will heal our diseases.

Questions

- What was the father's attitude in seeing Jesus (v. 17)?
- Have you ever prayed for the healing of a person?
- Do you think that healing people is only for pastors and / or leaders?

III. Tools To Conquer The Devil (Mark 9:19, 29)

When everything was over, and when they had recovered from the impact, the disciples asked Jesus: "*Why couldn't we drive it out?*" (v. 28) It was very important that the disciples consider this question, but it's also relevant for us to think about it. Why did the disciples fail? They had been trained by the best Teacher, commissioned and invested with authority to heal the sick, cast out demons, and even raise the dead (Matthew 10:8; 3:14-15). And they had a record of successes. How can we recover the usefulness and effectiveness of a ministry that has failed? There are at least three causes of a sterile, useless and ineffective ministry.

A. Discard Disbelief (v. 19)

Unbelief is the antithesis of faith that connects us with the inexhaustible source of life, healing and sanctifying power. Adam Clarke says: "*Why are our souls not completely healed? Why isn't every demon thrown out? Why pride, self-love, affection for the world, greed, anger, bad temper aren't entirely destroyed? [...] because we don't believe. Jesus can; moreover, Jesus wants; but, we aren't willing to surrender our idolatry; we don't believe his word; for that reason, sin is in us; it dominates us.*" (Clarke, Adam, Commentary on the Holy Bible, volume III, USA: CNP, 1976, pg. 95).

We can have knowledge, important positions, broad ministerial experience; but without power. In the end, it's no use, for we cannot give what we don't have, and we disappoint the world hungry for a God who comes to us with help. We also shame the Lord, and give place to the children of darkness, and the devil himself, to make fun of the inability and ineffectiveness of our ministries. Today, churches can boast of having many resources that the church of the first century didn't have. They didn't have printed books, they didn't have great church buildings, or modern technology that we have, but when they met someone in need of God, they could say to him as Peter: "*Silver or gold I don't have, but*

what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” (Acts 3:6) How important it is to have spiritual vigor because you never know when someone will need your help. Independent of our position in the church, a lay person, minister, evangelist, superintendent or missionary, etc., it’s indispensable to maintain a living growing faith in God.

B. Take Care To Pray (v. 29)

A ministry devoid of prayer is a ministry lacking power; and the lack of power affects the testimony of believers. The lack of prayer weakens our passion for Christ and for the needy souls of God. *“Passionate love for Christ produces in the believers a holy passion similar to that which Christ himself had for the salvation of the people. What ignites this passion? ‘Prayer!’ Pray as the believers prayed on Pentecost: united, in an intense and continuous way.”* (Greenway, Roger S. Go and Make Disciples! Costa Rica: Libros Desafío, 2002, p. 93). If we stop praying, we begin to lose vitality and freshness. The church can have the best organization, the best doctrine, the best ecclesiology, etc. but if we don’t pray, they’re just like a beautiful corpse.

Prayer is the resource that keeps us in contact with our God; it contributes to our spiritual nutrition; and it keeps us out of the enemy’s reach (James 4:7, 1 Peter 5:8).

C. Take Care To Fast (v. 29)

We can see a group of nine disciples who were mortified and defeated by their lack of faith (Matt. 17:20), which in turn was the result of their lack of prayer and the absence of self-discipline. However, the experience of believers for generations with the practice of fasting as a spiritual discipline has served to nourish spiritual vitality and fervor. Prayer is the medium that keeps us in touch with the supply of spiritual power. Fasting itself has no spiritual power, but it helps us put God above material food, and take time to be with Him.

Notes:

Both resources contribute to maintaining a fresh life of faith, full of power. Neglecting fasting will cause us to bring disappointment to the people who seek our help in the hour of their needs. We’ll be ridiculed by Satan and bring shame to the name of the Lord. Any gift we have received cannot be maintained in strength and power without continued dependence on God, the Giver. The kind of problems confronting the disciples couldn’t be handled without a life of persistent and effective prayer. Spasmodic requests in emergencies aren’t enough. However, the warning implies a promise. *“The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”* (James 6:16)

The devil isn’t afraid of the gifts, offices, titles or experience of the followers of Jesus; but he fears and trembles at the presence of the Lord. The mere knowledge about Jesus, as well as the successful experiences of the past, don’t guarantee success before the clamorous cry of help from a world captured by the power of darkness.

Questions

- How can you explain v. 29 in the light of everyday life?
- What were the three tools?
- What can you learn from this lesson?

Conclusion

The use of the means of grace is indispensable in cultivating the freshness of our relationship with God in achieving the fulfillment of an effective mission. We cannot give what we don’t have. Only the real presence of Jesus in our lives, as believers and His ministers, can guarantee us an effective ministry before a world in need.



Jesus, Our Deliverer

Débora Acuña (Chile)

Passage to study: Luke 8:1-3

Memory verse: “After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him.” Luke 8:1

Lesson Aim: To reflect, appreciate and share the freedom that God has given us in Christ Jesus.

Introduction

Each of the people who saw and knew Jesus were people who had forgotten what God had done for His people. After the Old Testament book of Malachi, about 400 years passed, during which time there were no prophets delivering God’s message, or kings chosen by God to guide His people according to God’s commandments. They only had the Scriptures, and in them, the stories of the experiences of their ancestors, but none of them had seen the Red Sea open up or had eaten the manna. The most recent thing for them was the preaching of John the Baptist. They had the unique opportunity to know this Jesus, the probable Christ that had been prophesied about.

I. Following The Master

A. A Special Man

The first memorable appearance of Jesus occurred in Galilee. He went there to be baptized by John in the Jordan River (Matthew 3:13). All those present were able to hear clearly from John that this man, Jesus, was the Christ who was to come; He was the Messiah whom they had all waited for for so many years. John the Baptist said: “I have seen and I testify that this is God’s Chosen One.” (John 1:34) This statement was crucial since many of those who knew the prophecy, and others who had been converted through John the Baptist’s preaching, believed that God would fulfill the prophecy that the long-awaited Christ would come. From that moment, many followed Jesus, in addition to those He would choose as His apostles (Matthew 4:25).

B. Who Was Jesus To Them?

The fame of Jesus spread quickly (Luke 4:14,37), and multitudes followed after Jesus, (Matthew 5:1, Luke 5:1,15). Many people followed Jesus, although clearly, not all had the same intentions. Some wanted to see his

miracles; many only wanted to be healed; others followed Him to see if they could trick him, and some also wanted to know how they could be saved.

Ask your students to meditate a few minutes about why they’re following the Lord Jesus today. Reflect together with them. Many of those who followed the Lord saw it as the hope of their lives. They had had no one to follow, no one to imitate. They didn’t have a spiritual authority to guide them, someone who would show them the way, someone to save them from their conflicts, their illnesses, or their hopeless lives. Jesus offered hope for a better life.

C. What Did It Mean To Follow Jesus?

Today, many people follow idols, such as soccer players, rock stars, and music groups and bands, among others. Following them isn’t difficult. With technological help, we can follow their itinerary, see where they’re going to present, buy the tickets and queue up for hours to get the best seats. After witnessing the performance, the spectators return to their homes to sleep in their comfortable rooms.

Following Christ wasn’t like when He was on earth, nor is it today, although many think it is. Following Christ isn’t just following the church program, or sitting on the front row in the services every Sunday; and then, going back to our homes and carrying on our lives as normal.

The disciples were the most faithful followers of Jesus, and He taught them many things while they walked around the villages with Him. He was their mentor and gave them an example to follow, and He brought them closer every day to the kingdom of God. His words were coherent with his actions. His gaze spoke of His truth and sincerity. He also spoke to them gently, corrected them, persuaded them, and He taught them to be like Him, step by step. During his public life, Jesus went all over Galilee and Judea and the surrounding nations on several occasions (Matthew 9:35). Many times, He and His apostles would

have been able to have shelter and meals normally; although there may have been times when they had to go without. The disciples learned in their walking around the towns and villages to be strong, overcome fatigue, endure hunger and thirst, fast, and other discomforts. Our Lord, without needing to speak, was strengthening and preparing them for when they would have to undergo in their missionary work to distant regions later. Jesus woke up at dawn to start ministering, and on occasion, cared for people clear into the night. Other times, He didn't have time to eat. Whoever lives like this cannot be lazy.

Following Jesus means constantly learning from Him, following His steps every second, learning about His teachings and obeying His commands. The Master wants us to learn to be like Him, to see with His eyes and follow the truth that only comes from Him, and which He alone reveals to us (John 14:6).

Questions

- When Jesus began his ministry, where did he make his first public appearance, and who saw him? (Matthew 3:13)
- What did people do when they learned that Jesus would pass through their city? What would you have done if you had been in their place? (Luke 5:15)

II. When Jesus Christ Frees Us

A. The Truth

Although Christ had been announced to the Jewish people, before John the Baptist preached that he was the Son of God, there was much disbelief. The Pharisees couldn't understand how it was possible that any 'man' could be the Christ. Because of this, they constantly followed Him to refute His words, His acts and His teachings. They claimed to have the only truth, the true teaching of God. However, although they were very knowledgeable in what they knew, unfortunately, they couldn't recognize the true and only Messiah when they saw and heard him.

Jesus taught about life, about the kingdom of God, and about what the Old Testament Scriptures revealed. His truth wasn't limited to mere words written on a page, or to the strict adherence to some law. He went much deeper, teaching that what was really important was a humble and submissive heart before God.

We too must keep in mind that words and deeds, as in Jesus' times, are the consequence of clean hearts (Luke 6:45). Christ's truth was and is the only total and complete truth, and He says that we must live holy lives (1 Thessalonians 4:3a).

B. Health And Salvation

Jesus demonstrated His absolute power and authority. Along with what He taught, He performed miracles which also provided lessons for those who followed Him. The miracles authenticated the authority of the words of Jesus, confirming His divinity. They were and are eloquent signs. He healed the lepers to teach about faith and gratitude (Luke 17:11-19). Jesus healed the paralytic man to teach about the true meaning of the Sabbath (John 5:1-18). The resurrection of Lazarus taught those near Him about faith, and was a wonderful way to display the glory of God (John 11:38-44). When He calmed the storm, He showed His sovereign power over nature (Luke 8:22-25). And we could quote many other instances.

Jesus had not only come to heal the people's physical bodies, but His truth brought healing and salvation to every area of their lives. If we study some biblical verses, we'll realize that throughout the New Testament, our Lord often used the following expressions: 'Be saved', instead of 'be healed'. The words 'healing' and 'saving' have their root in the Greek word 'sozo', which means 'to save, to rescue, to liberate, to protect'. We find this word translated in the New Testament, with the words like healing, preserving, saving, doing well and complete restoration. This speaks rather of a type of good that affects the person in an integral way. Taking this into account, let's read the following biblical verses:

1. The healing of the woman with the issue of blood: Jesus turned and saw her: *"Take heart, daughter; he said, 'your faith has healed you.' And the woman was healed at that moment."* (Matthew 9:22)
2. Healing of blind Bartimaeus: *"Go," said Jesus, 'your faith has healed you.' Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road."* (Mark 10:52)
3. Sinful woman who poured the perfume from the alabaster jar: *"Jesus said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace.'"* (Luke 7:50)
4. The healed leper who returned to thank Jesus: *"Then he said to him, 'Rise and go; your faith has made you well.'"* (Luke 17:19)

C. Free From Oppression

Children, men and women witnessed the miracles that Jesus did, and they followed him. Some were spectators and others were the protagonists of His miracles. Everyone could see that Jesus not only had authority over common diseases, but also over the elements of nature.

They witnessed Jesus' power over everything; even the demons couldn't resist him. These evil spirits knew very well who Jesus was. Jesus had authority over them, and the result was the liberation of the tormented and possessed, who once free followed Jesus.

One of those liberated people was Mary Magdalene, from whom Jesus freed from seven demons (Luke 8:2). Let's imagine the relief that Mary would have felt to be rid of these demons. Of course, in recovering her life and self-will, she chose to follow her Savior and Liberator.

Currently, it's difficult for people to recognize the oppression that Satan exerts on them. Instead, they have attributed these attacks to disturbing diseases. Maybe now we don't carry out many exorcisms. But even so, we cannot say that the evil one has stopped tormenting people, wreaking havoc on their lives. He continues to torment and often uses new weapons.

You will have heard about fear, insecurity, phobias and panic that many people suffer. Many are afraid to leave their homes because of these fears. Other people suffer panic attacks, crises of anguish, stress and nervous breakdowns. Many people suffer from depression, cannot sleep, among others. These types of oppressive diseases don't allow people to live their lives in a normal way. They find it hard to establish normal relationships, or get a stable job. There are illnesses that cause constant torment such as schizophrenia, and other mental disorders that produce stormy hallucinations and keep those who suffer from these disorders from knowing reality and from their loved ones.

Jesus Christ didn't come only to save us from our physical or mental illnesses. He came primarily to free our spirit, to give us freedom, to break all chains that could keep us bound (Luke 4:18). Sometimes, we live with them, but even in chains, we don't understand the full freedom that God has offered us through his Son, Jesus Christ. We need to meditate and thank God that through Jesus, we can be free from oppression, healthy and safe.

Questions

- What do you think people thought about the prophecy of the Messiah? (Isaiah 7:14)
- Why did Jesus, in healing someone of an illness or illness, tell him that his faith had saved him? (Matthew 9:22)

III. The Joy And Peace That God Gives Us

There are no limits to the benefits that we receive after the liberation that Jesus Christ grants us, whether it be from a physical, mental or spiritual illness. However, only God and the person who experienced their own limitations know about all the suffering implied. If we look from the outside, we can observe that someone who suffered from constant hemorrhaging will no longer suffer when they're healed. We can imagine the freedom to go where they want and do whatever they like, but we cannot understand the limitations and frustrations that that illness had caused in the sick person. We cannot measure how much they've suffered and what this suffering has meant for them. We

do know that after being healed, they have been released, freed. When Jesus came to take away the burden we had in our life, whatever it was, He took it away. And not only that but He also gave us His peace and His joy. The change is wonderful. No longer do the heavy burdens of the past continue to ruin our lives. We must learn to live without them, remaking our lives, starting again. We must begin a new full and abundant life in Christ Jesus.

Let's review the above, reading the following verses:

A. Get Rid Of The Load

We will no longer have that weight, which we were carrying around for a short or long time. That limitation, that oppression, would no longer be there, and from then on, our decisions will not depend on our limitations. And because of that, we can now truly say that we're free (John 8:36).

B. Leaving Behind The Past

We will no longer suffer from that experience. We don't have to pour out more tears for our past. It will no longer be part of us, it will only be part of the past (2 Corinthians 5:17).

C. Enjoy The Joy And Peace Of God

One day, we came before Jesus with our burdens, sorrow and sadness, the product of the oppression of sin. He offered to take all of it from us, and in return, we need to accept His joy and peace and begin to move toward the paths He has prepared for those who follow Him (Acts 2:28).

Many of those who have been saved and now follow Jesus have found that the new life in Christ was a new beginning. His truth and healing brought a new way of living, a new path, full of hope.

We suggest you take a moment to talk with your students about the freedom that God brought into their lives, and ask them to ponder about what they have done with that new opportunity that Jesus Christ gave them by saving them. Today, those of us who follow the Master and learn from his Word will enjoy all the experience of being saved by Jesus Christ.

Questions

- What freedom do you think John 8:36 refers to?
- Is this freedom in your life a reality today? How can you share it with others?

Conclusion

Although we're all different and have different needs, our motivation to follow Him must be same: We need to thank Him, for He died to give us freedom and eternal life. The benefits or blessings we receive should be understood as gifts that we receive as a result of His immense love and kindness, and should motivate us to follow Him.



Christian Personality

Natalia Pesado (United States)

Passage to study: Acts 22:1-16

Memory verse: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there's no law." Galatians 5:22-23

Lesson Aim: To understand that nothing is impossible for God; He can renew our personalities.

Introduction

Personality has been studied closely by modern psychologists who want to understand more deeply how our decisions and behavior are governed. The Encyclopedia Britannica defines personality as "*a characteristic way of thinking, feeling, and behaving. Personality embraces moods, attitudes, and opinions and is most clearly expressed in interactions with other people. It includes behavioral characteristics, both inherent and acquired, that distinguish one person from another and that can be observed in people's relations to the environment and to the social group.*"

Today, there are many books that detail the different theories of personality that have been developed over the last century (for example: psychodynamic theories, humanistic theories, etc.).

This lesson will be based on a Christian perspective about the human personality. Most of us can agree that personality is a very complex concept to understand. We must trust in God, the Creator of the human mind, to be our best guide so that we can understand ourselves a little bit more.

The study of personality can also help us understand others better, and this will result in being able to relate to them in an effective, healthy way so that we can bring more glory and honor to God. In the class we'll see how a natural personality can be changed radically when the supernatural power of God touches a human life. When we allow God to enter into the scene and take a central role, our lives change course in amazing and exciting ways.

I. The Source Of The Christian Personality

At the beginning of our lives, God give each of us a new body with a brain and a mind. Our minds will help us understand the outside world, including our relationship with other living beings and with God. At the beginning, we all develop natural characteristics, and we're also molded by the guidance given by parents and others in our immediate environments. For example, some folk have a natural tendency to be much more active than others, others look for opportunities to work with various materials and understand how different mechanisms work. While others enjoy relating to people rather than things, and spend a lot of time talking with others and understanding them.

We can observe in babies, even in twins, different personalities from an early age (approximately two or three years old). Some may be more tender and noble in terms of feelings towards others, while others are more prone to anger, impatience and expressing their individual frustration. Some want more contact or emotional attachment with people, while others are more introverted and need time to be alone frequently.

Our personalities are based on natural tendencies. Children can be quite selfish about sharing their toys, for instance. There's a tendency to want to get our own way. All these are general characteristics of almost all human beings in early childhood. A moment came when we had the capacity to understand that we were different from the others and that we could make our own decisions. This is where the possibility to choose for ourselves began, which affected our personalities.

When someone gives their life to Christ and receives good spiritual guidance, that person can learn too that he can choose to develop a Christian personality. God can, through His Spirit, make us into a new person with a new personality transformed by the Holy Spirit of God. We can decide to be committed to remain under the guidance of the Holy Spirit daily so that we can experience His presence and transformation in a constant and permanent way throughout our lives.

It's in this moment of life where we need to understand that the only source of having a Christian personality is God himself. Through his Holy Spirit, He creates in us a personality that has patterns, thoughts, feelings and behaviors guided by a holy love which comes from God.

In the history of creation (Genesis 1:26-27), we see that God, from the beginning, wished His children to be like Him so that they could guide all creation to salvation. God has the same desire for us today.

Questions

- Do you think we can change our personality? Could you share some change that you have personally experienced?
- What do you think when you read the passage in Acts 9:1-19?

II. Characteristics Of The Christian Personality

By studying more closely the characteristics that make up a Christian personality, we'll take David Stoddard's book, *The Heart of Mentoring* (2003), as a guide. Stoddard says that personality is the set of qualities that constitutes one person and distinguishes him from another; that is, each person is in some way different from another. When we speak of a Christian personality, we aren't thinking that every Christian will be the same, but there are certain qualities that should be part of the life of every Christian

We'll study some elements of the fruit of the Holy Spirit that will be the best guide so that we can evaluate ourselves and allow ourselves to be molded into God's plan for us as His children. By having times of communion with our heavenly Father, we'll be able to see these virtues flourish.

A. Love: In the original Greek, the word is 'agape.' *"Agape love is a little different. It's not a feeling; it's a motivation for action that we're free to choose or reject. Agape is a sacrificial love that voluntarily suffers inconvenience, discomfort, and even death for the benefit of another without expecting anything in return"* (CompellingTruth.org).

We see that this Christian quality directs the personality of the person, producing decisions that benefit others. This way of feeling and thinking is in complete contrast to the egoism that's innate to our personalities.

B. Joy and Peace: In the Bible, these two Christian virtues are mentioned several times. Spiritual joy is an element of the fruit of the Holy Spirit that refers to a feeling of well-being and tranquility that's independent of the circumstances that surround us. Note here the desire New Testament writers had that God's children should experience joy and divine peace. Peace is true inner tranquility, with a general sense of harmony. In our societies, people are seeking for true joy and true peace. In several verses, we see the peace that Jesus offers; He understands our need for it (John 14:27, 16:33, Philippians 4:6-7). Likewise, we see in the Bible the joy to which God calls us, expressed as a commandment (Philippians 4:4, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18), and how God is the source of joy for the Christian (Psalm 16:11, 94:19, 118:24; Habakkuk 3:17-18).

C. Patience or Forbearance: This element of the fruit of the Holy Spirit comes from the word meaning, waiting long enough before expressing anger. This helps us prevent the use of force (or retribution) that arises from inappropriate anger (a personal reaction). We can see the following biblical quotations about patience: Examples of God's patience (Romans 2:4, 9:22); the example of Timothy as a Christian leader (2 Timothy 3:10); and the call to patience for us today (Ephesians 4:2).

D. Faithfulness: The original Greek word for faith is 'pistis', which denotes trust, faithfulness, being faithful. A personality that cultivates faith is a personality that trusts in God as Creator and sustainer without losing peace and joy. In these biblical citations, we can observe the following: Examples of people of faith who can be used by God (Stephen, in Acts 6:5, Barnabas, in Acts 11:22-24); the importance of faith in the walk of life (1 Corinthians 16:13; Ephesians 6:16); and the results of faith (Matthew 15:28, Mark 10:52, Acts 14:9-10).

E. Gentleness or Meekness: Refers to an inner spirit of quiet assurance. It's tamed strength, the ability to deal appropriately in difficult situations, not to take revenge. Let's see some biblical references of this Christian virtue: It's necessary in leaders and lay members of the church (Galatians 6:1); it's a quality of the children of God (Colo. 3:12); and it's a call for us today (Titus 3:2).

F. Self-control or self-governance. The root of the word means "to govern". In modern psychology, human personality is characterized by different roles, for example, father or mother, son or daughter, student, worker, friend, enemy, etc. Often, we experience several of these roles at the same time. We need to experience self-control in each case to avoid emotional and behavioral disorders. The Bible underlines the importance of self-control to withstand the temptations of the enemy (1 Peter 5:8); and the dangers/consequences of not having self-control. (Proverbs 25:28).

Invite your students to reflect about what a person who has all these six characteristics would look like. What would they think of this person? Would they like to have this personality? ... What an exemplary personality! Certainly, that person would be a true inspiration for all of those who were in contact with them. In the Bible, we can read about the life of Jesus and we can see these personality qualities in His life. We should desire to be like Him.

Questions

- What aspect of the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:21-22) do you want to develop more in your life? How will you do it?
- Why do you think you need more of that virtue?

III. Results Of The Christian Personality

In the first place, the results of cultivating a Christian personality will be demonstrated in our personal life; that is, we'll enjoy true daily joy and peace, even in moments of difficult circumstances that are sometimes part of human existence.

The Christian personality, which includes self-control, meekness, and patience, will bring great benefit to those who they live and work with. There will be a lot of harmony, unconditional love, personal sacrifice for the welfare of others, a sense of security and well-being, true trust and mutual support, and collaboration for mutual edification. Someone who

allows the Spirit to develop these Christian virtues will be as the popular saying goes: *"a little piece of heaven here on earth."*

Third, we'll see the results of Christian personality in our relationship with God. As a loving Father, He wants us to enjoy His love and His presence in continuous communion. By living a life in the Spirit, we'll develop His fruit in our lives. God's presence in our lives will bring unspeakable joy, a peace that passes all understanding, and abundant life just as Jesus promised us (John 10:10b). These experiences can help us get closer to God and desire to remain united to Him.

Also, living in the Spirit and allowing Him to mold our personalities makes us live in harmony with God. Author Ted Hughes wrote: *"To be holy is to be in harmony with God. This harmony is based on the fact that we share the same nature ... When God makes us partakers of His nature, we come to think like Him. Not always with the same wisdom, not always with the same understanding, but we think like God. We want what He wants"* (That Key Point Called Holiness, Argentina: CNP, 2004, p. 70, Translated from Spanish).

Finally, and above all things, living daily with a Christian personality allows us to please God. We can enjoy knowing that our Christian personality pleases His heart, brings glory and honor to His name, and cooperates in advancing the plan of salvation in the lives of others. What a great blessing! (Psalm 51:10-13)

Questions

- Can you share some other thoughts about the results of how to develop a Christian personality today?
- What aspects would you like to stand out from your Christian personality?

Conclusion

Each fruit of the Spirit is a necessary characteristic and distinctive element of a truly Christian personality. We need to examine ourselves. How are we manifesting these virtues? Allowing the Spirit to mold our personalities will produce very beneficial results in our personal, family and social lives. We can trust that God, our heavenly Father, wants us to be healthy, joyful and close to Him, and with His power, this can be achieved in our lives.



Managing Our Moods

Máximo García (Peru)

Passage to study: Mark 14:32-42

Memory verse: “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.” 1 Peter 5:7

Lesson Aim: To learn to remember that God doesn't want us to be dominated by our moodiness.

Introduction

We humans are made up of spirit, soul and body (1 Thessalonians 5:23). For these to work harmoniously with each other, we need to be at peace with God, our Creator, with ourselves, and with others.

In the post-modern culture of the 21st century, there are millions of people suffering from a lack of peace, and this absence of peace in the human heart carries devastating consequences. Likewise, this lack implies stress, discomfort, and emotional and spiritual illnesses. This uneasiness is due to the lack of harmony in our souls that happens when we aren't at peace. All this ends up affecting our minds, hearts and spirits, and in the end, all this affects our bodies as well.

Although not all diseases are caused by lack of peace, we must recognize that there are many psychological causes for physical illnesses, including: Increase in cholesterol levels; diabetes; heart problems; among others. So, we need to accept this truth in order to handle the emotions that hurt us, and in some cases, destroy us. First of all, we can be sure that there's always a way out and a response. Our Lord gave his disciples a wonderful promise which is for us too: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you ...” (John 14:27). That true peace comes only from God.

I. Sharing Our State Of Mind With Our Friends (Mark 14:32-34)

Our moods are emotional manifestations expressed in external and/or internal behaviors, which affect our attitudes. These emotional manifestations can be toxic or non-toxic; they often originate in our thoughts, and can be manifested later in other forms. These emotions generate a series of biochemical

reactions in the body, such as the secretion of hormones which go into the bloodstream. This then translates into behavioral responses of grief, joy, anger, wrath, frustration, among others, according to the circumstances. It's very difficult to know what a person is thinking, and therefore to gage their reaction to circumstances, which may cause surprise to others. In any case, how a person reacts will indicate the type of person they are, and if they are the type of person we want to share with and relate to.

Our different moods are part of being human. We read how Jesus, knowing that his terrible hour was approaching, went to a place called Gethsemane to pray with three of his closest disciples: Peter, James and John (vs. 32-33). There, Jesus said to His friends: “*My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death, he said to them. ‘Stay here and keep watch.’*” (v. 34) We notice that in the midst of that sad feeling, Jesus decided to share his feelings with his closest disciples. Because of what he was suffering, he asked for their emotional support in prayer. This teaches us that in the middle of our complicated moments, we can share with our closest relatives and/or friends how we feel. We can seek their emotional support and their support in prayer. Galatians 6:2 says: “*Carry each other's burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ.*”

Emotional burdens that can generate different moods should be shared with those close to us; and when it's our turn, we can receive help from others. We'll need it and should not refuse it. In doing this, we're fulfilling what the Master said about loving and helping. Let us be compassionate and merciful to one another, as our God is with all of us! (Luke 6:36) But sharing with those who are closest to us and asking

them to pray for us isn't the only thing we should do as sons and daughters of God.

Questions

- Why did the Lord Jesus ask his disciples Peter, James and John to go with him?
- What moods can we identify in Jesus at the time he was praying in Gethsemane?

II. Crying Out To God In The Midst Of Complicated Situations (Mark 14:35-36)

In the parallel passage to Mark, Matthew recorded that the Lord Jesus shared with his heavenly Father in a personal way his suffering through a profound prayer: *"My Father, if it's possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."* (Matthew 26:39b) The Lord shared with His heavenly Father all His feelings, and trusted Himself to God, showing His dependence on His Father as His helper. Following this exemplary attitude, we must also come to our personal confidante, par excellence: Our good God! In Him, we must cast our burdens, and learn to depend on Him with confidence (1 Peter 5:7).

To be able to understand the heart cry of a person in the midst of a complicated situation, we need to know their state of mind and how they can be helped to be victorious. We must learn not to make mistakes in this regard. Let's look at some Bible characters to illustrate this.

A. Moses' Anger Due To The Murmuring Of The People (Numbers 20:1-13)

In this story, the people asked Moses why he had brought them to the desert to kill them of thirst. Faced with this, God commanded Moses to speak to the rock to get water out; but in a moment of desperation and anger, Moses struck the rock with his rod (Numbers 20:10-12) instead of speaking to it as God had commanded him. That outburst of frustration and anger cost Moses dearly. For this reason, God told him: *"you will not bring this community into the land I give them."* (Numbers 20:12) We can learn from this that a hasty action under a certain state of mind can cause us serious consequences with spiritual repercussions. In the case of Moses, he couldn't enter into the promised land with the people. Pray asking God to help you to not act hastily!

B. Elijah's Weakness (1 Kings 19:1-4)

This man of God was a person of passions similar to ours (James 5:17). So, he experienced the following moods:

- He was so discouraged that he wanted to die, just as many of us feel in the face of certain events that happen to us (v. 4).
- He experienced depression. This can be seen in the heartfelt prayer that this prophet raised to God: *"I have had enough, Lord, ... Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors"* (v. 4). We can understand how foolish our prayers can be when our state of mind falters.

You as the teacher can share your own life experiences as you teach this lesson. I want to share one of my experiences here. I went through a very difficult and critical situation which led me to feel terrible anguish, which triggered a stroke. I remember that at that moment, I felt like everything was falling apart and I wanted to die. However, after that episode, I can say that the loving hand of our Lord lifted me up. Today as I write this lesson, I can see and feel the great miracle of God in my life. My recovery in less than three months has been great. This was medically impossible; but the Lord did it!

Questions

- What can happen when a person decides to act in a hurry under a certain state of mind that they are feeling?
- What are the benefits of calling out to God in the midst of complicated situations?

III. Delivering Every Situation Into The Hands Of God (Mark 14:39)

Faced with what our Lord Jesus was experiencing and suffering, He continued to cry out in the same way: *"My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."* (Matthew 26:39b) We see, then, that what our Master was experiencing didn't lead him to take any other decision; He prayed and continued trusting in God, in the midst of all his suffering.

I wonder how we would feel if we knew that we were about to die. What would our mood be? But most importantly, what would we do at those precise moments? Many people make hasty decisions in those critical moments when they're experiencing different states of mind, and afterwards, they regret

those decisions. This often leads to situations that cause them even more distress, uncertainty, etc. than what they had before.

The best we can do is always to be steadfast in prayer. Remember that God always hears the cry of his people; the cry of each one of his sons and daughters, and he responds in the best time according to His holy and perfect will (Jeremiah 33:3). Certainly, God answered the cry of our Lord Jesus. He showed him that His will was for him to give his life as a ransom for all of us. That was the perfect and pleasing will of God so that today we could be saved!

Next, let's look at the moods of two Bible characters, and what God did for them.

A. The Case Of Asaph (Psalm 73:1-23)

The psalmist Asaph was David's musician. After 12 years of service to God, he doubted, lost his trust in God, and was envious of the ungodly. He even said: *"Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and have washed my hands in innocence."* (v. 13) This man was experiencing a mood of complaint and his complaint was to the Most High. But this changed when he entered God's sanctuary (altar), and he realized what the end of the wicked was (v. 17). From there, Asaph acknowledged and accepted that he had made a mistake. In the same way, a certain state of mind in us could lead us foolishly to doubt or disown God, entering into conflict with Him. Let's be careful! Let us pray to the Lord asking for patience at all times.

B. God's Tenderness Towards Elijah (1 Kings 19:1-18)

God answered Elijah by giving him the following:

- He gave him rest (sleep) (v.5). Although it seems incredible, physical rest is also a blessing from God. Think about this: How many people cannot sleep peacefully or normally?

- He fed him with adequate food (v. 6).
- He allowed him to talk about his afflictions. This is often a very good way to help others in the midst of their moods. Thus, Elijah explained his case to God and relieved his depression (v. 10).
- God revealed himself in his various ways. The wind, the earthquake, the fire and the soft voice were all God's voices (vs. 11-12).
- The Lord gave Elijah more work to do: to anoint others, showing his depressed prophet that He wanted to continue to use him. Thus, God changed Elijah's depression through work (action). This was a complete therapy (vs. 15-16).
- He told Elijah good news, that there were seven thousand faithful remaining in Israel (v. 18). In this way, his feeling of loneliness was removed (Spurgeon, Charles, Notes on Sermons, USA: Editorial Portavoz, 1974, pg. 55).

Questions

- What words of the Master's prayer show that he shared with His heavenly Father the situation of agony that he was experiencing?
- What should we do, as sons and daughters of God, with what causes us distress, uncertainty, fatigue, etc.?

Conclusion

In our personal lives, how many times have we encountered situations that cause us anguish, despair, etc. Remember, in the midst of all those moments, to learn to rest in Jesus Christ (Matthew 11:28). No son or daughter of God has been abandoned in their human problems. The Lord Jesus is always attentive to our situation; He wants us to come to Him.

Notes:



Don't Worry, Trust!

Vivian Juárez (Guatemala)

Passage to study: Luke 12:22-31

Memory verse: "Don't be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:6

Lesson Aim: To understand that anxiety or worry is an evil that afflicts many people, and that God doesn't want us to worry.

Introduction

Many times in life, we face uncertain situations where we cannot see a way out. In times of crisis, we question ourselves about which decisions to make or where the resources will come from to meet a need. In the face of all this uncertainty, it's normal that worry and anxiety arise in us as we look at what we see as an unknown future, and not as present reality.

Jesus knew that his disciples had questions about their future and how their needs would be met. In Luke 12:22-31, we see that the Lord took time to let them know that God was looking after each one of their needs, so they only needed to trust in His divine care.

As sons and daughters of God, we need to remember that He is our heavenly Father who always looks after us and will never abandon us. So, our anguish contradicts our trust in Him; it stops us from fixing our gaze on the kingdom of God where we can discover how important and valuable we are to God.

Jesus' invitation is simple: Instead of worrying about the different difficult situations in life, He expects us to always seek the kingdom of God. To change, we have to exchange one action for another; replace worry and anxiety for trust and dependence upon God.

I. The Origin Of Anxiety

The online dictionary defines anxiety as: *"a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease, typically about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome."* That's to say, anxiety is a state in which the being of the person is totally restless and a bit fearful. Such a state is a normal and natural reaction, which arises when our agitated thoughts activate this reaction in our bodies. Anxiety causes physiological changes in us that prepare us to increase performance and stay

alert. This is normal, however, what's not normal is being constantly anxious for different reasons.

Anxiety is a very common problem. Medicine and psychology offer multiple treatments to reduce it. Many people who feel anxious cannot identify exactly what they feel or cannot explain what the source of their anxiety is. But anxiety comes as a result of feeling threatened by some situation. So, in all cases, we need to look for what's causing this condition.

A. Routine And Hectic Life

The current pace of life and the overload of activities and occupations can be a constant source of anxiety and stress. When we don't set appropriate priorities and allow circumstances or other people make decisions about our time and activities, we can experience periods when we're overloaded with work, which keep us in constant turmoil.

Being so busy doesn't allow us to take time to meditate and reflect on the course of our lives, and it limits us in our times of personal encounters with our good God. In the parable of the sower, Jesus explained to us how the thorns represent those cares in our daily life that drown His Word and don't let it bear fruit (Matthew 13:22). Let's be vigilant, and with the help of God, we'll know how to keep those constant times of being in His presence and establishing appropriate priorities in our lives.

B. Dissatisfaction

The human heart is insatiable; ambition and passions can govern us. When our gaze isn't on Christ, and we don't let His Holy Spirit guide our life, we're prone to go after our own desires. This interminable search for more satisfaction ends up exhausting us and leaving us increasingly empty.

In his encounter with the Samaritan woman, Jesus recognized this woman's need and helped her see all those decisions that she had made in trying to be satisfied. Then, he offered to quench her thirst and give her eternal life (John 4:13-14). Jesus is the only one who can satisfy all our needs and keep us from being controlled by the pleasures of this world.

C. Crisis And Uncertainty

Anxiety can also be the result of problems or crises in our life. The loss of a loved one can leave such a large void that it can make us think that we'll never recover. So, we focus our attention on the uncertain future and on how we can continue with life from that moment on.

The breakup of a family or marriage relationship can also make us feel anxious. Having put our trust in a relationship, we see how our plans are frustrated and we feel disoriented. Also, the loss of work, interpersonal conflicts or any other situation that generates instability ends up disturbing our mind, giving way to ideas and thoughts that don't allow us to move forward.

The crises in our lives often cause us to forget to trust in God's perfect plans for us. They distract us from being able to find God's purpose in the midst of the circumstance we face.

Questions

- In what ways can being very busy cause anxiety? (Matthew 13:22)
- In what area of your life have you needed to recognize that Jesus is the only one who can quench your thirst? (John 4:13)

II. Let's Learn From Birds And Flowers

If anxiety is a normal reaction in human beings, then we need to ask ourselves the following: What does God expect us to do with those situations we go through in life which provoke anxiety? God isn't indifferent to our human condition. He knows that there are moments of uncertainty in our life where we really don't know what to do. In Luke 12:22-31, our Lord Jesus spoke to his disciples about God's care and provision for them.

A. Don't Worry About Daily Life

When we think about our basic needs like food and clothing, we can see that they become indispensable to guarantee our life here on earth. However, Jesus helped His disciples see how God diligently takes

care of his creation (Luke 12:24b, 28). When we turn our gaze towards the afflictions of this world, it's easy to forget that God is the one in control and who sustains everything. We can be sure that God will put his wonderful care over our life and our needs.

B. God Takes Care Of You

In Luke 12:29-30, we can clearly see Jesus drawing attention to the fact that we aren't to be like unbelievers, whose lives revolve around anxiety and worry. For Jesus, the anxiety in our life is the result of forgetting that we have a loving Father who is watching over us and knows all our needs.

When we experience anxiety, we need to understand its origin, and also to reflect about our faith and why we have begun to doubt God's provision and care.

Questions

- How can we nurture our trust in God by seeing how He cares for His creation? (Luke 12:24-28)
- What did the Lord Jesus mean when He said that we look like unbelievers when we doubt God's provision? (Luke 12:29-30)

III. The Effective Antidote Against Anxiety

In a simple search on the Internet, we can find many options on how to get relief for anxiety. Such options range from breathing exercises to medication. Although many of these resources are useful and allow for a better management of anxiety, we need to go to the root of the problem to be able to solve it.

On the other hand, we must understand that not all people suffer from anxiety in the same way. So although for some people it may be easy to manage, others may need professional help to recognize their source of anxiety and learn the best way to cope with it. Many times, it's difficult to overcome anxiety, due to our rigid thoughts that prevent us from adapting to the situations we face, or because we don't see alternative actions or solutions in the middle of a crisis.

As Christians, we must be prepared to accompany people in their anxious moments since, as we have seen, there are times in which faith is weakened, and they need to recover or establish trust in God. Next, we'll see that there are four important elements that we can consider when faced with anxiety.

A. We Need To Put Our Trust In God

An important factor when we face anxiety is to understand, be aware of, and recognize that worries or situations that can cause anxiousness are taking on a higher priority in our lives than the trust we have in God.

When we face one of these crises in our lives, we naturally look at our own resources and means first (Psalm 20:7). As we begin to depend on them, we weaken our trust in God. When discovering that what we can do isn't enough, what we'll feel will be anxiety. Reflecting on God's provision, and remembering how He has supplied our needs in the past, is a way of nurturing our faith. In order to be able to rest and counteract the thoughts that provoke anxiety, we need to recover our trust in God.

B. Concentrating Our Thoughts On God

If we recognize that we tend to be anxious and worried, we must protect ourselves, even before we get anxious. As well as any other circumstance that moves our focus away from God, anxiety can be very subtle. We can even validate it, considering that it's necessary and responsible to be able to attend to the issues that concern us.

The problem of anxiety is that it stirs our mind and thoughts. It takes away our peace and doesn't let us see clearly the best action we can take. Isaiah reminded us that God will keep in perfect peace the person whose thought is placed on God, who trusts Him (Isaiah 26:3). We need to fill our mind with the thoughts of God, recognizing His action in each moment of our lives, in order to avoid the worries take His place and distract us.

C. We Need To Be Thankful

We forget very easily. Above all, in moments of anguish and need, we tend to forget the past moments in which the provision and grace of God worked in our favor. An indispensable resource to change our way of thinking is to live gratefully. Although things in the present aren't always as we would expect, we'll always find reasons to be grateful. The mercy and faithfulness of God are evident in many ways in our lives. So, we need to constantly express our thanks to the Lord, which will change our perspectives.

Paul gave us wonderful counsel in his letter to the Philippians. He reminded us that we have no reason to feel anxious. In the moments in which we experience anxiety, we need to present these concerns before God, praying with thanksgiving (Philippians 4:6). To be grateful is an effective antidote for anxiety because

it generates a wall of resistance to our worries and anxieties. It also makes us see that, even though we're experiencing a difficult situation, we have valuable resources in God, to whom we can turn at all times.

D. We Need To Pray

When we maintain our trust in God, our thoughts are centered on Him, and an attitude of gratitude will make it easier for us to resort to prayer when we experience anxiety. As Christians, we need to live with the certainty that God is close to us and attentive to our prayers. So, developing the discipline of prayer is important when we want to overcome all attacks of anxiety. But such discipline should not only be seen as a temporary relief, but as our first resort in any situation. When we pray, we'll always be connected with God and His will.

Prayer and anxiety cannot and should not coexist. That's why when we're anxious, it's hard to pray; it's difficult for us to concentrate, and we're easily distracted. It's important to know that we can count on other members of the faith family to sustain us in prayer when we cannot. As a church, we must also be ready to intercede for others who are facing crises in their lives, and because of that, cannot refocus their eyes on the Lord, and thus be able to feel the relief and rest that only God can give us.

1 Peter 5:7 reminds us that we can place all our anxiety on God, recognizing that He takes care of us. God knows that we're human. He knows our needs and he is a loving Father who wants to supply in every area of our life. Our confidence in the certainty of His care is our best resource to be free from anxiety.

Although anxiety is a natural human reaction that sometimes alerts us and helps us to prevent dangers and threats, we must be aware that we're often worried and agitated by situations that only show a lack of faith and trust in God's provision for our lives.

Questions

- How does Psalm 20:7 challenge you to consider your trust in God?
- Why do you think Paul advised us to be grateful to relieve anxiety? (Philippians 4:6)

Conclusion

God expects us to believe that He is a caring Father who knows our needs and wants to supply each of them. When we face situations where we don't see how God can help us, we need to look for His help in prayer and with gratitude, focusing our eyes upon Him.



What The Bible Tells Us About Stress

Ely Camas (Mexico)

Passage to study: Matthew 11:25-30

Memory verse: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” Matthew 11:28

Lesson Aim: To understand that God wants His children to live a restful life physically, spiritually and emotionally.

Introduction

Throughout the history of mankind, problems and pressures have existed in the lives of us humans. They can be physical, social, spiritual and / or emotional. In our study passage, Jesus is speaking to the Jewish people, a people loaded with many things. The situation in which they lived wasn't very different from the one we live in today. As a nation, the Jews were under the yoke of Rome. While it's true that they could cultivate their land, they had to pay taxes for it. Also, while it's true that they had a center of worship (the Temple in Jerusalem), it was also true that their religious leaders were imposed upon them by the government that oppressed them. If we go a little further, it's true that they had the freedom to believe in God, but their religion was full of many rules almost impossible to fulfill.

This description reflects in a small way how the Jews at the time of the Lord lived. We should ask ourselves the following questions: Can a person surrounded by all these limitations feel good? Is it possible for a person to have freedom when everything seems to be against them?

With this in mind, let's study Matthew 11:25-30 and see what God has for us when we seek Him wholeheartedly.

I. Stress, Its Causes And Consequences

A. Causes Of Stress

As the times have progressed, we have generated our own problems. Here are some of them: Belief that the abundance of knowledge solves everything; the eagerness for material things; distancing ourselves from God; diseases; social pressures; among others.

James 4:6 teaches us the importance of keeping ourselves humble and not falling into pride.

Humanity is increasingly loaded with problems. We struggles with ourselves because we want to know more. This has led to the generation of pressures of all kinds, including emotional ones, because we haven't been able to find answers for our existence. Incredible as it may seem, in a time when there's more science, there are also more suicides, more drug users, more alcoholism, and similar things. And all this makes us wonder why? There are many answers, but I think one of them is that we live more and more stressed because we cannot find real answers.

B. Stress And Its Consequences

Stress has been defined as a feeling in which everything falls apart, and can be aggravated by the inability to handle problems. It's also feeling burdened with worries about work, home, family, money, car, and a series of factors. All this may result in high blood pressure and dermatitis to mention just a couple of them. But it can also lead to spiritual problems such as despair and anguish, which leads some people to consult everything related to spiritualism and occultism. These emotional problems and mental tensions are like invisible forces that pull or push against a person. Also, stress manifests itself as anger, tearfulness, disability, loss of control, loss of appetite or binge eating, causing mistakes, anger, nervous depression, and, sometimes, very dramatic incidents or accidents. The apostle Paul tells us too that worry is very common, and he exhorted us not to “worry” (distress or despair) in difficult times (Philippians 4:6).

Questions

- In your opinion, who do you think are those who live in constant stress?
- Analyze your life. Are there any symptoms of stress in you? What makes you think so?

II. Jesus' Response To The Problem Of Stress

A. The Religious Society In The Time Of Jesus

The problem of the Jewish people in the time of Jesus was that the Jewish religion itself didn't offer them alternative solutions to their anguish. Their religion was so laden with rules and regulations. Jesus himself condemned the religious leaders, saying that they were capable of putting burdens on the people that even they themselves couldn't carry (Matthew 23:4).

B. Society Today

Everything that's developing around us today can be stressful. Alarmingly, even religion has become a source of stress, either because the church is governed by rules or traditions that over time have taken over true faith, even when they have nothing to do with the Bible, or because the church has become an entertainment center, an alternative to many other meaningless and insatiable experiences in our contemporary scene.

In our society, people seek to get things. Young people want to have a good job in order to be able to buy a car, house, brand clothes, etc. They believe that this will make them feel happy, but it turns out that these things don't really satisfy them. Married couples believe that they will be happy if they have all the necessary things for their new stage of life. But we're again talking about material things. Neither religion, or money, or professions, or the things that we can acquire are helping us to be happy. Hence the importance of continually renewing our thoughts in the light of the Word of God (Romans 12:2 NIV).

C. What Jesus Offers

In this situation, Jesus made the following invitation: *"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest."* (Matthew 11:28 The Message) Anxiety is oppressive fear without a precise cause, and this is what society is living with today. Some even bury their emotional problems by

firmly believing that they're experiencing a physical problem. Reflect on this: How many people have headaches, bowel problems, etc. that they believe are simply physical problems, when in fact, they're emotional matters? Anxiety is that restlessness or fear that stalks a person.

How many people spend the whole night without being able to sleep? Why are they afraid of something they cannot get out of their head? If we can observe the words we have read and defined, that's exactly stress. With this in mind, Jesus made a great invitation so that all those who have these kinds of problems come to Him, and thus get rest.

In relation to this precious invitation, we need to ask ourselves two important questions: "How can we come to Him?" and "What kind of rest does the Lord offer?" There are many people who hear about Jesus, and they're invited to believe that He can forgive their sins and give them a new life. Many of them say that they will fix some things in their lives, and then accept the invitation. However, the truth is that if we could fix our lives on our own, why do we need Jesus?

He invites us to come as we are, with all our burdens and problems, believing that He is the only one who can forgive our sins and can make us new creatures. There's no rest more complete than the one Jesus offers us because when we come to Him, we'll find freedom from our sins, from our anguish, and from our fears. Remember what the Psalmist said: *"Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never let the righteous be shaken."* (Psalm 55:22)

Questions

- Could the contemporary church cause stress in society? Explain
- How many Christian people do you know who live and reflect a truly happy life?

III. Being Yoked to Jesus

When I was younger, I grew up on a farm. I had to put a yoke on two oxen so that they could pull the heaped-up cart. That was very easy when the two capable animals were used to carrying the load together, but it got complicated when we put the yoke on one trained animal and one that we were just training. The novice ox didn't like being yoked and pulled this way and that, not allowing the other to walk well. Of course, this caused pain through these sudden movements.

A. “Take My Yoke Upon You, And Learn From Me ...” (Matthew 11:29a)

When someone comes to Jesus, they must learn to walk with new rules: no more pride, no more taking the reins of their lives, and no more self-centered rules. Now, they must follow Jesus’ rules. It’s interesting that He tells us to take His yoke, that is, his teachings, and begin on a new path, the path of humility, subjection, relearning how to walk in life. Jesus told us: “...learn from me ...” (v.29). But where and how can a child of God learn from Jesus? He himself gave us the answer: “...study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me.” (John 5:39)

B. “... I Am Gentle And Humble In Heart ...” (Matthew 11:29b)

Jesus’ description of himself was totally different from what the Jewish leaders were like: arrogant, proud, legalistic and commandeering. Jesus is meek, in other words, gentle and kind, very different from the attitudes of the priests and the high priest of that time! Jesus’ nature is peacefulness. He’s the one who can comfort our souls. In the story of the prophet Elijah in 1 Kings 19:1-18, we find the prophet fleeing from Ahab and Jezebel, depressed and distressed. They were looking for him to kill him. God helped him sleep, and then spoke to him in a cave. God used a strong wind, an earthquake and fire to get through to Elijah, but he didn’t see God in them. Verse 12 tells us that the distressed Elijah heard God speak to him in “a gentle whisper.” Then, the prophet knew that God was there and went out to meet Him.

God always speaks to us softly. We just have to know how to listen to Him in a world where there are many noises that distract us and make us unable to hear that kind voice of our Lord. Jesus invites us to learn from Him, the humble one who meets our needs gently and in a simple manner. However, coming to Jesus and following Him seems to become so complicated many times because it’s contrary to the society in which we live. Our societies are becoming more sophisticated; we’re challenged to live with the latest in fashion, have the most expensive telephones, the most complex computers, etc.; where commerce

does things that are programmed to last a very short time, and then we experience anguish for not having what others have. Jesus tells us that to walk with Him, we don’t need any of that. He isn’t expecting us to be at the top end of fashion or to use sophisticated language. He just expects us to come with humility.

C. “... And You Will Find Rest For Your Souls” (Matthew 11:29c)

People’s greatest desire is to be able to rest from their afflictions. We need to be at peace with ourselves. Today our societies consume more products for anxiety called anxiolytics; people go to spas as therapeutic centers that offer relaxation. The interesting thing is that despite the fact that these medications and relaxation centers are increasingly more abundant, our society continues to experience more stress problems.

In Philippians 4:6, the apostle Paul invites us to pray for the things that normally concern us, and which take away our peace. The solution then is that we should talk more often with God. If we pray for all the things that concern us, we would have much less stress.

Here are two practical suggestions to obtain peace for your soul.

First, find more time to be with the Lord Jesus, time for yourself, and stop running after things.

Secondly, settle for less, that is, learn to live with what God has given you.

Questions

- What kind of relationship do you have with Jesus?
- Do you enjoy your relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ? Explain

Conclusion

God is very interested that His children live a life of rest physically, spiritually and emotionally. To do this, we must stop looking at what we don’t have or at what’s causing us anguish or concern. Instead, we must share it all with God in prayer, and then we’ll experience the true peace that only comes from God.



God Forgives Those Who Forgive

César Barco (Ecuador)

Passage to study: Matthew 18:23-35

Memory verse: "Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?" Matthew 18:33.

Lesson Aim: To learn that God wants us to forgive others the offenses that they have done against us.

Introduction

One of the themes that Matthew dealt with in the gospel he wrote was the theme of forgiveness. We read that to be children of God means to live a peaceful life (Matthew 5:9). We read as well that if before presenting our offerings (economic or praise) to the Lord, we remember that we have something against a fellow Christian, we need to pause, go, and be reconciled with the other, and then worship God (Matthew 5:23-24). It's interesting that chapter 5 ends with the urgent call to love our enemies if we want to become children of our heavenly Father (vs. 44-45). Apparently, our perfection in holiness rests upon forgiving others (v. 48).

I. The Characteristics Of God's Forgiveness (Matthew 18:23-27)

In order to understand the magnitude of God's forgiveness, we need to have a look at this parable that Jesus told the disciples. In the first instance, the servant owed money to the king who was over him (v. 23, 25-27, 31-32, 34). This king in the parable represents our Lord Jesus. The second thing to note is that the debt that the servant owed the king was huge, ten thousand talents, equivalent to something like 216 tons of silver. In today's money, this servant owed his king and lord approximately 123 million dollars. Certainly, it was impossible for him to pay the debt. Lastly, at the end of this parable, the servant was judged by the king for not forgiving the debt of a fellow servant. The king sent him to prison and sold everything he had, including his family, to pay off the debt. (v. 25). With these details of the situation, we can understand the magnitude of the debt and the magnitude of divine forgiveness.

A. God's Forgiveness Doesn't Seek Its Own

The servant said to his king and lord: "... *be patient with me ...*" (v. 26). The on-line dictionary defines patience as: "*the capacity to accept or tolerate delay, trouble, or suffering without getting angry or upset.*" The servant also told his Lord: "... *and I will pay back everything.*" (v. 26) The response of this servant shows his arrogance. He didn't ask to be forgiven all the debt or part of it. He didn't ask for comfortable installments to repay his debt. But he asked for something which was impossible for him to pay back on a servant's salary. Sin leads us to see overly optimistic options, instead of seeking the divine forgiveness that's freely given to us.

The king in the parable could have agreed to the servant's offer of paying back everything (v. 26). He would have had to be very patient if he wanted his ten thousand talents returned to him. But the king had another type of attitude. As a gentleman, he didn't demand his 216 tons of silver; neither did he wish to have his servant as a debt slave (Exodus 21:2, Deuteronomy 15:12-14). This shows us that divine forgiveness is closely linked to His perfect love. God doesn't seek His own benefit but rather, the good of the other.

B. God's Forgiveness Is Merciful

We read: "... *the servant's master took pity on him.*" (v. 27) The idea expressed here is often found in the Bible (Judges 2:18, Luke 10:33, 15:20, etc.). The king had profound compassion on his servant.

We too need to show mercy when we have to forgive someone. Just as we need God's mercy, so must we show it in our relationships with others.

We're invited in the Bible to become like Jesus, manifesting Jesus Christ in our lives. Learning to forgive one another will keep us united, and that will give testimony to the world (John 17:21). We also need to understand that one of the strategies of Satan is to keep us disunited (2 Corinthians 2:10-11).

C. God's Forgiveness Grants Freedom

Our destiny was going to hell, a permanent prison for our souls (Luke 16:26), but God in His mercy paid our debts, taking away our guilt and declaring us to be righteous, thus guaranteeing our eternal freedom if we remain in Christ. We're free because divine forgiveness brought justification to our lives. "We believe that justification is the gracious and judicial act of God by which He grants full pardon of all guilt and complete release from the penalty of sins committed, and acceptance as righteous, to all who believe on Jesus Christ and receive Him as Lord and Savior" (Manual of the Church of the Nazarene 2013-2017, USA: CNP, 2013, p. 32).

This parable of the debtors also helps us understand that by ourselves, we cannot buy our freedom. Our pride cannot do it, nor our good intentions. The only thing that can give us freedom for eternity is divine forgiveness (John 8:36). Matthew 18:27 ends by saying: "He canceled the debt and let him go."

Questions

- What are the characteristics of God's forgiveness according to Matthew 18:23-27?

II. Demonstrations Of Unforgiveness (Matthew 18:28-30)

We move on now to the story of the other servant who owed the first one the sum of one hundred denarii, a salary of one hundred days. At present, it would be the equivalent to three minimum wages, a payable debt. This is in contrast to the debt that his lord had forgiven him, which was equivalent to millions of dollars. But the first servant refused to forgive him this relatively small amount, although his master had forgiven him a colossal amount. (v. 28).

A. Lack Of Forgiveness Affects Others

The pardoned servant didn't have the same forgiving attitude as his lord had had for him. The passage says that this servant violently took his fellow servant and wanted to hang him (v. 28). And even though this fellow servant threw himself at his feet and begged him (v. 29), using the same words he

had previously said to the king (v. 26), he didn't want to forgive him. Here we can understand that the absence of a forgiving attitude gives rise in us to violence against others, suffocating our peers, unleashing anger, tantrums, unnecessary pain, insults, lawsuits, etc. If we, as fellow servants, act in reciprocity when someone treats us badly, it won't please God who has forgiven us, and we'll generate a circle of endless quarrels.

B. The Lack Of Forgiveness Accuses

The servant said to his fellow servant: "Pay back what you owe me!" (v. 28). Many people, even within the body of Christ, don't forgive from their hearts, and in front of the person they feel has offended them, they seek the opportunity to bring up again everything they did in the past.

Often as offenders, we wish to be forgiven not only by God, but also by our neighbor so that we no longer have to feel the weight of guilt. But when the situation changes, when we're in the position of being the one offended, how difficult it is to forgive! We want to keep on blaming our offender and seek to make them remember what they have done because what they did hurt us. It's hard to forget. However, true forgiveness overlooks all shortcomings, mistakes and sins committed against us (Proverbs 10:12, 1 Peter 4:8).

Questions

- Do you think that the fellow servants did well in telling their king about the wicked servant's bad attitude with his fellow servant? What would you have done? (v.31).
- What causes the lack of forgiveness according to the passage? Explain.

III. The Consequences Of Not Forgiving (Matthew 18:31-35)

A. Unforgiveness Will Be Observed By Others.

Among the characters that are mentioned in this story are the other slaves, some of whom were sad and others angry about what they had seen: "When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened." (v. 31)

The Jewish leaders correctly applied the law, "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." (Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20, Deuteronomy 19:21). But this wasn't

to avenge but because punishment was necessary. The king had to act with justice in this case. The wicked servant had done an injury to his fellow servant; he needed to be punished. Sooner or later, people will demand justice. There needed to be forgiveness between those two servants.

B. Unforgiveness Brings Back The Judgment Of God

I would like to end the lesson here but there's another truth to communicate. God will correct us if we don't forgive. The divine correction required from the servant who didn't want to forgive is the same judgment he would have had if he hadn't been forgiven (v. 34). Now he had to pay back all the debt.

The king made the wicked servant pay back his huge debt because he hadn't forgiven the small debt of his fellow servant. The king wasn't interested in the money, neither did he condemn the wicked servant because all the others demanded it, but because he didn't want to forgive his fellow servant. Therefore, the king said to him: *"'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?'"* (vs. 32-33).

C. Brings God's Unforgiveness

In the same context in Matthew, there's a requirement if we want God's forgiveness. We must accept Christ and receive a forgiving attitude from Him. In the Lord's prayer, we read, *"And forgive us ... as we forgive ..."* (Matthew 6:12). This is the will of God. And closing this same passage, Jesus adds: *"For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you."* (Matthew 6:14) Jesus knows our human tendencies: *"But if you don't*

forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive you your trespasses." (Matthew 6:15)

God forgives those who forgive, and regrettably, God doesn't forgive those who don't forgive. For only a heart trained by divine grace can take the step of forgiving any type of offense, debt, harm, error, sin, fault, or crime, etc. The message is hard, but it's the truth. A heart that has accepted Christ must have among its qualities a heart inclined towards forgiveness. Many people resist this forgiving grace, resulting in bitterness, hatred, contempt, indifference, etc. Some say that they feel so badly about the situation that it's impossible to forgive. However, Christ wants to work in all areas of our lives, even those that have been hurt by the actions of others. He wants to restore His image and likeness in us. We need to ask God for the power and capacity to forgive from the heart, and He will work this out in us.

Questions

- What do these passages teach us about forgiveness? (Matthew 6:12,14-15, 18:34-35).
- How would you help a person forgive their offender?

Conclusion

Sometimes it's almost impossible for us to forgive, but God's perfect love enables us to do so. But how can we forgive a rape, a robbery, a relationship disappointment, a homicide, an economic debt, etc.? We cannot do it in our own strength, but with God's help, we can. Jesus left us an example (1 Peter 2:21-23). We can be empowered through His Holy Spirit to forgive.

Notes:



Be Content!

José Luis Barrientos (Guatemala)

Passage to study: I Timothy 6:3-10

Memory verse: “But if we have food and clothing, we’ll be content with that”
I Timothy 6:8.

Lesson Aim: To understand that it’s God’s will that his sons and daughters be content and live content with what they have.

Introduction

According to the United Nations Development Program, Sweden is one of the richest countries in the world (ranked 8th in the 2018 human development index). This high state of welfare was achieved due to the implementation of a government policy, whose priority was individualism. However, and this is striking, Sweden is among the countries that have a Protestant tradition.

Decades later, it has been found that wealth, independence and individualism have brought down solidarity and left as a result the immense loneliness that leads many to suicide, without other people finding out about it, even after several days. In an article by Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, he says, “The Swedes have lost the skills of socialization. The end result of independence isn’t happiness, but emptiness and an absolutely unimaginable boredom.” (September 18, 2017). Faced with this reality, the passage of I Timothy 6:3-10 shows us a better way through godliness and contentment.

I. The Benefits Of Godliness Accompanied By Contentment (I Timothy 6:3-6)

A. Following Jesus’ Godly Example

The apostle Paul emphasized piety or godliness when he exhorted his disciple Timothy to teach about this matter. In I Timothy 6:3, he expressly indicated that the teachings should be: “*the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and ... godly teaching.*” When the Lord Jesus Christ began His ministry, He indicated what this godliness consists of. One day when He was in the synagogue, the Master read the book of Isaiah, mentioning that He would bring good news to the

poor, freedom to captives, sight to the blind (Luke 4:18). These actions show acts of love for others, worthy of piety. Also, Jesus had compassion on the helpless multitudes (Matthew 9:36). In addition to all His compassionate acts, His greatest manifestation of compassionate love was to surrender himself to death on the cross for all of us (Philippians 2:8).

B. Contentment

The on-line dictionary defines “contentment” as: “*a state of happiness and satisfaction.*” In the Greek, this word is ‘*autarkeia*’, meaning ‘*sufficiency in oneself*’ and was used by the Stoic philosophers to describe a person who wasn’t disturbed by external circumstances. Christians must be satisfied and sufficient people, without feeling the need to seek more of what God has already given them. He is the source of true contentment (2 Cor 3:5; 9:8, Phil 4:11-13:9).

The Christian church has suffered persecution since its birth, and this circumstance has always produced a great challenge. In addition, natural events that could exacerbate the situation were added. However, despite all this, the first Christians acted with compassion when there was a famine in Judea. They sent offerings to the brothers and sisters who were suffering (Acts 11:29).

Contentment is a condition in which, whatever the circumstances might be, we assume a positive overcoming attitude, aware that neither abundance nor scarcity are permanent situations. Rather, contentment is the attitude when we recognize our dependence on an almighty God, and when we know that in abundance, in scarcity, in sickness or wealth, in every circumstance we’ll be guided by the Holy Spirit (Phil. 4:12).

C. The Benefits Of Godliness And Contentment

In 1 Timothy 6:6, the apostle Paul indicated that there's great gain when godliness is accompanied by contentment. Piety, like every act of love, when it's authentic, always implies a sacrifice. Thus, the Lord Jesus, when He came and gave himself up on the cross of Calvary: *"Who, being in very nature God, didn't consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness."* (Philippians 2:6-7) Human logic would say, how can being openhanded make us happy? However, Paul reminded us of the words of Jesus: *"... It's more blessed to give than to receive."* (Acts 20:35) A heart that doesn't have Christ cannot experience this feeling, but whoever has surrendered themselves to the Lord will experience godly contentment. A pastor once said the following: *"When it comes to giving, we cannot out give God."*

Questions

- What should be the correct teaching according to verse 3?
- How would you define the Christian's contentment and godliness?
- Is godliness and contentment a practice in your daily life? How?
- Today can we see something similar to what Habakkuk lived?

II. Manifestations Of A Contented Life (1 Timothy 6:7-8)

A. Recognize That We Had Nothing When We Were Born And We'll Leave With Nothing

In 1 Timothy 6:7, the Apostle Paul quoted one of the blunt truths that accompany our earthly life: *"For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it."* In some cultures, people had the custom of burying their dead with items that would serve them in "the afterlife", especially if they had been wealthy people. However, for sure, none of that stuff could be used. In spite of this truth, it's also necessary to bear in mind that financial resources and material goods are necessary both for our personal lives, for missions, and for the enlargement of God's Kingdom. What this portion of the Word teaches us is we shouldn't exert unnecessary effort to obtain material resources. And what we have we should be willing to share with our neighbors.

The apostle Paul worked to earn a living, and in this regard he said: *"... The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat"* (2 Thessalonians 3:10). John Wesley said: *"Earn everything you can, save everything you can and give everything you can."* We can trust God for our material needs as we relax about seeking personal prosperity.

B. Enjoy The Simple Life

One of the characteristics of the world in which we live is its tendency to buy things endlessly. Because of the encouragement of the media, a very high percentage of the world's population is pressured by ads that tell us to "get a new car, computer, t.v., etc." even though the old things are working perfectly well. Many people in the world, and even in the big cities, are plunged in poverty and famine. This obsession to buy new things constantly puts pressure on those who, in a minimal way, have managed to access some financial resources.

In contrast to this, 1 Timothy 6:8 motivates us to find satisfaction in the simple things of life. The Word of God exhorts us to use our resources intelligently: *"Why spend money on what's not bread, and your labor on what doesn't satisfy?"* (Isaiah 55:2). Human nature was designed to identify better life goals. In the garden of Eden, God gave Adam and Eve the mandate to administer the earth (Genesis 1:28); God gave them the ability to do so. Unfortunately, the fall messed up God's plan. So now, we humans must work to meet our needs. The desire to have more must not take the place of our dependence on God, piety, and contentment. We must be satisfied with having the essentials, working, and be willing to share (Ephesians 4:28). This is the secret of happiness.

As Protestants, we believe that the command to earn bread with the sweat of our brow (Genesis 3:19) leads us to work hard. This help a lot, but we're also urged to lead simple lives, saving what we can, having money to invest and help. This way the Protestant work ethic paves the way for wellbeing.

Questions

- What does verse 7 teach you?
- If we deny this truth, what is our attitude (v. 7)?
- How would you define a simple lifestyle today (v. 8)?

III. The Consequences Of Not Being Content (I Timothy 6:9-10)

A. Temptation, Greed And Ruin

I Timothy 6:9 states that: *“Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.”*

Estrangement from God produces in us numb and hardened hearts where we often call good things bad and vice versa (Ephesians 4:17-19). The search for a state of well-being in which we can all be content is God’s ideal, but we cannot achieve it without Him. Falling prey to temptations can lead to negative and diverse results, going from the apparently good to the definitely bad. The individualistic attempt of some has led them to extreme loneliness, totally distant from the doctrine of godliness. The search for well-being without God brings temptation for illicit immorality, loneliness and greed - all condemned by God (Exodus 20:17).

B. Destruction And Ruin

In the recent past, we have seen the media present the events of government corruption with big headlines. Before the report, we had considered those who performed government functions as honorable. However, the accusations, denunciations and even condemnations of a significant number of officials at all levels, including the sports arena, have provoked citizen disenchantment (Proverb 29:2). This has also caused loss in people and their families, particularly in those who wanted to have an honorable life. Now they live marked by these signs. Here is another consequence.

C. Loss Of Faith

I Timothy 6:10 says, *“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.”*

In this passage, the key phrase is “love of”. As we have already said, money is a useful resource. However, as the popular saying goes: *“Money is a good servant; but lousy master.”* In 2008, there was

a financial crisis that threatened to collapse whole countries of the developed world. It was unleashed by what was called *“financial panic”*. Many documentaries have been published after that disastrous event, and in all of them, it’s easy to observe how *“the love of money”* was the source of the problem. Of course, this environment wasn’t based on the principles of the Christian faith, and therefore for them it was normal. God says: *“The silver is mine and the gold is mine”* (Haggai 2:8). When our faith is deposited in these metals, our faith ceases to be *“Christian”* and becomes idolatrous. That was the experience of the people of Israel in the desert (Exodus 32).

If the worldly love of money is the foundation of faith, this will seriously damage the church. In 1517, Martin Luther challenged the practice of the sale of indulgences. The Catholic hierarchy was raising money by lying to the people that if they bought these indulgences, they wouldn’t even have to repent. They could buy their way out of purgatory. Luther discovered that *“... the just shall live by faith”* (Romans 1:17). Luther was concerned that this practice was seriously misleading the people by selling fraudulent pieces of paper.

We find it hard to have a detached attitude to the things we possess. Jesus surrendered his life on the cross for us. Godly contentment implies living harmoniously in community, sharing with those in need, not holding on to our possessions. This is the secret of being content.

Questions

- What practical steps can you take to get rid of the consequences of *“not living in contentment”*? (vs. 9-10).

Conclusion

If we’re content with what we have now and don’t worry about things, we can trust the owner of all the silver and gold to help us have what we need to cover our needs, and at the same time experience the joy of sharing.

Notes:



Let's Take Care Of The Temple!

Máximo García (Peru)

Passage to study: I Corinthians 6:12-20

Memory verse: “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You aren’t your own?” I Corinthians 6:19

Lesson Aim: To learn that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit and we need to take care of them.

Introduction

At the beginning of the class you can present the following activity: Present two silhouettes of human bodies made from posterboard. One of them must have colored circles inside it while the other one is just one color. Ask your students what they think the colored circles mean. The purpose of the activity is to point out the difference between a body that’s wholly pure and one that’s contaminated by sin. As children of God, we must have pure bodies. Since the Bible says that our bodies are the Temple of God’s Spirit, we need to learn how to take care of them and keep them from being contaminated by sin.

We need to reemphasize this teaching since neglecting it or allowing ourselves to be contaminated by post-modern culture can lead us to problems and difficulties. We need to go back to the Bible’s teaching on this issue. Unless we’re guided by the Word of God, we can be led astray by ideas which are contrary to the Holy Spirit who has sealed us (Ephesians 4:30).

The Bible teaches us that the Holy Spirit indwells us and enables us to worship our living and omnipresent God. In the Old Testament, the dwelling place of God was the tabernacle of meeting. Today, each believer is a tabernacle where God dwells by the means of his Holy Spirit. Therefore, if our body is the abode of God, we must take care that no part of it is contaminated. This also means that we must take care that our mind (thoughts) is pure and holy, because the Bible says in Philippians 4:8: “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”

I. How Are We Using Our Bodies?

Platonic philosophers believed that the body was material and corrupt, and was therefore bad, and that only the soul was eternal. The Corinthian new believers

that Paul wrote to were influenced by these ideas. Some didn’t believe in the resurrection. Paul was very clear in I Corinthians 15 that there would be a bodily resurrection. Paul also taught them in I Corinthians 6:12 that God has given us free will but we have to choose correctly: “Just because something is technically legal doesn’t mean that it’s spiritually appropriate. If I went around doing whatever I thought I could get by with, I’d be a slave to my whims.” (I Corinthians 6:12 The Message)

Paul clearly told the Corinthians that as people regenerated by our Lord Jesus Christ, their bodies were included in the transformation done by the Lord, creating their own personal tabernacle (dwelling place of God) which must not be contaminated. With this teaching in mind, we must remain completely free of any contamination that comes to attack our bodies, souls and spirits. “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there’s freedom.” (2 Cor. 3:17)

Questions

- According to I Corinthians 6:19, what’s the body?
- Apart from the fornication mentioned in I Corinthians 6:13-18, what other sins affect the body?

II. Sins That Destroy Integrity & Physical Health

Just as the tabernacle of meeting was the dwelling place of God in the time of Moses (Exodus 26, 27, 33:7-11), today our body is the temple and abode of the Lord, “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You aren’t your own.” (I Cor. 6:19) We can say we’re made up of several parts: body, soul and spirit (I Thess. 5:23). Therefore, it’s our responsibility to take care of the body God has given us because He dwells there if we’re sons and daughters of God (Eph. 1:13). What sins can destroy integrity and physical health?

The historical social context of the Corinthian church was full of sexual immorality. High on a hill in Corinth was the temple to the goddess Aphrodite, where more than a

thousand prostitutes were employed as priestesses, and sex was part of the ritual of worship. The apostle Paul warned the believers in 1 Cor. 6:13-18 to “*Flee from sexual immorality.*”

The current context in which we live may not be very different from what the Corinthian church experienced. Today in many places, there are countless motels and brothels where both men and women carry out sexual actions. So we too must heed the warning to “*Flee from sexual immorality.*”

There's also another and maybe more subtle danger lying in wait for God's people: spiritual infidelity, not having a close relationship with God, being unfaithful. Paul told Timothy: “*if we're faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself*” (2 Tim. 2:13a). When we're close to God, we do what pleases Him: “*But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit.*” (1 Cor. 6:17) Therefore, let's be careful and vigilant about our walk and fellowship with the Lord. We need to love Him with our all our hearts. If we turn away from the Lord, our integrity will be destroyed, and we'll become nothing (John 15:15).

Questions

- What's idolatry, and what does it generate in a person's being?
- Considering 1 Corinthians 6:17, what's spiritual infidelity?
- How does this affect the well-being of the person?

III. Ways To Glorify God In Our Body

As we have mentioned, we're made up of different components body, soul and spirit “*May God himself, the God who makes everything holy and whole, make you holy and whole, put you together—spirit, soul, and body—and keep you fit for the coming of our Master, Jesus Christ. The One who called you is completely dependable. If he said it, he'll do it!*” (1 Thess. 5:23 The Message). Just as the Israelites worshiped in the tabernacle, we can and should glorify the Lord in our bodies (1 Cor. 6:20). But how can we do this? Here are some suggestions.

A. Glorifying God In Our Body.

We need to maintain a healthy body, being careful of what we eat as Daniel did (Daniel 1:8). In our contemporary culture, there's lots of foods that aren't healthy. Junk food may be delicious, but it can be harmful to our bodies. A healthy diet based on cereals, fish and white meats, and enough fruit and vegetables will provide the necessary source of proteins, vitamins, minerals, etc. that we need to keep us healthy and strong. We need to eat at the right times. If we eat balanced meals in an orderly fashion, we'll be looking after our bodies as the place where God dwells. We know that as sons and daughters of God, we have been bought for a price (1 Corinthians 6:20).

We must also take care of what we drink. We know that alcohol is harmful and can cause addiction, but also

some sodas or juices damage our bodies because they contain too much sugar. We ought to drink more water. Everything that causes addiction (dependence) is harmful to the body.

B. Glorifying God In Our “Psyche” Or Souls

The “*psyche*” (soul) represents the psychological part of people. According to studies in neuropsychology, our personalities are directed by the mind. There are two types of thinking. Let's see what they are.

Non-toxic thoughts motivate and encourage our will (heart) to carry out good actions. The source of good (or non-toxic) thoughts lies in the Word of God, which helps us discern between what's good and what's evil (Psalm 15:1-5, 24:3). So, we must take care of that part of our personal tabernacle by constantly feeding our mind with the Bible. In that way, we can glorify God in our thoughts (Luke 6:45a).

Toxic thoughts are the ones that contaminate our thinking and disturb our relationship with God. This will lead the person to not glorify God with his deeds. The Bible says that our thinking will lead to actions. What kind of thoughts are we allowing ourselves to have and what kind of testimony are we giving?

In glorifying God in our spirit, the third part of our personal tabernacle, we must seek to be filled with all the virtues of the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-25). We need to cultivate the talents that God has given us, consecrating them and using them for His service and for the building up of the church.

We must continually study the Bible. This will help us stop bad or toxic thoughts from invading us. If we allow ourselves to backslide, we'll lose the holy vitality that God gave us, and we'll be easily influenced by any wind of doctrine or temptation (Ephesians 4:14).

Studying and meditating on the Bible will take us along the paths of righteousness and we'll follow the Lord Jesus. In addition, it will give us the strength to put His teachings into practice, and to share them with others, with the sole purpose of glorifying God.

Questions

- List three actions with which you can glorify God in your body.
- How does study and constant meditation on the Word of God relate to the care of our thoughts?

Conclusion

Let's honor God with our bodies, as temples of the Holy Spirit. Let's not contaminate them. Let's discard everything that can harm our bodies so that we can live to glorify the name of God at all times.



The God Who Heals

Loysbel Pérez (Cuba)

Passage to study: I Corinthians 6:12-20

Memory verse: “The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So, I went and washed, and then I could see”
John 9:11

Lesson Aim: To reflect on what disease is, and how God wants us to face it.

Introduction

Disease has been present since the fall of man, and there are many myths and interpretations about how we get sick. Here are some questions: Does God cause disease? Are we sick because we have sinned? Should a Christian ever get sick? Does God always heal? These questions are useful to start the class, and we'll find the answers during the class.

I. Interpretations About Diseases (John 9:1-3)

A. Jewish Interpretation

Jesus had to face sick people whom He tried to help, and at the same time, the Jewish ideas about disease. Following these Jewish beliefs, the disciples wanted to know who had sinned, the man who was blind from birth or his parents (v. 2). The Jews had been discussing for centuries this problem of whether sickness was inherited or because of some personal sin.

We must ask ourselves the following questions: What's the origin of diseases? Why are some people born blind, deaf etc.? The answer is that everything came because of the entrance of sin into the world. What happened in Eden triggered a warping or brokenness in God's original design, and brought about human degradation. Therefore, disease came into the world as one of the consequences of the fall of man. From this point of view, the origin of the disease lies in the sin of the human race. We could say that sin and its consequences are 'hereditary' because they pass from generation to generation.

From this perspective, the disciples' question to Jesus wasn't so farfetched. But that wasn't the point of interpretation to which Jesus wanted to take them. Rather, He was taking His eyes off the discussion of the origin of sin, and offered another reality or interpretation of that man's illness: “*Neither this man nor his parents sinned, said Jesus, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.*” (John 9:3) The situation of that blind man had nothing

to do with sin, according to the Master. It had to do with what God wanted to do, for His glory to shine (v. 3).

Although, unquestionably science has shown that there are diseases that are hereditary and pass from parents to children, we must understand that these aren't due to the sins of a particular family, but rather a consequence of man's original sin. Hereditary genetic processes are one thing, and sin is another.

It's possible that the child of a believer may be born with a certain deformity, product of family heredity, but this doesn't mean that the parents or the family has caused it through any particular sins, although we continue to affirm that all this is a consequence of the fall of Adam and Eve in Eden.

B. Damaging Interpretations

In the same way that the Jews had their interpretations about diseases, the churches today also presents many currents of thought and interpretations on this subject, as confessions of faith, as well as the interpretation of believers in particular. We're going to analyze some of the most widespread and damaging interpretations that have gained space in the Christian public.

I. Disease Is Caused By The Devil

Diseases as such aren't diabolical, they're part of a process in life. There are some cases where demon possession may cause disease and that after a liberation, the person is totally healed. Jesus, on several occasions, expelled the demons that were in a person's body, and healed them of the illness they suffered (Matthew 9:33, 17:18, Luke 8:29-35). But this happens only in non-Christians who haven't had an encounter with the presence of God. No Christian can have a disease caused by demons, because the Holy Spirit who lives in us has already freed us once and for all. But, if the believer neglects his spiritual life, this could be an open door to hosts of evil.

2. Christians Never Get Sick

Nowhere in Scripture is it stated that Christians don't get sick; our experience proves that this is false. We all get sick, some more and others less, but disease always touches our door. The Bible affirms that God has power to heal us (Exodus 15:26), and that He is by our side at all times (Matthew 28:20).

3. People Are Sick Because Of Lack Of Faith

We can be healed by faith when it's the will of God. He is the one who heals, and even if a person possesses all the faith of the world, the will of God is sovereign. So, a believer can suffer, and not necessarily because of lack of faith. God is a God who heals, whether or not you have faith. However, although faith is necessary, even when the person doubts this doesn't constitute an impediment to God's will to heal someone.

Questions

Fill in the spaces:

- The people believed that disease is a product of _____ or _____.
- Jesus made clear his interpretation to this question, and in the case of this blind man from birth, we can clearly know the following: This illness wasn't a product of _____ or _____, nor _____.
- What are the prejudiced interpretations that the present church has regarding diseases?

II. The Will Of God In The Midst Of An Illness (John 9:4-5)

The important thing that the passage of study is highlighting is that this man was blind until Jesus came and healed him. While the Jews were discussing where this man's blindness came from, and then how he was healed, John emphasized that Jesus ended the blind man's condition. So, the most important thing in this text isn't the disease of the blind man, but the miracle that Jesus worked, and how He was making Himself known as God. Everything may have been going wrong until Jesus entered the scene, but when He came, everything changed. The blind man could see.

When we're going through an illness, instead of seeing it as something negative, it's possible that God is seeing it as something very positive.

A. Illnesses For Believers

I. All Are For God's Glory To Shine

The disease of this blind man showed that Jesus was God; He showed his light (John 9:5). Illness allows us to get to know God as our healer. The only way we'll experience the God who heals is when we have been sick and God has done the miracle.

Many times, it's through miracles of divine healing that people affirm themselves in the faith and others come to the knowledge of the truth. But if God doesn't perform the miracle, His glory also manifests itself in His children who peacefully face illness, constituting a public testimony of the greatness of God. While others despair, believers enjoy the peace of God.

2. Everything Fulfills A Purpose In Our Lives

Nothing happens without purpose in the life of a believer, even what we consider our problems and difficulties through our human lenses. Sickness comes to fulfill diverse purposes that we see daily in believers who are going through health problems:

- a.) They affirm us in faith. We know God in our experiences, we see His protection and care day by day. In the midst of trials, He becomes more visible.
- b.) Conversions to Christ. It allows the believer to preach to others who are in their same or similar condition, and to transmit a message of hope and the good news of salvation. The family that doesn't know Christ sees an example to follow, and hospitals and consultations with doctors become excellent pulpits.
- c.) Family unit. In many cases of family divisions, sickness provides a bond that God has used to unite entire families.
- d.) The miracle of healing can happen. God can even use medical science.

Sickness can have many purposes for a believer. We should never look on the dark side. Let's think about what God can do and remember the text of Romans 8:28 which says: *"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."* No believer has a disease that God doesn't allow. If God doesn't want you to have it, He will take it away; otherwise, it's there because God is allowing it.

B. Illnesses In Non-Believers

Believers as well as non-believers get sick, it's part of life after Eden. In the case of non-Christians, it may be caused by demons. Someone who is demon possessed needs to receive Christ in their heart and break with the demons to be totally healthy. We have had cases of sterility that have ended after people made a profession of faith and broke the diabolical pact. This was and is part of Christ's mission: to do the works of Him who sent him (John 9:4). One of them is liberation from satanic oppression.

One of the fundamental purposes that many diseases fulfill in non-believers is to bring them to an

understanding of the existence of God and acceptance of Him into their hearts, although this isn't always achieved.

C. Living With The Disease

Many diseases come as consequences of our actions of not taking care of our body. This is true for both believers and non-believers. The neglect of our body, the failure to comply with food and health principles, result in making us sick. So in many cases, we're the biggest culprit. However, in the end, the diseases come from one cause or another. How can we face them with victory and quality of life? We cannot avoid being sick in many cases, we can only coexist with disease, and the way we live will be foundational.

1. Hold on to God. He is the only one who can help us. Pray and let others with gifts and training of healing do so.
2. Trust the promises of God.
3. Enjoy life as you live in the peace of God.
4. Make your condition a reason to exalt God.
5. Always wait for the best of God.

Questions

- Why do believers suffer diseases?
- Mention some tips for people living with a disease.

III. God's Wonderful Ways To Heal (John 9:6-12)

It's very interesting to note that in all the gospels, Jesus had different ways of healing. He didn't always do the same thing, and that tells us that there's no special recipe for divine healing, If God heals, it's because He wills to.

There are those who canonize a particular way of receiving healing. They talk about steps to take, special sayings, or a specific language for healing to happen, and if these aren't carried out, healing won't occur. However, none of this makes biblical sense. The Scriptural truth is that God is the one who heals, and He does it as He wills, through whom He wants, wherever He wills, and with whom He wills.

A. Knowing The Healing God

The least that the blind man and those around the Master expected was that he would spit and make mud, and with this mud anoint the eyes of the blind man, and order him to wash in the pool of Siloam to be healed (John 9:6-7). It wasn't the saliva, or the mud, or the pool, but the person who was behind all this - Jesus! It's not the human actions that someone performs that makes the miracle of healing happen, it's God who deserves the glory.

The only thing that we need to know is that God heals people, at any moment, in any form and through the person He chooses. But if it's not His will, then we need to keep a life of faith and prayer, and continue living a life of fullness in God. God always has the power to heal.

In the case of this blind man of the study passage, in order to received the miracle of healing, his faith was fundamental. So, through faith, many are healed (Mark 5:34). However, remember that it's God who heals when He will.

B. The Mission To Pray For Healing

All the children of God, without exception, have the authority to pray for the sick so that they may be healed by Him. This is a responsibility of the mission that God has entrusted to us. Every opportunity to do so must be a joy of every believer. Services should have a time to pray for the sick. This responsibility belongs to the whole church. It hasn't been delegated to certain groups or people, although we recognize that the gift of healing rests on certain people.

It's the church, as the body of Christ, that is responsible for carrying out the fulfillment of God's mission, and a very fundamental part of it is praying for healing. The Church of the Nazarene, in its Article of Faith No. 14, urges its members to pray prayers of faith for the sick.

In many cases, it's the fear that the person won't be healed that stops us short of expecting God to work. But unless we step out in faith, we'll never see God at work. The miracles will come when the church is responsible in the mission to pray with faith for the sick, and let God do His will.

Questions

- Name three ways the Lord Jesus used to heal (indicate the Bible verses).
- Write a brief testimony about a miracle of healing that God worked in your life, or that of a close associate of yours

Conclusion

There are different interpretations about why we get sick. However, we must be clear that disease entered humanity after the fall in Eden. The good news is that God is willing to heal people according to His holy and perfect will. The ways He does so can vary. Likewise, the church must remember that part of our mission is to pray for the healing of people, and to trust that the Lord will do it according to His will.



Our Greatest Hope

Roberto Sosa (Argentina)

Passage to study: John 9:1-12

Memory verse: "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die.'" John 11:25

Lesson Aim: To learn how to put our faith into practice; and when we have to face death, to trust in the power of the promises of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Introduction

The most important question in any religion is the one that has to do with death. There are questions that have to do with this life; but the great mystery is death. Christ offers us many benefits right now, but the greatest of all benefits is eternal life. It's therefore very practical to ask the following question: Will the dead rise again? Life here is so short. Anyone who has lost a loved one knows that the hope of the resurrection is a very practical reality. If we don't have this hope when faced with death, we'll surely be overwhelmed by melancholy and sadness. But there's good news!

I. How To Face Death? (John 11:1-4)

A. The Purpose Of Lazarus' Death

When Jesus received the news that his friend Lazarus was sick, he said that this illness wouldn't be to death (v. 4). With that, he was implying that death wouldn't be the end result of that illness because although it was true that Lazarus was going to die, the sepulcher wasn't going to be able to retain for long the body of his friend. We must understand, therefore, that the Lord was anticipating that death wouldn't come out victorious, but would be defeated when He raised his friend from the dead.

It's true that he could have said: "*Lazarus will die and then be resurrected*", but he didn't. In this way, although the Lord knew what He was going to do later, all the others had to face the events without knowing with certainty what He was proposing. That's exactly what happens to us when we go through different times of testing. We must remember that God has a purpose (Romans 8:28). Often, we don't know it, so we wonder why we have to go through certain unpleasant experiences.

In our study passage today, we see that Lazarus' illness led his sisters to desire to be closer to Jesus, which is why they sent for him (John 11:3). But the Lord didn't go immediately, but sent the messenger back with enigmatic words expressed in verse 4.

The expression "*the glory of God*" in this gospel is used to refer to those attributes of God that are shown to people. And on that occasion, the Lord Jesus Christ appeared as the "*resurrection and the life*" (v. 25), two of His attributes that are closely related to the most fundamental needs of man.

B. "Lord, The One You Love Is Sick" (v. 3)

Here we have a good example of the first thing that we Christians should do when we're sick or going through any difficulties, we must seek the Lord. It's true that we can't do it in a physical way, as Mary and Martha did, but we can always come to Him through our prayers. Of course, this doesn't mean that we shouldn't use other means to recover our health. First and foremost, we must bring our ailments to the Lord in prayer and trust Him completely, and also thank our brothers and sisters for praying for us!

As for the message that Lazarus' sisters sent to Jesus, there's a very important and beautiful detail that we see: "*Lord, the one you love is sick...*" (v. 3) They didn't add anything else, they didn't make any request. They had full confidence that the Lord would do what he considered best. This was proof of their faith and humility, the same attitude we need to adopt in our prayers.

Let's also note that their confidence wasn't based on Lazarus' love for the Lord, but on the love of the Lord for Lazarus. Our love as we come to Jesus will always be imperfect, fluctuating and uncertain, but Jesus' love for

us is perfect and never changes (Jeremiah 31:3). These two women knew how much Jesus loved Lazarus, so they didn't have to make a long plea with elaborate phrases that they would repeat over and over again in order to try to convince him to do what they asked. None of that was necessary. They knew that Jesus had more than enough power to do what was needed, and they rested on the fact that His love would move Him to act in their favor in the best way. In the same way, when we pray, we must know for sure that His love for us is real, and we must confidently wait for His answer.

Questions

- Does the Lord have a purpose for our lives in difficult situations that we face? Explain.
- What are practical ways that can help us endure difficult times due to the death of a loved one.

II. The Need For Mourning (John 11:5-16)

A. Severe Pain

In this world, every living being dies. Only those who don't live don't die, for death is an inseparable part of life. We carry it with us always and it's absolutely inevitable. We know with certainty that we'll all die. But here we need to ask ourselves: How do we face up to that reality? How would we feel about the death of a loved one? Well ... Pain! Sadness! The most terrible suffering!

In this part of the lesson, please take time with your students to discuss how Christians mourn. You can use some of the following questions to start the dialogue: What's grief? Is it permissible for Christians to grieve? How should Christians mourn? How does grief affect our faith?

B. Pain Is Part Of Life

Death causes pain! It's natural ... Nobody wants their loved ones to die. It's the saddest and most painful thing that can happen to us. John tells us that when Jesus arrived at the house of that beloved family, Lazarus' sisters were deeply sad, crying inconsolably. In its shortest verse with just two words, the Bible expresses how Jesus, who is God and true man, was touched: "*Jesus wept*" (John 11:35).

C. A Time For Grieving

It's good to cry when we suffer the pain of losing a loved one. We can cry for our pain, and we can also cry for the pain of others. Let's relieve our grief and support and comfort each other in the harsh reality

of death. But after the terrible moments of that brutal impact, after the natural and necessary days or months of mourning, let's continue living!

We shouldn't allow ourselves to be "buried" with the one who died. Around us there are other people by our side, who love us and need our love and our attention. If we have to announce the proximity of our own departure, after the tears of the first moment, let's continue living! Of course, we must mourn when someone dies. We need to express our pain and go through the mourning process ... but not in desperation! Death isn't the end, there's another life!

Questions

- How long do you think a person's grief should last? What should we do during that time?
- Briefly explain the reason for Jesus' weeping (v.35)

III. "I Am The Resurrection And Life" (John 11:17-44)

A. "... If You Had Been Here ..."

As soon as Lazarus' sisters heard that Jesus was coming to see them, Martha quickly left to meet Him, while Mary stayed at home (v. 20). Once again, these sisters expressed how different they were from each other. Martha was always active, agitated, impatient, while Mary was calm, thoughtful, meditative. However, when both sisters met Jesus, the two said the same thing: "*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died*" (vs. 21, 32). Surely, this is what the two would have repeated to each other during their brother's agony.

They showed faith, yet at the same time disbelief is perceived. These women didn't doubt the power of the Lord to heal their brother, if He had been present. They couldn't see that he could also have healed him at a distance (John 4:50), much less think that he could resuscitate him from the dead. Their faith needed to mature. We too need to have a strong, mature faith. How often our faith is weak and we can't see all the greatness and resources of God's grace! Let's pray every day that our faith in the Lord will continue to mature.

We also have to fight frequently in the Christian life against disillusionment with unfulfilled expectations. It was clear that Mary and Martha felt disappointed, they had expected something that the Lord had not given them. Now, this leads us to wonder who was really the one who had failed. For these sisters, it seems that Jesus had not lived up to what they expected from Him. He

didn't arrive in time. But we also have to ask ourselves if what they expected was right. Should we think that if we're with Jesus, bad things won't happen in our lives? Has the Lord pledged to heal us of all the diseases we have, and to free us indefinitely from death?

If this were so, there would be no sick Christians, nor would they die. We know that this isn't true. Of course, when we see sickness close to us, we like to think that God will get rid of it. However, is that what God has promised, or is it what we want to believe? If we place our faith in something that God hasn't said, then we'll feel disillusioned in the end, although the responsibility is entirely ours.

B. "But I Know That Even Now God Will Give You Whatever You Ask" (v. 22)

Despite all her pain, Martha still believed that God worked powerfully through Jesus. Her trust in Him remained unmovable. In fact, she hoped that He could still do something because she knew that God listened to His prayers (v. 22).

But here we notice the vague and confusing ideas that Martha had regarding Jesus. She spoke as if He were only a human prophet who lacked independent power, as if He couldn't order a healing by himself without asking God. On the other hand, although he said that God would give him "everything" he asked for, it seems that for her, the matter of the resurrection of her brother Lazarus was excluded.

C. "Your Brother Will Rise Again" (v. 23)

The first words our Lord pronounced when he arrived at Bethany are truly extraordinary. He promised Martha that his brother Lazarus was going to rise from the dead. But Martha was still struggling with her faith and wasn't able to interpret the resurrection promised by Jesus as a reality for the present time. She only interpreted it for the last day (v. 24). In fact, a few moments later after Jesus had the stone removed from the entrance to the tomb, Martha seemed to not yet believe that Jesus was going to raise her brother, and all she could say was that he was already stinking because he had been dead for four days (v. 39).

Martha, like many of us, was able to believe that God would do great things in the distant future, but at the same time, she showed a weak faith in light of the present evidence. But the Lord is capable of doing much more than we ask or hope for in the present. He can always overcome our faith!

D. "I Am The Resurrection And The Life..." (v. 25)

Martha believed that God would give Jesus everything He asked for, but at that moment, the Lord told her that He Himself had the authority and power to give life and to restore it by means of resurrection (vs. 25-26). He is the "*Author of life*" (Acts 3:15), the incarnate God himself, source of all life, whether spiritual or physical. Therefore, no one but He could make a statement like this: "*... I am the resurrection and the life ...*" (v. 25).

This was the seventh affirmation of the Lord that John recounted and which begins with the phrase "*I am.*" On that occasion, He wanted to show that He had absolute power over death, not only that He was going to bring the dead to life, like prophets such as Elijah or Elisha had done in the past, but that He Himself was the resurrection and the life.

That day, Jesus set out to raise Lazarus from the dead, but this would be only a foretaste of what will one day take place in this world (John 5:28-29). In John 11:25, we see the order of what He said: First, resurrection, and then, life. Resurrection opens the door to an authentic immortal life. Therefore in this context, Jesus was referring to people who are "*dead*" physically. All of them will be raised from the dead by the power of the Lord Jesus Christ and will live eternally, although some will be sentenced to condemnation, and others will enjoy eternal life with the Lord.

In verse 26, Jesus said: "*whoever lives by believing in me will never die.*" The believer will be delivered from death or eternal damnation by the power of the Lord.

Questions

- Briefly write your personal testimony about an occasion when God has overcome your faith. How has this helped you in your confidence in Him?
- Briefly discuss what implications Jesus' statement that He is life has for your personal faith, .

Conclusion

When we're in the midst of terrible and indescribable pain at the death of a loved one, we need to put our faith into action. The Lord is always ready to comfort us through his Holy Spirit! We need to trust in the power of the promises of the Lord Jesus Christ, and continue to live in Him, knowing that death doesn't end everything. He is the resurrection and the life! The person who believes in Him, even if he is buried, will live. Do you believe this?



Living With Illness

César Barco (Ecuador)

Passage to study: John 11:1-44

Memory verse: "...My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." 2 Corinthians 12:9

Lesson Aim: To learn that we need to accept with a good heart the will of God in the midst of incurable diseases.

Introduction

Many times, we have believed that if we get sick, God has to heal us because we pray and confess healing. He will do it. Although as Nazarenes we believe in divine healing through the prayer of faith or through medical science, God isn't necessarily always going to heal us. As He wills, He will heal one and say to the other one: "*My grace is sufficient for you*" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

We can see this in the life of the great apostle Paul who literally saw the miraculous power of God in many lives, but didn't get his personal healing, although he prayed at least three times for it (2 Cor. 12:8). God didn't heal him because he needed, through illness, to perfect Paul's life more, as He does today with His people.

I. Paul's Thorn In The Flesh (2 Cor. 12:1-7)

A. Paul's Thorn

Commentators say that Paul may have suffered from an illness for a long time. Some think that it might have been his eyesight. He was blinded on the Damascus road as a result of the brightness of the light of heaven (Acts 9:3,8), and even though he was healed initially, and something like scales had fallen out of his eyes (Acts 9:18), his eyesight apparently wasn't right (Galatians 4:13-14). Maybe he needed glasses, which hadn't been invented at that time. His eyes might have been giving him pain. Another disease that he may have suffered from is epilepsy, a product perhaps of the constant beatings he suffered, such as those he received in the city of Lystra (Acts 14:19).

We don't know exactly what Paul was suffering from. But that thorn in the flesh appears to have been some physical illness since the word 'weakness'

is mentioned several times in 2 Cor. 12:5, 9-10, which suggests some disease of the body. The meaning of the word "thorn" (v. 7) suggests some bodily disability. This thorn of the flesh may well have been an incurable chronic disease in Paul's body.

B. A Messenger Of Satan

In the context of verse 7, Paul presented the thorn in his flesh as a messenger of Satan. It's worth mentioning that in this verse the word 'messenger' means 'angel.' What Paul was suggesting was that this thing that was piercing him was a spiritual being, a messenger of destruction and death, not belonging to God's ranks. Whatever it was, it was under the command of Satan (Matt. 25:41, Rev. 12:7). Therefore, this messenger of Satan was an enemy and opponent of Paul. The attack was a physical one bringing discomfort to his body. That messenger of Satan was constantly present in Paul's life.

Here we need to underline that Paul wasn't leading a double life, for even the most godly can be attacked by evil forces that tempt us. Jesus, the Son of God, was tempted and was victorious. The Bible says that Satan left him for a time (Luke 4:13), implying that he always came back to tempt him more. Paul felt that these struggles were not with people but against spiritual beings (Eph. 6:12), whom he had learned to resist with prayer (2 Cor. 12:8, Eph. 6:18).

C. A Slap In The Face

Verse 7 says: "*Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.*" According to Strong's dictionary, the word 'torment' comes from the Greek 'kolafizo' and means "to strike with the fist, to punch, to slap." This is a very good metaphor of

what chronic illness does to us. These diseases come and slap us, punish us, lower our esteem, undermine our confidence, weaken us physically, and as far as is possible, spiritually. They hit our faith. This is why Paul compared his illness to an angel of Satan.

When someone suffers an incurable disease, it's because God has allowed it. He knows that the person can endure these hard blows (1 Cor. 10:13). Even in the midst of an illness, God measures our maturity and our capacity for resistance. So, let's remember not to judge those who are chronically ill by labeling them as sinners (remember what we learned in previous lessons). The beggar Lazarus is a good example since he died poor, sick and alone. However, when he died, he went directly to eternal life, quite the contrary to the rich man who died in economic prosperity with his family and friends around him and in good health, but his final destiny was eternal death (Luke 16:19-31). In spite of the hard blows caused by the disease, it's allowed for a divine purpose.

Questions

- What does the expression "thorn in the flesh" refer to? (v. 7)
- If Paul, being one of God's great apostles, suffered diseases, what do you think about Christians suffering from a chronic illness? Should they be judged as sinners?

II. Embracing The Divine Will (2 Corinthians 12:8-9)

A. In Order Not To Boast Or Exalt Ourselves

It's curious that Paul said the cause of his thorn was the possibility of him being too conceited (2 Cor. 12:7). He was a great missionary and apostle, but it seems that he was tempted to be arrogant. Remember, he was a converted Pharisee. Luke, one of Paul's disciples, paints the picture in his gospel of a Pharisee (Luke 18:11-12). If you analyze the Pharisees, they were not bad in themselves because they were not drunkards, they were fair, they didn't commit adultery, they fasted and tithed. But the Pharisees had forgotten something, for they had exalted themselves and ended up despising their fellow men (Luke 18:11).

As leaders of the people of God, we're often proud of the fact that we're successful in our ministries, our church has the best music group, the best sound equipment, the best instruments, or the best voices. When our churches grow, we're proud of the fact that we have more members than other churches.

Or maybe we're a successful Sunday school teacher or we teach in an institution. Maybe we're proud of the fact that we're evangelists, many people come forward in our campaigns, etc. However, all that has been achieved is certainly not by our power, but by the power of Christ's grace (2 Cor. 12:9). God wants the best for us, and out of love, He disciplines us as His children (Hebrews 12:5-6).

B. "... Three Times I Pleaded With The Lord..."

God is sovereign and only if it's His will does He heal us. If God doesn't want you to be healed, don't get angry with Him or deny your faith. Don't change your church or withdraw from it, let alone blame your pastor or leader. The Bible says that Paul three times pleaded with the Lord for healing, that God would take that evil thorn from his body, but God didn't heal him (2 Corinthians 12:8).

Did Paul lack faith? Was Paul a terrible sinner? Was it not enough to have accepted Christ? Christians shouldn't have to suffer? The fact that we're Christians isn't a guarantee that everything in life will go to perfection. Not all of our needs will be covered, but the Lord does promise us eternal life. The guarantee is there, that's why we live by faith. Only when we cross the threshold of death will he wipe away all our weeping (Revelation 21:4). Pray for healing, but if you aren't healed, follow Paul's positive attitude.

C. "... My Grace Is Sufficient"

Our Lord told His apostle: "... *My grace is sufficient ...*" (2 Cor. 12:9). Paul didn't need to give up. God had not abandoned him to his fate. He has provided His grace. When God says to him, "*My grace is sufficient for you,*" He is also saying "*I am sufficient for you.*" In some cases, God's grace will bring about healing, and in others, this same grace will bring strength to be able to resist with optimism the illness for the rest of their days.

If we aren't healed, without a doubt it will be hard. Those who suffer from chronic diseases will suffer again and again and again and again. It will be a battle that will have to be fought until the day of their death. In the name of Jesus Christ, we must not faint. We must not lose our faith in Him, but rather, follow Paul's attitude. He didn't deny the thorn in his flesh, but assumed a humble attitude and glorified God for it (v. 9). We can rest in God, for He has told us that to those who love Him, all things (even incurable diseases) will work for our good (Romans

8:28). In the midst of our illness, we need to depend on the grace of God, and be confident that if it's not God's will to heal us, He will always be there to help us endure, helping us to feel better and also giving us the courage to face the disease until the end.

Questions

- Why did Paul suffer from a chronic illness?
- What do you think God wanted to correct in him?
- Do you believe that if God is sovereign, he also uses illnesses to consecrate us more to Him? Explain.

III. Glorifying God In The Midst Of Illness (2 Corinthians 8:10-11)

A. "...My Power Is Made Perfect In Weakness."

What does God need to perfect in you? Some say Hebrews may have been written by Paul, and in Hebrews 12:5-11, we're told about divine discipline. Thus God, who loves His children, disciplines us (Heb. 12:6). If He didn't discipline us, we wouldn't be true children (Heb. 12:8). The purpose of discipline is that we partake of the holiness of God (Heb. 12:10), without which no one will be able to see Him (Heb. 12:14). So, it can be said that illnesses are a discipline, because through them, we're taught and corrected.

Paul didn't see illness as negative, but as something which can be positive. Although maybe we suffer physically, the end is salvation, and not eternal destruction. Although this suffering is usually not welcome, it may produce holiness in us if we accept it as the will of God. Therefore, let's allow the power of God to be perfected in the midst of our illnesses.

B. "...I Will Boast All The More Gladly About My Weaknesses"

The holiness of God in Paul produced maturity, so he said: *"I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses"* (2 Cor. 12:9). We too need to follow Paul's example of adopting a positive attitude towards disease. We have to battle on with our weaknesses and fight them with good cheer. Our bodies were affected by sin, but this doesn't mean that we should stop caring for it, even more so when we're ill. Although Paul said that dying is much better, he also said that living is necessary because of those around us (Phil. 1:23-24). Between the best and the necessary, Paul chose what was necessary. Therefore, we should not give in to disease, but rather fight it, because our spouse, our children, our relatives, our

friends, and/or the church still need us.

The author of this lesson has a type of diabetes. I remember when the doctor told me. She smiled and mentioned something to cheer me up: *"Calm down"* she said, *"I also have diabetes!"*

At first, I wanted to fight in silence, but a sister told me to share it with confidence with the church. When I did, another sister who also had diabetes told me: *"Pastor, with this disease I learned to do things that I didn't do before. Among them, drink enough water that my body requires, eat healthy and what's necessary, walk to be active, and not to be sedentary. In the name of the Lord, I've been able to master this disease, and I'm not letting it defeat me."* Believe me, that testimony totally lifted my spirits. May God bless all of you who also face this disease.

C. Resting In Christ's Power

As I mentioned, the goal is for the power of God to be manifested in us isn't necessarily to be healed, but rather to be saved through sanctification. When I was a senior pastor in my second church, I prayed for the sick and they were healed. But something happened later on with them. When they were sick, they repented of their sins, went to church, feared God, but when they were healed, they no longer attended church, and some returned to the old life. I learned the lesson: I no longer prayed for healing, but that the will of God be done.

In the midst of disease, the power of Christ will rest on us. He bore our sins, and by his wounds we have been healed (Isaiah 53:5). His power can heal us instantaneously, or He may choose to heal us progressively, or simply His power will help us to endure the disease until the day we close our eyes.

Those of us who are well and don't have a terminal illnesses need to learn the sort of battle that sick people are dealing with. That battle can be an incurable disease, and our kindness can be used by the Lord to give encouragement so that they will have the courage to face the disease.

Questions

- How should we face the diagnosis of a chronic and/or incurable disease?

Conclusion

May the power of Christ rest on us and on our bodies weakened by illness. God will sustain us and continue to use us for great things (1 Cor. 1:27).

Challenges And Rewards: Chronicles

Third Semester

How To Honor The Presence Of God
Building The House Of God
God Is Faithful Even If We're Not
King David's Most Important Project
Organization And Distribution Of Human Resources
Preparations For Building The Temple
A Vital Request
A House Worthy Of God
A King With Extraordinarily Wisdom
Choosing The Right Team
Faith Put To The Test
A Necessary Transformation
Always Do What's Right



How To Honor The Presence Of God

Eudo Prado (Venezuela)

Passage to study: I Chronicles 13-16

Memory verse: "He appointed some of the Levites to minister before the ark of the Lord, to extol, thank, and praise the Lord, the God of Israel." I Chronicles 16:4

Lesson Aim: To understand that the Bible tells us to honor the presence of God.

Introduction

Regardless of our personal opinion on the matter, the Bible teaches certain fundamental truths that all Christians must learn. One of the biblical characters that can teach us a lot about the presence of God is King David. As we can see from the Psalms, he was constantly worshipping God.

This lesson based on I Chronicles chapters 13-16, teaches us how we can approach the presence of God in accordance with the commandments of His Word. Incidentally, the book of I Chronicles concentrates almost exclusively on the story of David, an important king who deeply loved God.

I. The Presence Of God (I Chronicles 13)

Throughout our lives, we all make important priority decisions. When they refer to salvation, they have an even greater significance. Some of the other decisions we make are also especially important as they affect our relationship, and that of other people, with God.

One of the first decisions David made as king was to bring the ark of God to Jerusalem. It had been captured by the Philistines (I Samuel 4). Some commentators consider that after establishing Jerusalem as Israel's capital, this was King David's most important decision. David wanted to restore proper worship and consequently deepen the religious life of the people. This is narrated in I Chron. 13. More than any other, this decision would mark the destiny of the nation of Israel.

A. A Priority For The Whole Congregation (vs. 1-4)

The presence of God is the most important need that people have. A person, church or nation can achieve many things, but if they're far from the presence of God, they're really lacking the greatest good (I John 5:12).

The lives of some of the kings of Israel show us this inexorable principle. Their separation from God had dire consequences, not only for their own lives and families, but for the whole people of Israel. Some notorious examples of this are the following: Saul (I Sam. 15:26); Jeroboam (I Kings 13:33-34); and Ahab, (I Kings 21:20-21). On the contrary, other kings who honored the presence of God received great blessings: Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 17:3-6); Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:5-7); and Josiah (2 Chron. 22:2, 23:24-25).

However, honoring the presence of God isn't about expressing mere emotions or interest only through words. Our reverence for the presence of God is truly demonstrated by concrete actions of love and obedience to His commandments (John 14:23).

In I Chron. 13:1-4, we see David's priority decision to bring the ark of the Lord to Jerusalem. All the people agreed with him. The ark was a wooden box or chest covered with gold that had an upper cover known as the mercy seat. The Decalogue clearly prohibited any image or likeness of God. Yet this mercy seat was the place where God and man met (Ex. 30:6), where God spoke to man (Ex. 25:22, Num. 2:89), and where the high priest appeared on the day of atonement to sprinkle blood for the nation of Israel (Lev. 16:14). The fact that this ark symbolized the presence of God and His glory over His people gave it its vital importance.

Why did David decide to bring the ark to the capital city? It was an act of loving obedience to the divine commandment. He wanted to do the very best for God. It's not activism that we should look for in the church, but the holy presence of God. This must be the high priority of both the leaders and the congregation. We must always make sure that our actions are guided by the holy will of God.

B. A Wrong Approach (vs. 5-13)

In 1 Chron. 13:5-14, the episode of David's frustrated attempt to bring the ark to Jerusalem is recounted (v. 10). Bear in mind that Uzziah had good intentions when he tried to prevent the ark of God from falling, but he wasn't the person assigned to do it. Only the Levites were authorized to move the ark, and this had to be done according to the way prescribed in the law (Num. 4:5-6). We need to point out that this procedure was extremely strict because the ark was one of the most sacred things of God (Num. 4:1 Chron. 15:12-15).

This leads us to think about how holy the things of God are! In God's work, one cannot proceed only with good intentions, but in strict obedience to His commandments. In an attempt to do something "good" for God, we can find ourselves in total contradiction to His holy Word. Therefore, the only way to serve Him acceptably is to receive by faith the sanctifying grace that allows us to obey His Word (Heb. 10:19-25).

Questions

- Why is it considered that bringing the ark of God to Jerusalem was one of David's most important decisions as king of the nation of Israel?
- Why was Uzziah struck down by the presence of God while trying to hold the ark? What does that teach us today?

II. The Presence Of God Brings Blessings (1 Chronicles 14)

During his exile in the desert of Judah because of the uprising of his son Absalom, King David composed the poem that we know today as Psalm 63. In it, David expressed the satisfaction that the presence of God brought to his life in times of great affliction. He expresses his experience with a beautiful simile: "I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you. On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night." (vs. 5-6) In David's life, we can see the great blessing that the presence of God can mean for every believer.

A. God Fulfills His Promises In Us (vs. 1-7)

The presence of God imparts prosperity and personal blessings. Verses 1 to 7 tell us two important facts that corroborate that God was pleased with David's decision to honor his presence. One of the first confirmations of God's blessing was the recognition of his reign by Hiram, the Phoenician king with whom he developed a political alliance and lasting friendship, bringing great benefits to both nations. The support

of this king was taken by David as a sign of God's pleasure and confirmation of his reign. In the second place, His family multiplied in Jerusalem, where he fathered a large group of sons and daughters. Among them was Solomon who would succeed him on the throne and become famous among the kings of the earth because of his great wisdom.

Here we can see the fulfillment of God's promise to David to build him a strong family from which God would raise up the eternal King, our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Chron. 17:2 Sam. 7:11-16). In this part of the lesson, we learn that one of God's great blessings in the believer's life, when we honor His presence, is the fulfillment of His precious promises.

B. God Manifests His Power In Us (vs. 8-17)

As king, David always recognized the almighty presence of God. His great victories came as a result of his dependence on divine omnipotence. Verses 8 to 17 show us his great victory over the Philistines, staunch historical enemies of the people of God. We can say that this was a complete and definitive victory.

Samuel Schultz (1982) in "The Old Testament Speaks" wrote: "David was immediately challenged by the Philistines when he was recognized as king of all Israel (2 Samuel 5:17-25). He defeated them twice, but over a long period of time, it's completely plausible that there were frequent battles before reducing it to a subdued tributary state" (p. 113).

We notice David's deep dependence on God, in the following verses:

- "So, David inquired of God...The Lord answered him" (1 Chronicles 14:10).
- "So, David inquired of God again, and God answered him..." (1 Chronicles 14:14).
- "So, David did as God commanded him, and they struck down the Philistine army, all the way from Gibeon to Gezer" (1 Chronicles 14:16).
- After that great victory over the Philistines, King David said: "... As waters break out, God has broken out against my enemies by my hand..." (v. 11).

By trusting in God, we reach decisive and definitive victories over the biggest adversities of life. Sometimes, such victories are inexplicable from a human point of view. They correspond exclusively to the intervention of the omnipotent hand of God: "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that's at work within us." (Eph. 3:20)

Questions

- What were the two important events at the beginning of David's reign which were considered a sign of God's pleasure and confirmation of his presence?
- What do I Chronicles 14:10,14 and 16 teach us and how can we apply it today?

III. Let's Rejoice In The Presence Of God (I Chronicles 15-16)

Another blessing that comes with honoring the presence of God is the joy of the Holy Spirit. The presence of the eternal King, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, fills our hearts with unparalleled rejoicing. However, in order to get closer to the presence of God, holiness is demanded as a condition (Psalm 15). I Chronicles 15 and 16 teach us this great truth.

A. Holiness Demanded In The Presence Of God (vs. 1-15)

David's new attempt to bring the ark of God to Jerusalem was done by demanding strict obedience to the moral and ceremonial requirements clearly established in the Mosaic code. I Chron. 15:1-15 shows us the fulfillment of these two fundamental aspects. David commanded that the ark be moved exclusively by the Levites and with the correct procedure indicated (Ex. 25:10-22, Num. 4, Deut. 10:8).

Let's especially note the fulfillment of the requirement of sanctification (I Chron. 15:12-14). Vine, in "The Dictionary of Old and New Testament" states: "The expression 'sanctify' comes from the Hebrew 'kadosh' (sanctify, be holy), and is used in the sense of doing something or being pure and meeting all the requirements of God in terms of purity in people or things. It's used in the formal worship of God ... Although in these cases the main emphasis is cultic, there are also ethical-moral nuances" (pg. 307).

Theologically speaking, sanctification is "the total act or process by means of which internal renewal is effected in the justified" (Beacon Theological Dictionary). Believers are sanctified by the blood of Jesus Christ, which gives us full freedom to approach the presence of God.

B. Rejoicing In The Presence Of God (I Chronicles 15:16 - 16:43)

The last part of this lesson narrates the great national celebration on the occasion of the transfer of the ark and the restoration of the Levitical worship. Let's notice how the Levites were organized

appropriately according to their different capacities for worship and service (gifts and ministries): ark transporters, singers and musicians, porters, and Priests in charge of doing the sacrifices.

This verse is also of particular importance: "Now David was clothed in a robe of fine linen, as were all the Levites who were carrying the ark, and as were the musicians, and Kenaniah, who was in charge of the singing of the choirs. David also wore a linen ephod." (I Chron. 15:27) This shows us the dignity of worship of our holy God. Our appearance as we present ourselves in worship before God, especially those who lead worship, will reflect our understanding of its dignity and majesty.

But in contrast to the wonderful celebration of all Israel, we find at the end of chapter 15 the discordant note of the attitude of Michal, Saul's daughter who despised David in her heart as he leapt and danced before the Lord (v. 29). The joy of God's presence can only be experienced by believing hearts who can appreciate its greatness by celebrating the powerful facts of their salvation.

Finally, we find a psalm of gratitude from David. This was a new song for God on a great occasion. It's probable that this psalm was composed by David in advance for this special moment. David appointed Asaph and his associates to lead the worship using this great Psalm (I Chron. 16:7-36). The poem includes reminiscences about some of the main events of God saving His people Israel, and certain sections are inserted into other psalms of Scriptures (Psalm 96:1-13, 105:1-15, 106:47-48).

The New Testament instructs believers to sing as a way to give thanks to our God and express our joy in His presence (Colossians 3:16, James 5:13). There are many wonderful works for which there must continually be praise on our lips to the Lord.

Questions

- What's the indispensable requirement to approach the presence of God?
- What things can we mention in our lives that will lead us to rejoice in the Lord?

Conclusion

There are many ways in which believers can honor the presence of God; always it must be in accordance with the commandments indicated in the Bible. Honoring the presence of the Lord means giving Him priority in our lives and approaching Him with a consecrated and grateful hearts.



Building The House Of God

Mary Prado (Venezuela)

Passage to study: I Chronicles 17

Memory verse: "He is the one who will build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever." I Chronicles 17:12

Lesson Aim: To learn about the joy of being part of God's church through his Holy Spirit.

Introduction

Churches, as places where we worship God and carry out a large part of the church's life, are extremely important. But the Bible teaches that "...God ... doesn't live in temples built by human hands." (Acts 17:24) Likewise, King Solomon said: "But will God really dwell on earth with humans? The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!" (2 Chron. 6:18). The true dwelling of God is our hearts, sanctified through the presence of His Holy Spirit. So, our greatest concern every day should be that our lives are a holy temple for the Lord.

I. The House Where God Dwells: His People (I Chronicles 17:1-10)

How important are our churches to us as Christians? Sometimes, we have an exaggerated interest in our sanctuaries where we meet to worship. However, the Bible clearly teaches us that God dwells with and in his children (I Cor. 6:19-20). I Chron. 17, the biblical passage of our lesson, tells us about God's covenant with David. This covenant included God's promise to dwell eternally in His people.

A. Concern About A House Of God (vs. 1-4)

While walking through the luxurious rooms of his new palace in Jerusalem, King David was concerned. The ark of God was in a simple building, while he enjoyed a beautiful and comfortable palace. David hated the idea that God would have a house less worthy than him. So, he decided to build a beautiful temple for God, and he told this to his trusted counselor, the prophet Nathan (v. 1). Verses 1-4 tells us that the prophet shared the same concern as King David, and thought that this was a noble initiative, and even of divine origin (v. 2).

David thought that that rustic building wasn't worthy of God's presence, and building a good temple was a reasonable idea. But God had better plans, which would be completed in His time and in His way. As one commentator points out, "David's purpose was correct, but untimely" (Beacon Theological Dictionary, volume II. p. 54).

God's quick and definitive refusal of David's plans, revealed by the prophet Nathan, indicates the distance that sometimes exists between our plans and those of God (Isaiah 55:8-9). It's very important that what we do for God is in accordance with his will. At that time, having an earthly sanctuary wasn't a priority for God. His priorities always point to realities more transcendent than ours. In this particular case, God's main desire was to establish a perfect communion with His people; they themselves were the place of His habitation.

B. God's Lives With His People (vs. 5-10)

The lack of a temple was never an obstacle for God to live with His people. Verses 5 through 10 indicate the development of the divine purpose of grace in the history of Israel since their liberation from Egypt, followed by the period of the judges, until the establishment of monarchical government.

God never failed to keep His promise made to Moses to accompany His people with His presence (Ex. 33:14-15). All of His promises were faithfully fulfilled (Joshua 23:14).

In this section of the passage, God promised David to build a royal house. Here the word 'house' refers particularly to the family lineage. King David received God's promise that his family would be blessed forever (vs. 10-11).

We now know that this 'house' that God announced to him (v. 10), wasn't only a promise referring just to his lineage, but it alludes to all believers in Christ. The messianic character of the passage is especially evident in verse 14. Clearly, what God affirmed referred to our Lord Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, the certainty of the fact that God lived with his people is indicated in various passages of Scripture, but His fellowship is emphatically with the righteous (Psalm 15; Isaiah 66:1-2). God dwells in the midst of a holy people, whose character corresponds to His (Ex. 19:6; Leviticus 19:2, 20:26).

The church is the true temple built by the Lord. It's the spiritual edifice that has its cornerstone or foundation in Jesus Christ himself (Eph. 2:19-22), who dwells with us permanently (Matt. 28:20). Jesus is called Emmanuel, "God with us", in the messianic announcement of the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 7:14).

In summary, here we see that just as God, by His great faithfulness and love, blessed David's descendants in Jesus Christ, we're also blessed by grace in Him, along with our children (Acts 16:31, 1 Cor. 7:14). However, in light of such wonderful grace, each one must personally believe and be grounded in Jesus to be part of His house and Kingdom, and thus be able to enjoy all the promises given by God to His church.

Questions

- Instead of building a temple, what was God's priority?
- What do you think is God's priority for his people today?

II. The King Who Built The House Of God: Jesus (1 Chronicles 17:11-14)

God opposed David's immediate plans to build a house for Him, but that didn't mean that David wouldn't be blessed. In fact, the Lord allowed him to make the necessary preparations for the building of the majestic sanctuary that his son Solomon would build later (1 Kings 6). This temple was built in the 10th century BC, and is known as 'the first temple', which was completely destroyed in 587 BC by the Babylonian invaders.

Through the so-called Davidic covenant, God blessed David and his people not only materially in the present; but spiritually and forever. In 1 Chron. 17:11-15 we read that this covenant included the promise of the Messiah (Christ), the King who would come from the lineage of David and establish an eternal Kingdom.

A. A King Like David: But Greater Than All Others

God revealed to David that from his lineage He would raise the greatest King in history, our Lord Jesus Christ. Verses 11-14 contain a double reference to this prophecy, the immediate and the future. "...I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom" (v. 11b), refers to the reign of David's son, Solomon, who succeeded him on the throne. But for the future this prophecy referred to Jesus Christ, in human terms, a descendant of David. In various passages of the New Testament, Jesus was called the 'Son of David' (Matt. 9:27, 12:23, 15:22, Luke 1:32; John 7:42, Romans 1:3). Jewish interpreters believed that a son of David would come who would be the Messiah, the Savior announced in the Old Testament.

Even today, the Jews erroneously await the coming of the Messiah, and one of the requirements for this is that he be a descendant of David's family. All the prophecies clearly identify Jesus with that eternal King who was to come, fulfilling the Davidic covenant. Jesus also referred to himself as the 'Son of God'. Jesus debated with the Pharisees about what the Scripture teaches about the Messiah, and showed them that David, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, recognized Him as their Lord (Psalm 110:1, Matthew 22:41-46).

Jesus is the King of glory! Superior to any other king that has ever existed or will ever exist. At the end of the book of Revelations, He presents himself as the victorious celestial King who rules the nations with a rod of iron, and who wears on his garment the name "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS" (Rev. 19:16).

B. A People And An Eternal Kingdom

The messianic announcement contained in the message of the prophet Nathan pointed out that this glorious and eternal King would build the house of God: "He is the one who will build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever." (1 Chronicles 17:12)

That house refers, beyond David's own blood family, to the people of God, the church. The church is called 'the House of God' (1 Tim. 3:15) and 'holy temple' (Eph. 2:19-21), and has been founded on 'the rock' which is the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Matt. 16:18) He is the only and unchanging foundation of the church (1 Cor. 3:11).

The Kingdom, on the other hand, is a greater reality that indicates the lordship of Christ above all things. Charles Van Engen points out the following: "This Kingdom isn't physical or institutional. Rather, it's the

dynamic and active government of God, through Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit.” (The Missionary People of God, 2004, p. 66)

Therefore, this Kingdom isn't earthly or transitory in nature (John 18:36). Each person who places his trust in Jesus Christ for salvation belongs to this glorious and unshakable Kingdom, and is destined to receive the eternal inheritance that it entails (Matthew 25:34). What a wonderful truth!

Questions

- What does the word 'house' refer to in the messianic promise?
- What does the word 'house' refer to today according to 1 Tim. 3:15 and Eph. 2:19-21?

III. God's Purpose For His 'House' (The Church) (1 Chronicles 17:15-27)

David understood that God made a covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:1-9), and that He confirmed it to Moses (Ex. 34:27). So, he would continue to bless Israel with the arrival of the Messiah. That covenant was an eternal covenant that was extended to all those redeemed by Christ, the new Israel. Likewise in David, we can see how the grace of God works in us despite our human weaknesses.

In the last part of the biblical study passage, verses 15-27, we have David's beautiful prayer after God revealed His purpose through the prophet Nathan.

A. A Purpose Of Grace

Verse 16 states: *"Then King David went in and sat before the Lord..."* (v. 16a). The prophetic announcement caused a great impact on David, so much so that he immediately felt moved to approach God through prayer. His petition here is one of the most beautiful in the entire Bible. It's a prayer that reflects reverence and gratitude to God.

The content of the prayer shows us the recognition that, based solely on our human capabilities, none of us can offer anything acceptable to God. It's only because of His great mercy that God himself makes our approach and service to Him possible.

Who was David before being called and anointed by God to be king over his people Israel? A simple shepherd of sheep (v. 7). But God raised him up to do great things, so that after being a complete unknown, his fame as king spread through all the nations that surrounded Israel (1 Chronicles 14:17).

The question with which David began his prayer was the following: *"Who am I, Lord God, and what's*

my family, that you have brought me this far?" (v. 16b). This evokes the same feeling of inadequacy that was in other Old Testament characters when they were called by the Lord (Ex. 3:11, Judges 6:15, Jeremiah 1:6). David himself also pointed out in the Psalms the sense of our human smallness before the greatness of the Most High God (Psalm 8:4; 144:3).

The apostle Paul gives an account of this same sense of unworthiness at the prospect of his call to proclaim the gospel in the nations (Eph. 3:8). Understanding who we are today in Christ, in contrast to who we were before knowing Him, must overwhelm us and lead us to a deep gratitude to God. As in the case of David, our transformation has been solely the work of God's marvelous grace (vs. 7-8).

When each of us looks back on our lives, considering where we were before we knew God, we can realize what great things the Lord has done for us!

B. An Eternal Purpose

God's purpose for each of us is so great that it encompasses eternity. We belong to a lineage that's blessed forever. Jesus Christ said: *"I am the Root and the Offspring of David"* (Rev. 22:16), and by our union with Him, we reach the fulfillment of God's purpose made before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:3-14).

At the end of his beautiful prayer, which begins in 1 Chron. 17:16, David emphasized the fulfillment of God's purpose in His people. What made this purpose of God unbreakable was His faithfulness and choice of His people by His sovereign will (v. 19). So, we can be completely sure that God will lead the events of our lives until the full realization of His purpose, despite any adversity, just as it happened with David and the people of Israel (v. 21, cf. Rom. 8:28-39).

Finally, King David's prayer reflects the gratitude of the believer. As the people of God, we must remain in an attitude of thanksgiving to God for our eternal salvation and all His blessings (v. 24).

Questions

- What does King David's prayer reflect?
- What does this prayer teach me about my life today?

Conclusion

From the foundation of the world, God had a purpose in Christ, to build a house and an eternal Kingdom. Each Christian is a part of that great spiritual house of God, that is, His people, the church. This also implies that we're citizens and heirs of His eternal Kingdom. This marvelous reality must always keep us in an attitude of gratitude and serving Him with a holy life.



God Is Faithful, Even If We're Not

Flavio Martínez (Mexico)

Passage to study: 1 Chronicles 18,19,20,21

Memory verse: "Be strong, and let us fight bravely for our people and the cities of our God. The Lord will do what's good in his sight." 1 Chronicles 19:13

Lesson Aim: To understand that every time we triumph in life, the honor and glory must be only for our God, since He is the one who gives us the strength and the wisdom to achieve.

Introduction

It's clear that Chronicles 1 and 2 were written to give perspective and historical continuity to the Hebrews, a post-exile community that desperately needed to know that the covenant God was still their God. Israel's past history shows God's faithful love for His people.

Chronicles reflects the priestly point of view, and isn't merely reduced to repeating or adding some details for posterity. Rather, because of their point of view, details about the temple and liturgical interests are given, and the omissions and additions are important for a thorough understanding of the Jews and the divine plan of salvation. The biblical passage for our present study is within the context of David's reign, which ranges from 1 Chronicles 11:1 to 1 Chronicles 29:30.

I. David, As A Warrior, Extends The Kingdom (1 Chronicles 18-20)

These chapters summarize David's offensive wars against the enemies of God's people (2 Sam. 8). David achieved important victories that made him famous among his own people and among the surrounding nations (1 Chron. 14:17). Likewise, the spoils of war and tribute brought him great riches.

A. David's Conquests (1 Chronicles 18:1-13)

David, in obedience to God, advanced in his enterprises with extraordinary determination and vigor. The details given about the Philistines, both here and in 1 Chron. 20:4-8, indicate that they were a powerful enemy. The Philistines had oppressed the Israelites for several generations; but David defeated them and humiliated them. (2 Sam. 8:1-14). He even

crippled their horses (2 Sam. 8:4). The current animal protectionist associations wouldn't be happy with David's treatment of the horses. However, this was the common practice of those times, especially to prevent the horses from being used by the enemy.

B. David's Riches (vs. 7-11)

We must honor God with what He blesses us with. As the commander in chief of the army, David gave glory to God for each victory. He dedicated to God the bronze captured in Damascus and the presents that Tou, king of Hamath, sent to him (vs. 10-11).

1 Chron. 18:6 and 13 repeat the phrase: "The Lord gave David victory wherever he went." At this point, we must keep in mind that God gives power to people, not to make them selfishly magnified but to do good.

Questions

- What can we learn from David's military victories? (1 Chronicles 18:1-13; 20:4-8).
- Is this true in my life today "...Jehovah gave victory to David wherever he went" (v.13)?
- If not, what can I do to make this phrase a reality in my life today? Are there things I should change?

II. War Against The Ammonites, Syrians And Philistines (1 Chronicles 19-20:8)

This passage is parallel to 2 Samuel 10:1-19, except with some variants and additions.

A. Hanun Son Of Nahash (1 Chronicles 19:1-5)

The magnitude or nature of the favors received by David from the king of the Ammonites isn't known; but what's certain is that with honesty, David remembered the friendship that Hanun's father had

shown him. However, something totally unexpected happened. Those who have a bad heart often suspect the intentions of others, without having any reason! That is, they conjecture vainly and maliciously. That was what happened with Hanun and his relatives. For this reason, they greatly affronted the servants that King David had sent them (v. 4).

Hanun ordered David's servants to be shaved. This was a terrible shame in that cultural context. They also cut their clothes at the level of the buttocks. They wanted to provoke a reaction in David. Because of this, the Ammonites, by rejecting David's offers of peace, were defeated along with their ally (v. 19).

B. Hardened Hearts Of Sinners Leads To Destruction (I Chronicles 19:6-15)

The Ammonites realized that David would take revenge for the humiliating action they had done to his men; but instead of seeking forgiveness for the injustice they had committed, the Ammonites prepared for war (v. 7). However, with that action, they only brought about their own ruin at David's hand. Although the Ammonites had a thousand talents of silver to get mercenaries to make them strong in the war (v. 6), they weren't successful. (A thousand talents was a huge sum, since, later, Amaziah hired 100,000 men for 100 talents (2 Chron. 25:6).)

When Joab and Abishai were attacked from the front and the rear, instead of retreating, with God's help, they were able to defeat the Ammonites. Verse 13 reflects that they had no selfish interests, but rather they sought the good of the people of Israel. Likewise, these men showed a clear dependence on God, for they strove and waited for God's intervention.

C. The Aramean Campaign (I Chronicles 19:16-19)

The Ammonites did what they could to take advantage of their good position. They brought a good army to the battlefield, but they fought for a bad cause, and lost the battle.

The Arameans, who had fought as mercenaries by the side of the Ammonites, sought the support of the Arameans on the other side of the Euphrates when they were defeated. However, everything was in vain (v. 18). Seeing that the victory was on Israel's side, they not only refused to continue helping the Ammonites; but they also made peace with David (v. 19), and became subject to him.

D. The Subjection Of The Ammonites (I Chronicles 20:1-3)

Evidently, David went to Rabbah (2 Sam. 12:26-31), called by Joab, although at first he stayed in Jerusalem. Afterwards, David put on the crown of the Ammonite king and subjected the people to hard work. This was the only crown that David appropriated for himself. We don't know why. David had given the spoils of his first victories to the temple treasury for the construction of the future temple of God; but apparently, the booty of the crown remained.

This victory occurred a year after the submission of the Arameans, in the time that kings usually go out to war, which is thought to have been after the spring rains. The writer of the book of Chronicles, whose purpose was to relate the details of David's obedience to the law of God and how God worked through him, omitted David's sin with Bathsheba, which is mentioned in 2 Samuel 11:4-12:24.

E. Death Of The Philistine Giants (I Chron. 20:4-8)

The Philistines had been subdued (I Chron. 18:1); but the giants of Gath still had to be destroyed. David's men, though of ordinary stature, in every encounter proved too strong for the giants of Gad. However, although the Israelites were impressed by their size, they stood firm for they had God on their side (v.8). This reminds us that when we're in a situation similar to that of the soldiers of the Israeli army, we must continue to trust in the fidelity and protection of the Lord. He will never abandon us! (Deut. 31:8)

Questions

- What was the Ammonites attitude according to verses 6-15? What would have been another option?
- What's my attitude when others offend me?

III. David Orders The Census (I Chron. 21)

Verse 1 states: *"Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel."*

Joab, the general of the army, argued strongly against this census. In verse 4, we see that the discussion between both protagonists was concluded, with Joab in obedience to David, and starting the census.

Perhaps we think that there was nothing wrong with a census. We ask ourselves, Why shouldn't the shepherd know the number of his sheep? But we need to observe that David acted with the impulse

of his pride, which offended God. By the wording made in verse 1, it can be noted that the chronicler blamed Satan, who, appealing to pride of the king, induced him to count the people. Apparently, David wanted to calculate his military might. However, when the king ordered the census, he showed a lack of confidence in God's promise.

A. David's Sin And The Plague (1 Chron. 21:1-22:1)

I. The Census (vs. 1-6)

The original word is "to review". The census had military purposes. David's relationship with God wasn't right; he provoked God, placing himself on the side of the spiritual enemy. When David's relationship with God wasn't right, it also affected his relationship with his people. Surely, King David had neglected his devotion and dependence upon God. Meditating on the extent of his rule, he ignored that God had promised that Israel would be as numerous as the sands of the sea. The victories he had won were not be the fruit of strategies or forces, but of God's power. How important it is not to lose our communion with God! Let's remember, when we reach the place where the Lord leads us, our dependence on Him should be the beacon that guides our steps.

Joab limited himself to giving the report to David; however, communication between the two isn't recorded. On that occasion, David did talk to God. Instead of placing himself above God, he subordinated himself to God by acknowledging his guilt (1 Chron. 21:8). While David's relationship with God was good, he didn't dwell on his superior position over others as king, but upon his dependence on the hand of God.

2. Correction And Redemption (vs. 7-13)

David recognized before God his sin and need, and begged that his guilt be taken away (v. 8). But God had already determined to punish him for his wrong decision. The divine punishment on the people of Israel reflects the influence that a person's decisions can have on those who are close to him. David could choose between three years of hunger, three months of humiliating defeats in the war, or three days of plague on earth. He chose the latter (vs. 12-14). Although God's forgiveness was on the way, David couldn't get rid his country of the consequences of not consulting God in making his decisions. How important is to pray and not act unwisely in our lives and/or ministries! We must bear in mind that there are people around us who could be affected by the consequences of our actions.

3. The Plague (vs. 14-17)

Verse 12 mentions the three options that were presented to David because of his disobedience to the Lord: A great famine (sowing the seed in vain), fleeing before enemies, or a three-day plague. David decided to choose the plague, for he knew that the hand of God was better in mercy than the hand of man. And indeed, God extended his mercy and ordered the angel to stop the destruction (v. 15). David recognized his guilt and that God's wrath was solely because of his wrong decision (v. 17).

4. An Altar And A Sacrifice (vs. 18-27)

David was instructed to erect an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite (v. 18) as a sign of reconciliation. Araunah offered the use of his threshing floor for free, but David refused to offer God cheap worship. David said: "No, I insist on paying the full price. I will not take for the Lord what's yours, or sacrifice a burnt offering that costs me nothing." (v. 24) God showed His acceptance of the sacrifice by responding by fire from the heavens on the altar of the burnt offering (v. 26). God stopped the punishment (v. 27).

5. A Place For The Temple (1 Chron. 21:28-22:1)

The bronze altar that Moses had built was in Gibeon (v. 29), and that's where all the sacrifices of Israel were being offered. But David was terrified of the sword of the Lord's angel, so he wouldn't go there (v. 30). David was so impressed with the place of the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite that he decided to build the temple there. (1 Chron. 22:1).

Questions

- Explain what motivated David to conduct the census? (1 Chronicles 21:1-4).
- What was David's reaction in 1 Chron. 21:7-13?
- Briefly write how you feel this lesson will help you in your Christian walk.

Conclusion

The hand of God is always in favor of His people, and He promises to bless those who obey Him. So, no matter how hard the difficulties are that we'll have to face, the hand of God is always willing to bless the efforts of His children. However, any attitude of pride will offend the heart of God, and although God, in Christ, extends His mercy, the painful consequences of disobedience will have to be faced.



King David's Most Important Project

Leticia Cano (Guatemala)

Passage to study: 1 Chronicles 22:1-13

Memory verse: “Now devote your heart and soul to seeking the Lord your God. Begin to build the sanctuary of the Lord God...” 1 Chronicles 22:19

Lesson Aim: To identify, relate, analyze and apply King David's different attitudes and actions as he carried out this big project.

Introduction

Based on the memory verse, get the students to reflect on the importance of having a place specially designed for the worship of God in King David's time. According to a popular expression, what all humans should do in life is to have a child, write a book and plant a tree. But none of the three things is easy to do. Perhaps we have no children, have never planted a tree and or written a book, but what legacy will we leave when we die? Get the students to discuss this question.

I. Preparations For The Project (1 Chronicles 22:1-9)

David was the second king of the new nation of Israel. When he reached the end of his life, he decided to build a temple, replacing the tabernacle. The ark of the covenant (which symbolized the presence of God) would be put in a special place in this new temple. There, every Israelite could experience a personal encounter with God and express their worship.

This project didn't come from a moment of sentimentality, but of a tragic experience. David had ordered a census that God didn't approve, so there had been a great slaughter in the nation. When he reached the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, the angel of Jehovah stopped David with his sword. There, God asked David to build an altar and offer a sacrifice, which was accepted by the Lord (2 Sam, 24:1-25; 1 Chron. 21:2-27). David then, grateful for the mercy of God, determined the following: “*The house of the Lord God is to be here, and also the altar of burnt offering for Israel*” (1 Chron. 22:1).

A. Call For Workers (vs. 2, 15)

David ordered the foreigners who lived among them to work in the quarries and cut stones for the

project. Possibly, they were people taken captive during the wars against other nations. The king spared no effort to get a large number of workers: masons, stonemasons, carpenters and many specialized people for each area of the task. This included the artisans specialized in wood, and goldsmiths who made unique artistic pieces with precious metals.

B. Building Materials (vs. 3-4)

We don't give up when a job we're doing is really important to us. Sometimes we would rather do it ourselves than risk that someone else does it badly. David was diligent in planning, as well as providing the necessary materials such as stone, iron, bronze, fine wood, gold and silver. He planned and organized everything, but the only thing he couldn't do was the actual building of the temple.

The kings of Tiro and Sidon provided a great quantity of Cedar wood, which is extremely durable, doesn't rot and has a pleasant smell. It's interesting to note the repetition of some terms related to the generosity and splendor of the resources: large amounts of nails, and more bronze than could be used (v. 3); incalculable amount of cedar wood (v. 4); one hundred thousand talents of gold, one million talents of silver, iron and bronze without measure (v. 14). This teaches us about giving generously. We don't need to be rich to offer something. What's important is the disposition of our hearts. In fact, many times the poor are generous and the wealthy stingy.

King David delicately planned every detail because the work was of great importance. It wasn't like one of the palaces that had been built before. Thus he said: “...*the house to be built for the Lord should be of great magnificence and fame and splendor in the sight of all the nations...*” (v. 5). David was very interested in God's name being exalted among the nations, and

that was the reason why he wanted the temple of the Lord to be splendid. He was a good example, and then the people also contributed with metal and precious stones for the construction of the temple.

Generosity is a characteristic of God's grateful people. In this particular case, David as ruler had a personal fortune which he used in the preparations for the house of the Lord. Maybe we don't have a great fortune, but the biblical principle is to give liberally (Rom. 12:8), and joyfully (2 Cor. 9:7). Frequently, Christian churches are full of broken benches, roofs with holes, dirty walls, etc. Often, the members take great care of their own houses without worrying about improving the bad conditions of their places of worship. In contrast to this, there are also lavish temples, while the parishioners live in deplorable conditions. We need to maintain a balance!

Questions

- Regarding the preparations for the construction of the temple, list the outstanding attitudes of David (vs. 1-5, 14, 16).
- What do we learn from I Chronicles 22:2, 15?

II. Instructions And Requirements For Solomon (I Chronicles 22:10-16)

Solomon was still very young. Although the Bible doesn't indicate how old he was, we understand that because of his youth and immaturity, David didn't want to take any risk that the work wouldn't be carried out with the magnificence he wanted. So, he made sure that only the best materials were provided. He was explicit when he gave his son the guidelines for carrying out this magnificent project.

David told his young son that although he wished with all his heart to build the temple, God hadn't allowed it because he was a man of war who had shed a lot of blood (vs. 6-10). For that reason, he had arranged that his son Solomon would be the one to do it. He promised to prepare by maintaining peace. Solomon didn't have to fight any war to defend himself against his enemies because David had left him a stable kingdom.

A. A Lasting Kingdom (v. 10)

This verse is extremely important regarding the relationship that God wanted to have with Solomon, David's successor. God wanted to have a relationship as close as that of a father with his son. That implies a daily relationship of trust, but also of obedience.

In addition, the Lord promised David that His family line would be everlasting "*And I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever.*" (v. 10) Solomon finished his days ruling in peace, just as

God promised. However, this promise transcended Solomon's reign. It was a messianic promise fulfilled at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, just as the angel told Mary (Luke 1:33).

B. The Indispensable Presence Of God (v. 11)

What do we need to do to be successful people? This is a very interesting question that we can ask ourselves. David told Solomon that the presence of God was indispensable if he was going to prosper, and that he needed to build God's house. Thus, the same divine presence would guide Solomon's understanding and make him a prudent ruler of Israel. Today we too need prudent leaders who are close to God to govern our nations wisely! In many cases, our politicians seek positions of power solely to increase their personal assets. In addition, many of them loot the coffers of the state at the expense of the suffering of others. This is a sad situation!

But the above doesn't mean that the children of God should shun government positions of leadership. Rather, they must prepare to be people with principles and values grounded in the Word, and when the opportunity comes up, to govern with wisdom grounded in the holiness of God.

C. Understanding And Prudence (v. 12)

King David also spoke to Solomon about understanding and prudence, virtues that only come from above. These qualities would guide him when he ruled over Israel. How important it is that government leaders have the understanding to perceive and analyze the circumstances, problems or needs of the population! But in addition, it's important that they have a heart full of prudence to discern or distinguish the good from the bad, and retain the good. When people enter the circle of the powerful, they often begin to be influenced by power, and their moral values begin to slide. They become corrupt.

D. The Need To Keep God's Law (v. 13)

David also told Solomon about the importance of keeping God's law if he wanted to be successful in the exercise of power. Prosperity doesn't consist in the possession of a great fortune or influences, but in having the blessing of God when observing or complying with His plans for our life. There's no virtue in economic prosperity when Christian values are disregarded. People who govern anywhere in the world need to keep God's laws.

The absence of practice of the principles established in the law of God is the reason why there are so many evils in our society, such as corruption, unemployment, delinquency, poverty, lack of work,

injustice, insecurity, alcoholism, and abuses of power in different spheres of daily life. David's advice for Solomon was the same that God gave to Joshua before he took leadership of the nation (Joshua 1:8). This also goes for all rulers and citizens today: We must keep, observe and fulfill God's law so that there will be a just and healthy society. So, the key to personal prosperity isn't to make economic deals, but to love the law of God and put it into practice (v. 13).

E. Effort, Courage And Courage (vs. 14-16)

David told his son Solomon: *"Now begin the work, and the Lord be with you..."* (v. 16). Solomon's training had been very different from that of his father David. The latter was raised in the fields performing harsh and dangerous tasks, and he even had to face wild beasts (1 Sam. 17:34-36). Solomon, on the other hand, grew up among the rich where servants supplied all his needs. He was used to being served, not serving. For that reason, David challenged him not to remain static, but to act to carry out the king's greatest project: God's House.

Great works require great effort and perseverance. For the financing for the building of the house of Jehovah, David made sure of quality control, supply of materials and supervision (v. 14). Under those circumstances, it was possible to suffer fatigue and discouragement.

Questions

- What did Solomon need to do to be successful?
- What do we need to do to be successful (vs. 11-12)?
- Why did David try to prepare all the materials for the construction of the temple and not leave that responsibility to Solomon (v. 14)?
- How firm is your decision to seek God, especially when you have to work hard?

III. Support From The Countries' Leaders (1 Chronicles 22:17-19)

David again took leadership into his hands and ordered the chiefs of the tribes of Israel to help Solomon with the construction, assuring them that the peace they were enjoying was a gift from God.

A. Project Of Gratitude (vs. 17-18)

The nation of Israel had faced a great mortality due to the census, and David, grateful for the mercy of the Lord, wanted to prepare everything necessary for the building of the temple. But Solomon couldn't do it alone, he needed his leaders to get involved in the project. God had delivered the nation from death. Therefore, all Israel should participate in this project of gratitude to make a glorious place for the worship of the Lord. A good leader involves other people in God's service.

Why did David work so hard to accumulate all the precious materials and give specifications to his son on how to build the temple, as well as asking for the support of the Israelite leaders? The reason is that the splendor of the temple would reflect the glory of God, symbolizing His holy presence among the people. With this project, David was emphasizing the importance of worship of the one, true, holy and merciful God of Israel.

Just as David procured the best materials, today it's up to us to present our hearts, adorned with holiness and obedience so that the glory of God may be manifested in our lives.

Likewise, David assured the leaders that it was God who allowed them to live in peace, after heavy battles in which they had subdued the inhabitants of the region, among whom were the Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites, and Syrians. David, speaking before the leaders of the people, gave God the credit and didn't take any for himself. Many people believe that their achievements have been obtained by their efforts alone, and they forget that it's God who has given them their successes.

B. A Firm Purpose (v.19)

We need the leaders of our nation and our churches to make a firm commitment to seek the face of the Lord so that He will give them wisdom and understanding to govern with righteousness.

We need in these days the firm determination to seek the Lord! But many are trapped by the cares of this life and don't have the heart or the time to have fellowship with God. How firm is our decision to seek God, especially when hard work entangles us?

Questions

- How important is it that we as Christian leaders motivate and involve other brothers and sisters in the service of the Lord?
- How do you feel you are serving the Lord in the place He has placed you? Do you think you could do better? Share.

Conclusion

David had many children, wrote many Psalms, and left a mark on the life of his fellow citizens by providing for the building of the temple of the Lord as a place where the whole nation could worship God for generations. We too need to search for the presence of God, obey His commands, and search for His divine direction every day of our lives. The same God of peace who was with David and Solomon is the one who is with us to help us today!

Organization And Distribution Of Human Resources



Marco Cisneros (USA)

Passage to study: I Chronicles 23:6, 24-27

Memory verse: "When David was old and full of years, he made his son Solomon king over Israel." I Chronicles 23:1

Lesson Aim: To apply the biblical principles of organization and distribution of human resources given to us by God to administer.

Introduction

In the last years of life, people make plans with specific instructions about their finances, material goods, relationships, etc. King David did this before leaving the throne, leaving instructions with his son Solomon. He made arrangements for all the available resources in the kingdom, especially human resources. This is an excellent lesson for us! Although we may not have thousands of people in our care, nevertheless, the principle is the same: to be faithful administrators of all the resources that God has entrusted to us. May our goal be one day to be able to hear the voice of the Lord telling us: "... *Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!*" (Matthew 25:23)

In this lesson, we'll study the organization and distribution of King David's human resources, which are divided into four main groups:

I. Levites In The Service Of The House Of God (I Chronicles 23)

A. David Was Old And Full Of Days (vs. 1-3)

The Bible tells us that King David was old. He decided to start making certain necessary arrangements before his departure (vs. 1-3). We too can start early in our lives organizing, distributing and taking care of all the blessings that God gives us. Keep in mind that with the blessing of being Christians, there comes also the responsibility of being good stewards. What's important isn't the amount of what we own, but the care with which we administer what we have. We must bear in mind that the way we manage what we have will directly

affect, for better or for worse, the lives of those who come after us, who are usually our loved ones. Discuss together the following question: What's the inheritance that we're leaving to our children?

B. The Organization Of The Levites (vs. 4-5)

In these verses, we observe the importance of precision. David and Solomon didn't just have to know how many Levites there were, but they needed to be distributed in different tasks and responsibilities. This must have been a great lesson in stewardship and administration. David said, "*Of these, twenty-four thousand are to be in charge of the work of the temple of the Lord and six thousand are to be officials and judges. Four thousand are to be gatekeepers and four thousand are to praise the Lord with the musical instruments I have provided for that purpose.*" (vs. 4-5)

C. Careful And Detailed Organization (vs. 6-12)

What we find in vs. 6-12 is a meticulous distribution by names and ages (it must be remembered that at that time, there was no computer technology). This teaches us that we can and should be careful with all resources, especially in relation to the people under our care and supervision. Behind each name, there's a face and a heart. Perhaps for many systems, especially in the present era of computers and technology, each one of us doesn't go beyond being just a '*number*' in statistics. However, for God we're much more than a number. For Him, we have a name which He knows. As leaders, teachers, pastors or parents, we must try hard to get to know the uniqueness of all the people who surround us.

D. Greater Responsibility (vs. 13-15)

All service to the Lord is holy, and must be sacred, because God is holy. Some things require a clearer sense of holiness, or of the responsibility that comes with doing certain tasks. For example, in the New Testament we observed that serving the tables required leaders full of the Holy Spirit: *“Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We’ll turn this responsibility over to them.”* (Acts 6:3) Therefore, every task done for the Lord is a great responsibility. Of course, some of them may require more special care and attention than others.

E. Grateful Service (v. 25)

Because God had given peace to the Israelites, all the work that David did to organize for the future stemmed from a grateful heart. Nothing is comparable to the peace that God gives. ‘Shalom means ‘may the Lord send peace.’ All the preparations for the celebration were to thank God for that peace. David expressed in Psalm 29:11 the following: *“The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace.”* Strength and peace, what a beautiful combination! Only God can make this possible; He alone can give us the power of His peace.

Questions

- Do we have to wait until old age to make arrangements for organizing the resources that have been entrusted to us during our life?
- Comment on how that applies to your life.
- Are there benefits to a congregation having a careful and detailed organization of the resources it has, especially the human resources? Explain.

II. The Sons Of Aaron As Priests (I Chron. 24)

After the Levites were organized, David established and organized the priests.

A. Functions Of Priests (vs. 1-6)

The duties of the priests were basically twofold: carry out the religious rites and communicate with God. In this way, they served as intermediaries between God and His people. God had established earlier that the members of Aaron’s family should be priests: *“Have Aaron your brother brought to you from among the Israelites, along with his sons Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, so they may serve me as priests.”* (Exodus 28:1) The priests were like bridges to God helping the people communicate with Him.

Strangely, it was the priests who plotted against Jesus to kill him (Matt. 27:1, 6, 20, 41). In the New Testament, priests also testified to healings (Mark 1:44; Luke 17:14). Some priests came to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior (Acts 6:7). The New Testament no longer calls the ministers of the gospel, priests. The letter to the Hebrews shows us that there’s no longer a need for priests who make daily sacrifices as in the Old Testament (Heb. 9:11-12). Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the priestly system having paid the ultimate sacrifice. Now, believers are priests (1 Peter 2:5, 9, Rev. 1:6, 5:10). It’s the believer who offers sacrifices of praise to God (Heb. 13:15-16).

B. Unauthorized Fire

In 1 Chron. 24:1, Nadab and Abihu are mentioned. Leviticus 10:1 gives us a reason for them: *“Aaron’s sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, contrary to his command.”* This expression: ‘unauthorized fire’ marks the strictness of the priestly tasks. The priest had to fulfill to the letter all of the Lord’s instructions. If they disobeyed, were rebellious or proud, their sacrifice, according to the passage in Leviticus, resulted in ‘unauthorized fire.’

C. The Priests Worked In Shifts (vs. 7-31)

In these verses, David organized the priests into 24 groups. He not only distributed them, but also assigned them shifts in the ministry.

Questions

- What functions did the priests fulfill? As priests of the Lord (1 Peter 2:5,9; Revelation 1:6, 5:10), what are our responsibilities today?

III. The Distribution Of Musicians And Singers (I Chronicles 25)

David himself was an excellent musician. It was important for him to organize the musicians. Nevertheless, he made the army leaders participate in choosing and separating those who would serve in this important task, the ministry of worship in the temple. So, it’s not just about instruments and talents. The musicians were people trained and consecrated for this vital part of public worship. These were good men who played an excellent variety of instruments.

A. “All Of Them Trained And Skilled In Music For The Lord” (v. 7)

When it comes to service for the Lord and His people, we should not rely solely on natural aptitude, ability, gifts or talents. Really, there must be a strong sense of commitment and continual preparation. A good musician, as in many other areas, must always keep growing in all those areas related to his ministry. Serving God through music must reflect serious preparation, both technical and practical, and above all, a serious spiritual preparation.

B. “Young And Old Alike, Teacher As Well As Student, Cast Lots For Their Duties” (v. 8)

Another very important aspect in the organization and distribution of participation roles was the opportunity that everyone received. They served in shifts, and everyone participated. How many practical lessons do we find here for our days? In the service of the Lord, no one is indispensable, all are important: the little ones, the senior citizens, the disciples and the teachers. Thank God that the church gives each and every one the opportunity to participate according to their abilities, talents and responsibilities!

Questions

- Who else took charge of the musical aspect in the worship of God? Why didn't David do it?
- How important is music today in worshiping the Lord?

IV. Gatekeepers And Officials (I Chron. 26-27)

In chapter 26, we find the following: the organization of the gatekeepers (vs. 1-19); the organization of the treasurers (vs. 20-28); and the organization of officers and judges (vs. 29-32). In chapter 27, we can see the following: the organization of the army (vs. 1-15); the organization of the tribes of Israel (vs. 16-24), and the administration of King David (vs. 23-34).

A. The Temple Gatekeepers (I Chronicles 26)

The gatekeepers of the family of Kore were priests charged with guarding the entrances to the temple of God (v. 1). The word gatekeeper means *'concierge, or guard.'* This office was of the utmost importance; and even from the time of Moses, gatekeepers had already been established. They needed to be Levites (I Chronicles 9:26). The Levites had several tasks in

their charge: to look after the temple (2 Chronicles 23:19); protect the ark from robbers (1 Chronicles 15:23); watch over the offerings (2 Kings 12:9). Their daily tasks were as follows: verify that the equipment and utensils used daily were returned to their places; keep order in the temple; keep supplies for priests and sacrifices; take care of the temple furniture; mix the incense used to be burned; and record the offerings received. In addition to all these requirements, the gatekeepers had to have special characteristics: they had to be brave (vs. 6, 9); strong (v. 7); robust and healthy (v. 8); willing (v. 8); wise (v. 14) and honest (vs. 22, 24, 26). What an excellent guide for ministry for our churches today! They're the characteristics that ushers, church treasurers and stewards, should demonstrate within the church as well as in their lives in the community.

B. The Army And Officers Of Israel (I Chron. 27)

The military of Israel served the king in all his business. David's army consisted of 12 groups. These groups took turns serving the king once a year. This was a way to keep troops ready and trained correctly. Unlike the gatekeepers whose job was to protect, the soldiers could attack an enemy. As Christians, we must be ready to serve, and we must also be ready to fight the spiritual battles. God alerts us to be ready with His armor on (Ephesians 6:11). Our worst enemy is the devil, and we have a fight against spiritual beings of evil that we shouldn't ignore (Ephesians 6:12). Our weapon of defense is faith (Ephesians 6:16); and our weapon of attack is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17).

Questions

- Describe the role of gatekeepers.
- How is this service in your church? Where and how are you serving?

Conclusion

God calls us to be excellent and dedicated in the administration of personal, family and church resources, the correct distribution of human resources within Christian service, and the preparation and carrying out of the different tasks of ministry. Let's always remember: our God and His people always deserve the best of our service!



Preparations For Building The Temple

Joel Castro (Spain)

Passage to study: I Chronicles 28-29:25

Memory verse: “‘All this,’ David said, ‘I have in writing as a result of the Lord’s hand on me, and he enabled me to understand all the details of the plan.’” I Chronicles 28:19

Lesson Aim: To learn from the wise counsel that David gave to Solomon, his principles of justice and his generosity for the temple where the people could worship God.

Introduction

David was the only king of Israel who by his authority and temperance was able to accomplish many things. As the youngest son of Jesse, he learned how to be a good courageous shepherd who protected his sheep against the attacks of bears and lions. In his teens, he saved the people of Israel from a war against the Philistines that seemed impossible. King Saul couldn't see how to get past what seemed to be an insurmountable difficulty – the giant Goliath. Young David with his sling and his 5 stones was able to down an enemy three times his size. In addition, he was a musician and singer, and a composer of many songs.

However, even though he could do many things, there was something that he wasn't allowed to do – build the temple of the Lord. He did everything to convince God: he brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem and he drafted all the plans for the temple. But God didn't grant him the privilege of building His house. God indicated to him that it was his heir, Solomon, who would construct the temple. Let's see how this important event and other actions in the last days of King David reign are narrated in the book of I Chronicles 28-29.

I. God's Plans Through David (I Chronicles 28:1-8)

David has been one of the most outstanding kings of the Israelite nation. He was totally devoted to God, his creator. Since childhood, he was very zealous for the name of the Lord. As mentioned in the introduction, he faced and overcame Goliath because he and the Philistines were mocking God's name. David, even though he was but a teen, didn't hesitate to come out in defense of His honor. Regardless of the physical difference or the Philistine's superior armament, he

knew that the God of armies, for whom he fought, wasn't going to abandon him. Everything he did was in the mission of honoring and magnifying God.

After many years, David wanted to build a temple to honor God. We can see this in chapters before I Chronicles 28: “*After David was settled in his palace, he said to Nathan the prophet, ‘Here I am, living in a house of cedar, while the ark of the covenant of the Lord is under a tent.’*” (I Chronicles 17:1) David was struck by the incongruity between the magnificence of his house and the fact that the Ark of the Lord was still among curtains, tapestries, and cured animal skins with which it was made. David intended to build a temple where the Ark of God could be kept in honor.

Then, already very elderly, King David called the people to a meeting (I Chron. 28:1). He revealed to them his original desire to build the temple for God and shared with them that he wasn't going to build the temple, because God had better plans (vs. 2-3) He was making plans which his son Solomon would be able to carry out with the people (vs. 11-19). God had told him that because of all the blood he had shed in his military battles, he wasn't going to be the one to build it. But God cheered David up by giving the task to Solomon (vs. 5-6). Through Solomon, God would bring a double blessing for David, which would also favor his people Israel. First, he would be the king who would give continuity to his lineage; and second, he would build the temple for worship of the name of God.

King David must be our model in loving and longing for God's presence (Psalms 27:4, 122:1, 84). Today, we're the temple of the Spirit Holy (I Corinthians 6:19), but as children of God, there should be no better place to be than where we gather to participate in the worship of our God in community.

Questions

- Why didn't God let David build the temple (vs. 2-3)?
- In your opinion, what do Psalms 27:4, 122:1 & 84 tell us?

II. Recommendations Of David To The Future King (I Chronicles 28:9-10)

Having chosen the future king of Israel, David, from his experience, gave five recommendations to Solomon. If Solomon obeyed God, he would be successful. Now, we'll study each one of those recommendations.

A. "...And You, My Son Solomon, Acknowledge The God Of Your Father..." (v. 9)

David urged his son not to forget that God wants honor and fidelity. Solomon had the privilege of hearing many historical experiences first hand, like when our grandparents tell us their fascinating stories. David's stories were very exciting stories due to the spiritual weight they had. This shows us that as parents, we have the responsibility to live in such a way that our children can truly see God in every area of our lives. As parents, we can also tell our children with conviction this same recommendation to honor and be faithful to God.

B. "Serve Him With Wholehearted Devotion" (v. 9)

Another exhortation given to Solomon was that he should serve God with integrity and intentionality. Holiness of the heart is the seal and testimony of loyal service to God. God is interested in our service, but above all, the state of our heart, our spirit and even our intentions. We're called like Solomon to serve *"with a willing mind..."* With this recommendation, David told Solomon not to simply have an active government, but service dedicated from the heart to God. Service has to be with joy, because God knows with what motivation and intention we do it. So today, the redemption of Christ must be our maximum motivation in serving. David told his son: *"If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will reject you forever."* Just as the hungry look for food and the thirsty for water, we must bring our daily spiritual need to God in an intimate and close relationship. It's very important to keep God in mind at all times and in every area of our lives.

C. "...The Lord Has Chosen You To Build A House As The Sanctuary..." (v. 10)

Solomon's number one priority as king was to build the temple of the Lord. Building the temple

wasn't an easy matter since there were going to be many obstacles. Therefore, in I Chronicles 28:20, King David gave Solomon words of encouragement. When starting out on a big project, we must count the cost to enable us to finish the project. Someone once said: *"To start a big project, you need courage. To finish a big project, you need perseverance."* How many projects end up as mere emotion or illusion? Maybe we've started to read a book of the Bible and have never finished it. Perhaps we began to pray every morning and then gave up, etc. Whatever the issue is, we must be courageous and persevere, trusting absolutely in the Lord.

Questions

- Why are the leaders or older brothers and sisters in the faith called to support young leaders now?
- With which of the five recommendations that David gave to Solomon do you feel that God is speaking to you in particular?

III. Recommendations For The Nation (I Chronicles 29:1-5)

The well-known inventor Henry Ford once said: *"Meetings are a beginning, staying together is progress and working together is success."*

A. Team Work

The first recommendation is that they work together with Solomon because God had chosen him (v. 1a). According to I Kings, where also the succession of the throne to Solomon is narrated, Adonijah, his brother, proposed to usurp the throne, declaring that he was to be the king *"So he got chariots and horses ready, with fifty men to run ahead of him..."* (I Kings 1:5). Adonijah conferred with Joab Abiathar the priest, and they gave him their support (I Kings 1:7). In that way, Adonijah had everything ready to seize the throne by force. This is the context of I Chronicles 29:1-5, when David gathered all the high leaders and told them that Solomon was the chosen one and not Adonijah. With this declaration, King David wanted to put an end to any rumor about Adonijah. Regrettably, this attitude still remains in some Christians who, instead of seeking the true direction of God, trust more in their power of knowledge and skills, thus fomenting confusion and rebellion. In light of this, let's always remember and reflect on what God tells us in Proverbs 3:5-7.

The second recommendation given by David to the leaders of Israel was that they work together with

Solomon for the sake of the nation, (1 Chronicles 29:1b). According to some commentators, Solomon was between 16 and 18 years old. Really, he was very young, and even more so knowing that, according to the Jewish culture, a man didn't qualify for some positions before the age of 30. But in spite of these considerations, David exhorted the people of Israel not to underestimate or belittle his son. He told them that they must work hard alongside Solomon for the sake of the nation. Many centuries later, General Simón Bolívar expressed: *"In union there's strength."* For David, *"The task is great..."* under the premise that this great building project *"is not for man but for the Lord God..."* (v. 1).

Today, many Christians need to understand this premise. Our mission is great because it's for the King of kings and Lord of lords. Everything we do for God must not be ordinary or mediocre. Following demands sacrifice, and also true intentions. The best way to give our best to God is when we strip ourselves of that earthly thing that the heart treasures the most, remembering that *"... the house isn't for man, but for the Lord God"* (vs. 1-5).

B. The Generous Offering Of The People (1 Chronicles 29:6-9)

David, after making his generous offer, ended with the following words: *"Now, who is willing to consecrate themselves to the Lord today?"* (v. 5). Up to this point, David preached by example; and from there, he would wait for the response of the people. The work of God needs the effort of all, not just a few. Although the commitment must always begin with those who are leading the work of the Lord, that is, pastors, presidents, teachers, etc., everyone needs get involved.

Thank God, all the leaders followed David's call: *"Then the leaders of families, the officers of the tribes of Israel, the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds, and the officials in charge of the king's work gave willingly. They gave toward the work on the temple of God..."* (vs. 6-7). *"Anyone who had precious stones gave them to the treasury of the temple of the Lord..."* (v. 8).

We see that in the end, *"The people rejoiced at the willing response of their leaders, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the Lord. David the king also rejoiced greatly."* (1 Chronicles 29:9) The whole offering received at that time, converted to our current currency, represents a lot of money. Some

have called it the greatest offering to God in history. We must emulate the mood with which they gave; this must be the attitude that we have in our hearts, because it's for the HOUSE of GOD. And the house of God involves all His work, each ministry, both that of building and that of outreach and discipleship.

C. David's Prayer (1 Chronicles 29:10-25)

When a heart surrenders completely without reservations, as we have seen in the previous chapter, then that person has free access to the throne of grace. With joy, David prayed before God. It was a humble and heartfelt prayer that involved five relevant actions:

1. Adoration to God, giving Him the honor and glory (vs. 10-13).
2. Humiliation and recognition that His grace is what enables us to share with him (vs. 14-15).
3. Gratitude for building a house in the name of the Lord (v. 16).
4. Honest confession and willingness to live honestly and faithfully (vs. 17-19).
5. Petition to God for a heart that perseveres in generosity (v. 17).

The people blessed God and joyfully sacrificed their animals to God (vs. 20-22). Today, we're the true sacrifice of true worship to God (Romans 12:1-2). The last verses of 1 Chronicles confirmed the faithfulness of the Lord (vs. 23-25).

Questions

- What are the three lessons we can learn from the words expressed by King David in 1 Chronicles 29:2-5; and what's your opinion about it?
- What does the generosity we read of in this passage teach us (1 Chronicles 29:6-9)?
- According to 1 Chronicles 29:10-25, what are the five ingredients that our prayers to God must contain.

Conclusion

David was obedient to God. Although there were torments in his life because of some bad decisions, at the end of his days, God gave him old age in peace. He fulfilled his desires, and through him bequeathed a model of a life worthy of imitating in true generosity and adoration to our Lord.



A Vital Request

Wilson Sánchez (Peru)

Passage to study: 2 Chronicles 1:1-13

Memory verse: "Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding."
Proverbs 3:13

Lesson Aim: To know that there's no greater treasure than the wisdom that emanates from above, on which our decisions must rest.

Introduction

What similarities and differences are there between Thomas Young and Solomon? King Solomon is considered the wisest person of all time; and Thomas Young is said to be the last man who knew everything. The latter was born in the eighteenth century. At two years old he learned to read, and at four years old he had read the Bible twice. At age 14, he could read ten languages, including Hebrew. In addition to reading Egyptian hieroglyphics, he also made many scientific discoveries. However, the difference between these two characters, the biblical king and the man from the eighteenth century, was that the latter had much knowledge and intelligence, but Solomon had intelligence and much wisdom.

Intelligence and wisdom are different things. Intelligence appeals to scientific knowledge, but wisdom is the ability to distinguish between good and evil. The first is acquired through study, and the second is a gift from God to enable us to not stumble and live eternally. But how did Solomon get so much wisdom at a young age? Let's see what 2 Chron. 1:1-13 says.

I. A Wise Request (2 Chronicles 2:1-10)

According to some commentators, Solomon began to reign when he was between 16-18 years old. While he was young, he was very willing once David his father had confirmed him as the future king of Israel: "Then King David said to the whole assembly: 'My son Solomon, the one whom God has chosen, is young and inexperienced. The task is great, because this palatial structure isn't for man but for the Lord God.'" (1 Chronicles 29:1) The government of the nation wasn't easy to manage, including the important recommendation to build the house of

God, something that David couldn't do by divine order (1 Chronicles 28:2-3).

The writer of 1 Kings chapter 2 described how David exhorted Solomon to act with wisdom. This highlights the two things that a father expects of his child: to work and to act with wisdom: "Deal with him according to your wisdom, but don't let his gray head go down to the grave in peace" (1 Kings 2:6); "...You are a man of wisdom..." (1 Kings 2:9). David was expecting his son Solomon to act with wisdom, and he had the certainty that he would do so. This demonstrates God's will for Solomon to rule the kingdom and build the desired temple, something that Adonijah his brother, who also wanted the throne, couldn't have done (1 Kings 1:5-27).

Because of everything mentioned in the previous paragraph, Solomon needed nothing more than a wise heart. Solomon wanted to encourage his father's heart who trusted him to be the new king in spite of the fact that he had several brothers who could have been anointed as the king. Every child should aim to bring joy to their parents. Later, in his wisdom, Solomon wrote these words on three occasions: "A wise son brings joy to his father..." (Prov. 10:1, 15:20, 29:3). On the contrary: "A foolish son brings grief to his father" (Prov. 17:25, 19:13). To find wisdom from above, Solomon began by giving place to God in his life: "Solomon went up to the bronze altar before the Lord in the tent of meeting and offered a thousand burnt offerings on it." (2 Chron. 1:6)

In response to his devotion and generosity in worship, God presented himself and said: "Ask for whatever you want me to give you" (v. 7). The only tangible way to find the presence of God is when we enter into communion with Him in spirit and in truth. Today, God has left us His Word to speak to our needy hearts.

At God's offer, Solomon remembered all the words of his father David about the great responsibility of leading the nation of Israel (vs. 8-9). That's why in his youth, he said to the Lord: *"Give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may lead this people, for who is able to govern this great people of yours?"* (v. 10). As a prince, Solomon surely had been well instructed and educated. However, that wasn't enough to govern the nation of Israel. His father motivated him, and he sought that wisdom in the right place: In the presence of God.

Although we aren't kings, we do have to make good decisions in our lives. Many have fallen into an infinity of errors and, as the saying goes, they still stumble over the same stone. The reason for this is because they don't ask God for wisdom. The Apostle James teaches us the following: *"If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you."* (James 1:5) We need to carry out a self-analysis in our lives: Is what we are because God wanted it that way; or is it because it has been the result of our foolishness? Let's do what Solomon did: Let's ask God for wisdom.

Questions

- According to Proverbs 10:1, 15:20, 29:3, what does a father expect of his child?
- What do you expect from your children?

II. A Divine Gift (2 Chronicles 1:11-12)

We have a giving God, and when we ask for things that benefit our spiritual and inner life, He is ready to help us. Remember what our Lord Jesus said: *"Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete."* (John 16:24) We must bear in mind that when the Master said this, he didn't mean for us to ask for material things, because in reality, material things don't satisfy. Rather they lead us to want even more. However, to ask for his continued presence through his Holy Spirit is to have eternal joy; and *"... no one will take away your joy"* (John 16:22). Joy is the cure for sadness, fear and loneliness.

Solomon made a perfect, pertinent first request: *"God said to Solomon, 'Since this is your heart's desire and you have not asked for wealth, possessions or honor, nor for the death of your enemies, and since you have not asked for a long life but for wisdom and knowledge to govern my people over whom I have made you king, therefore wisdom and knowledge will be given you.'*" (2 Chronicles 1:11-12a).

Wealth and fame are attached to the lusts of man, and this is often to be found in the hearts of many

believers who see God as a means to achieve their ambitions and dark plans. On the other hand, there was something very special about Solomon's request to God. God highlighted this excellent request and promised to bless him because he didn't ask for the wrong things. This teaching must transform the hearts of today's Christians so that we'll begin to seek more of the kingdom of God and his righteousness (Matthew 6:33). If we seek God's wisdom we'll receive it.

According to the writer and historian of the book of 1 Kings, chapter 3, once Solomon had received divine wisdom, he had his first test with a very difficult situation that he needed to sort out. Two women came before his throne, fighting to prove that one of them was the mother of the living baby. It wasn't easy to decide who the mother really was. Solomon couldn't send to the Lab for a DNA test to find out which of the two women was the true mother. In his wisdom, Solomon declared that he would cut the baby in two and give each mother half of the child. This decision was a wise strategy to reveal the wickedness of one of them: *"The woman whose son was alive was deeply moved out of love for her son and said to the king, 'Please, my lord, give her the living baby! Don't kill him!' But the other said, 'Neither I nor you shall have him. Cut him in two!' then the king gave his ruling: 'Give the living baby to the first woman. Don't kill him; she is his mother.'"* (1 Kings 3:26-27). Here we notice three attitudes that pass the filter of wisdom:

1. The false mother used that wisdom that the apostle James calls "earthly, unspiritual, demonic" (James 3:15).
2. Most people, not only unbelievers, but also some Christians, use their own intelligence and ideas to take advantage of others, but taking advantage of other people won't lead to their blessing.
3. The real mother acted with compassion. Her decision was wise for the welfare of her son. She was even prepared to lose her own child in order to safeguard its life.

True wisdom is *"...the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere"* (James 3:17). The attitudes of these two women were weighed by the divine wisdom that came to Solomon: *"When all Israel heard the verdict the king had given, they held the king in awe, because they saw that he had wisdom from God to administer justice."* (1 Kings 3:28).

Solomon wasn't only able to judge with wisdom, but also through his government in Israel, he was able to do three things that other kings didn't achieve: First, he built the most magnificent and splendid temple there could be, with all the measurements and special areas that God had indicated through David. Secondly, he enlarged the national territory without the need for wars or deaths as other kings had done. This brought peace and renown to the nation of Israel. He honored the meaning of his name: "*peaceful*." The surrounding nations were willing to make friends with Solomon to achieve certain benefits. One example of this was the visit of the queen of Sheba (2 Chronicles 9:1-12).

Thirdly, he had the ability to trade with different countries. That's why he was able to import many resources and materials used for the construction of the temple. His weakness was horses, which he traded between the countries of the north and the south (2 Chronicles 1:16, 9:24). His wisdom brought prosperity to the nation of Israel.

In addition, Solomon became famous through his advice and writing. As a poet, he wrote three thousand proverbs and one thousand and five songs (1 Kings 4:32); as a philosopher, he was able to lecture on trees, animals, birds, reptiles and fish (1 Kings 4:33). This king also may have been the author of three canonical books: Proverbs, Songs of Songs and Ecclesiastes.

Questions

- What did Solomon ask of God which gladdened his father's heart? (2 Chronicles 1:10).
- Sincerely, what would come to mind now if God told you to ask for something?
- How did Solomon solve the problem of the two women? (1 Kings 3:16-28)
- What does this teach us?

III. An Added Reward (2 Chronicles 1:12-13)

2 Chronicles 1:12 says: "...therefore wisdom and knowledge will be given you. And I will also give you wealth, possessions and honor, such as no king who was before you ever had and none after you will have." When Solomon made his request to God, he didn't think of himself, but he thought more about the responsibility he had as the king for his nation, that is, in the mission for which he had been chosen. His priority wasn't to get riches, acquire more goods, or the glory or fame that the world could give him. God mentioned these things that were not his priority or

delight. However, God wanted to add these things as a reward for humbly requesting only wisdom and knowledge to govern Israel.

The riches and glory of Solomon were based, according to 1 Kings 10:14-29, on:

- a.) Income (10:14-15). The income received annually from the vassal states was 666 gold talents (approximately \$20,000,000 dollars). To this was added the revenues of the control of commerce that Solomon exercised.
- b.) The golden shields (10:16). On special occasions, the royal guard used double shields of gold, of two sizes (compare 14:27-28 and 2 Chronicles 12:10). These were kept in the house of the forest of Lebanon (17: cf. 7:2).
- c.) The throne of ivory (10:18-20). The throne was very elaborately adorned with ivory and covered with gold. Nowhere was anything comparable to that throne.
- d.) The drinking glasses of gold (10:21).
- e.) The chariot cities (10:26). These cities were another aspect of the great wealth and power of Solomon.
- f.) Silver and cedar become commonplace (10:27).
- g.) Monopoly of the chariot and horse trade (10:28-29) ... (Beacon Biblical Commentary, pp. 265-266)

Everything that God promised to Solomon was fulfilled. However, he also warned him in 2 Chronicles 7:17-18 that these additions should not be the object of worship, but that he must be faithful to God so that evils wouldn't come to him.

Questions

- What was the reward that God gave to Solomon when he asked for wisdom?
- What temptations can come along with riches and glory of this world?

Conclusion

Wisdom is better than all the gold and silver put together, and every precious stone. The arrogant make the mistake of following riches; they will end badly (Proverbs 8). Christ is the source of true wisdom; to have Him is the greatest wealth that can be achieved. If we remain in Him and His Word remains in us, we can ask for everything we want and it will be done to us (John 15:7).



A House Worthy Of God

Ela González (Guatemala)

Passage to study: 2 Chronicles chapters 3 through 7

Memory verse: “May your eyes be open toward this temple day and night, this place of which you said you would put your Name there. May you hear the prayer your servant prays toward this place.” 2 Chronicles 6:20

Lesson Aim: To recognize that we’re the temple of the Holy Spirit and discover what this implies.

Introduction

God was present with the people of Israel in their journey in the desert in a visible way, through the cloud during the day, guiding them, and the column of fire that illuminated them during the nights. God answered their needs and requests: He opened the sea so that all could pass through on dry land when they were being chased by Pharaoh’s men; He made water spout from the rock to quench their thirst; and He gave them mana to eat and sent quails to them, when they asked for meat. He did all these miracles to satisfy their needs.

While they were in the desert, God told them to build the tabernacle, where ceremonies and sacrifices could be performed, and where the Ark of the Covenant would be kept.

God protected them along their journey to the promised land. The tabernacle was built according to the characteristics that God himself had dictated to Moses, and the priests took care of it.

King David wanted to build a temple, which would be a unique and special place for God. However, his wish wasn’t fulfilled because as we have seen in previous studies, he had been a war faring king and the task was to be carried out by his son Solomon.

As we study this passage, we can discover important aspects of the construction of that temple that can be applied to our Christian lives today.

I. The Building Of The Temple (2 Chronicles 3:1-17)

The temple of Jerusalem, known as Solomon’s temple, was to be the place of worship which would replace the tabernacle that had accompanied the people of Israel in their journey through the desert, and had rested in the high place of Gibeon: “*The tabernacle of the Lord, which Moses had made in the wilderness, and the altar of burnt offering were at that time on the high place at Gibeon.*” (1 Chronicles 21:29)

As time passed, David felt that he needed a suitable place to worship God, and thought it was time to build a temple. Regrettably, God didn’t want David to do it because he had shed so much blood in great wars (1 Chronicles 22:8). God showed David that his son would be the one to build it (1 Chronicles 22:9-10). God loved David: “*...I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.*” (Acts 13:22b) However, he didn’t get the honor building a temple for God.

In 1 Peter 2:5 we read: “*you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*”

The apostle Peter writes that Christians need to grow in three aspects: as a spiritual house, as living stones, that is, as parts of the structure, and also as a holy priesthood, offering sacrifices acceptable to God.

He wants us to consecrate our lives to Him. The psalmist writes in the first part of Psalm 127:1: *“Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain...”* We have to be willing to be used by God to be part of his great temple full of people who are willing to serve Him. As the new temple of the Lord, *“...we’re God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”* (Ephesians 2:10)

A. The Place Of Construction

In 2 Chronicles 3:1-2, we read that Solomon began to build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem, on Mount Moriah. The Jewish tradition identifies Moriah to be the same place that God instructed Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac (Genesis 22:2). The land was acquired by David when he made an altar to Jehovah where he offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and the Lord responded by sending fire from heaven to the altar in response to his sacrifices (1 Chronicles 21:22-26).

In the New Testament, we read that Jesus is the cornerstone (Matthew 21:42 see also Psalm 118:22). This was the main stone in Jewish constructions because it was the foundational stone on which the following stones of the construction depended. Today, God builds His temple in the lives of His children, and the basis for building the Church must be on the confession that Jesus is Christ, the son of God.

B. The Measurements (2 Chronicles 3:3-4)

The measurements of the temple that King Solomon built for the Lord were these: Sixty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and one hundred and twenty cubits high (2 Chronicles 3:3-4). In meters, *“the building should have an interior length of approximately 27 meters, 9 meters in width and a height of 13.5 meters (60 × 20 × 30 cubits).”* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temple_of_Jerusalem).

The measurement for the church and for us as believers is to *“reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ”* (Ephesians 4:13).

C. The Materials

In the construction of the temple, the best and most valuable materials from Solomon’s time were used, such as: Pure and fine gold; cypress and cedar wood; fabrics for the veil, such as blue, purple, crimson and linen; bronze, carved stones for the walls, and precious stones.

In 1 Corinthians 3:9, Paul wrote: *“...For we’re co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building.”* In this construction, one sets the foundations, another builds, but each one builds into the lives of those who compose God’s temple. Each must choose the materials they want to use, which can be gold, silver, precious stones, or wood, or poor quality materials like hay and stubble. In the last day, the materials we have used will be tested by fire.

D. The Finishing Touches

Everything was covered with fine gold. Two columns were placed in front of the temple, each of which was named. The one on the right was called Jakin and the one on the left, Boaz (1 Kings 7:21). The construction stones were covered by cedar wood in such a way that they were not visible. Likewise, the cedar wood had carvings of wild pumpkins and flower buds, and all were covered with gold (1 Kings 6:15,18).

In Colossians 3:10-14, Christians are urged to put on the new man, without discrimination, holy and loving, full of mercy, kindness, goodness, meekness, patience and forgiveness, but above all things, the final and most important garment must be of love, clothed with Christ, *“...So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”* (Galatians 3:26-27)

Questions

- What replaced the temple of Solomon?
- As a temple of the Holy Spirit, how can we contribute to honor God with it?

II. The Temple Furniture (2 Chron. 4:1-5:10)

The temple included furniture and utensils needed to perform the ceremonies and rituals (sacrifices and burned sacrifices). The new temple had to have the items God had told Moses to include. But this new temple was going to be very elaborate. They made ten gold lamp stands, ten tables, a hundred gold sprinkling bowls and lots of water. The art work was finely done. Four hundred pomegranates were carved at the top of the pillars. Many of the items were made of polished bronze. There was a golden altar, lamp stands of pure gold to burn in front of the inner sanctuary as prescribed. In the holiest place they put the Ark of the covenant, which by this time only had inside it the tablets of stone with the ten commandments. *“There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets that Moses had placed in it at Horeb, where the Lord made a covenant with the Israelites after they came out of Egypt.”* (2 Chronicles 5:10)

God wants us to be adorned with a holy and clean heart. He looks for our sincerity and purity of motives (1 Samuel 16:7 and 1 Peter 3:3).

Questions

- Name some objects that were part of the temple furniture that Solomon built for the Lord.
- Today we're the temple of the Holy Spirit. What are those furnishings today?

III. The Dedication Of The Temple (2 Chronicles 6:1-7:10)

After having completed the construction of this majestic work blessed with the best resources and workmen, Solomon invited the people for a grand celebration, which included sacrifices, worship, praise, and exaltation to the one who deserved that temple: the only true God.

A. The Ceremony

When Solomon finished building the temple, he called the people to a great feast for the dedication of the temple. King Solomon, with all the congregation of Israel, gathered before the Ark of the Covenant and sacrificed countless sheep and oxen (2 Chronicles 5:6). In addition to the sacrifices that the people made, Solomon also sacrificed twenty-two thousand oxen and one hundred and twenty thousand sheep. At the moment of the dedication, the king prayed to the Lord asking for forgiveness for the sins of the people and offering sacrifices, burned offerings,

and peace offerings: *“When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple.”* (2 Chronicles 7:1) The presence of God was so great that the priests couldn't remain in the place for a cloud had filled everything. That same presence of God is still manifest in those of us who have believed in the Son of God, through his Holy Spirit, as he says in Matthew 18:20 *“For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”*

B. A Great Party

Apart from the dedication ceremony of the temple, there were seven days of celebration with the whole nation of Israel. *“All the Levites who were musicians—Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun and their sons and relatives—stood on the east side of the altar, dressed in fine linen and playing cymbals, harps and lyres. They were accompanied by 120 priests sounding trumpets. The trumpeters and musicians joined in unison to give praise and thanks to the Lord. Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals and other instruments, the singers raised their voices in praise to the Lord.”* (2 Chronicles 5:12-13)

The care of David and Solomon for the construction of the temple of God should be imitated in our lives, bearing in mind what Paul said: *“Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?”* (1 Cor. 3:16) And we have the certainty that even if this house were destroyed, we have an eternal promise *“For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.”* (2 Cor. 5:1)

Questions

- Who were present at the dedication of the temple? (2 Chronicles 5:2,12)
- Considering that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, how do you consider that you can dedicate it to the Lord so that He will be pleased with such an offering? (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

Conclusion

Solomon, in obedience to God, built the temple with the best he could find, making it a truly beautiful and awesome construction. Today, God, who is the King of kings and Lord of lords, is also worthy of dwelling in the best temple. The Bible teaches us that He chooses to live today in us, in His church, As the temple of the Holy Spirit, let's live holy lives that honor our God.



A King With Extraordinary Wisdom

Eduardo Meza (Argentina)

Passage to study: 2 Chronicles 7:11-9:28

Memory verse: “All the kings of the earth sought audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart.” 2 Chronicles 9:23

Lesson Aim: To learn how seek the wisdom of God for each moment of our life, and thus be truly prosperous.

Introduction

King Solomon was one of the kings of Israel who remained on the throne for 40 years (2 Chron. 9:30). Of all the kings who reigned over Israel, he left a great mark for his virtues, especially wisdom for which he was widely recognized (2 Chron. 9:23). The biblical passages in this lesson show us what King Solomon achieved because of the wisdom that the Lord gave him, including abundant prosperity.

At that time, there was no king or kingdom that had not heard of the great King Solomon, and they wanted to be like him and enjoy wealth like his. Surely because of this, King Solomon received many visits from international leaders who were curious about how he had got to where he was.

In this class we'll examine and learn about three key points that allowed King Solomon to have the title of being the wisest king in all the earth.

I. God's Covenant With Solomon (2 Chronicles 7:11-22)

A. A Heart With A Right Attitude (vs. 11-12)

To begin this point, you can ask your students what they understand by the word 'heart.' After listening to them, you can introduce this section by highlighting the importance of having a heart for God and other people. The anatomists tell us that each person has a heart the size of a closed fist. Ask them: How big is your heart? Do the exercise with your students. In relation to the term 'heart', let's see some biblical considerations:

1. The word 'heart' in the Bible is more than an essential physical organ for life. Although in the Scriptures the term 'heart' appears more than 900 times, the great majority of these occasions it's almost never in a literal sense. 'Heart' in the Bible refers to the inner space of our being where

emotions reside (Ps. 62:10); thoughts (Gen. 6:5); the will (Ps. 119:2); and often, it represents the deepest part of our being (Gen. 6:6).

2. The Lord's appearance to Solomon, and the words he spoke to him (2 Chron. 7:11-12), are evidence that He always hears the prayers of his children, and is pleased with those who seek to give him their best (Ps. 145:18-19), and they look for it with all their hearts (Jer. 29:13).

B. A Beautiful Promise About His People (vs. 13-22)

In this section, we'll discuss the great love of God towards his people, but also the attitudes that He asks of us. We notice the following:

I. His Gaze Full Of Love.

The gaze of God was on Solomon, but also, especially on His people. God knew what was in the hearts of the Israelites, and although His gaze was and is full of love, He is pleased by what is just and holy; thus rebellion brings His judgment (v. 13).

Have a moment of reflection with your students and ask them: How do people in the world live today? Why is there so much crime, scarcity, injustice, indifference, frustration, pain and fear? What relationship do all these aforementioned problems have to the issue of obedience to God's commandments?

2. Conditions To Receive The Promise.

Even in the midst of all this reality, there was a beautiful promise of healing for those of us who genuinely repent and humble themselves before His sovereignty. God promised the Israelites three things if they humbled themselves, prayed, sought after Him and left their bad behavior: i) He would listen to their prayers; ii) He would forgive them, and iii) He would restore prosperity to their country. However, to achieve these promises, God laid down

some concrete conditions (v. 14). They needed to do the following:

- God wants His people to be humble (Eph. 4:1-2).
- God wants His people to pray (Eph. 6:18) and seek His face (Col. 3:1-2).
- God wants His people to turn from their evil ways (Rev. 3:19).

The promises of the Lord continue for His people, and He promises to be attentive to the situations through which we have to pass; and obedience remains a fundamental condition for the blessing of the Lord (2 Chron. 7:15).

Although the promise of these verses was given mainly to Israel in the context of the dedication of the temple that King Solomon built, and of the concrete spiritual situation in which the people were living, we also understand according to 1 Cor. 3:16 that each Christian's body is a temple and dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. In this way, the promises of 'election', 'sanctification', 'eternity', 'care' and 'love' of this verse also apply to those who have been born again and have given their lives to Him (v. 16). Many men and women of the Bible took the decision in their hearts to walk in a pleasing way before the Lord, like King David, King Solomon's father.

In these passages, Solomon is encouraged to walk like his father: to live in obedience and humility to God, so that his government would prosper (vs. 17-18). Ask your students to share some experience or anecdote where, because of a good attitude and being obedient to God, they received good rewards.

3. Consequences Of Disobedience

Placing God in second or third place in our lives will always expose us to multiple sufferings, which can lead us to being separated from Him forever (vs. 19-20). The temple built by Solomon was a beautiful sanctuary where the name of God was praised and where His presence was felt. However, after the people of God left the path of obedience, the situation changed. Today, there's a Muslim mosque on the site of the temple.

In visualizing this reality, we can see that exactly what God said would happen took place. So, God honors His Word by fulfilling it, and He can overturn all the calculations and ambitions of man (vs. 21-22). The apostle Paul said in one of his epistles: "Don't be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows." (Galatians 6:7) The consequences of sin persecute those who continue in sinful ways. Therefore, we all need to repent of our sins and stop living separated from God.

Questions

- When the Bible mentions the word "heart," what does it refer to? What teaching can we draw for ourselves today from 2 Chronicles 7:14?

II. God Gave Him Great Achievements (2 Chronicles 8:1-18)

God was being faithful to what He had promised King Solomon. For his part, King Solomon fulfilled his obedience to God. During this period of his reign, King Solomon achieved the following:

A. Finished The Building Of The Temple (v. 1)

The temple was a long-term project. It took Solomon half the total time of his reign to conclude it. God was attentive to all that. Mention is made of the only battle that occurred in the Bible during the reign of Solomon. These passages also mention other building projects in new cities and strengthening existing ones, expansion projects such as warehouses, forts, places for horses and chariots. Definitely, King Solomon was an excellent builder (vs. 2-6).

B. The Organization Of The Workforce (vs. 7-10)

King Solomon placed Israelite men in the army and in positions of authority, while using the descendants of the Canaanite tribes (former landholders who had not been killed) as servants or slaves to work in the domestic tasks. "Among his administrative policies towards foreigners, Solomon had well-defined practices. He submitted them to labor tax. Foreigners were part of the lowest social scale in the Israeli economy. These came from the strata of people conquered on the battlefield and immigrants." (Biblical Commentary: Ed. Mundo Hispano, 2000, p. 335)

C. His Public Worship Address (vs. 11-16)

This was an interesting decision that Solomon made in relation to his wife, the daughter of Pharaoh. He built a palace for her, far from the city of David. "This was a mixed union between an Egyptian princess and a Hebrew king, a worshiper of many gods united to a worshiper of Jehovah. At least, common sense and his still manifest spiritual sensitivity led him to consider Jehovah's opinion of this union, by building his wife's residence away from the sacred places (v. 11)." (op. cit. 2000, p. 335).

A possible interpretation of why Solomon married women from different nations was to get political advantage. When he married the daughter of some ruler, they probably wouldn't attack him if one of their princesses was queen. We don't really know if that explanation is true or not. The fact is that Solomon had many wives. Such behavior was contrary to God's instructions.

D. Commercial Achievements (vs. 17-18)

Finally, this chapter closes with the story about Hiram, who sent gold to Solomon. It was unusual for an Israelite to visit Ezion-geber since the Israelites were not sailors and didn't work at sea (v. 17). This was a port near the north of the Red Sea. Solomon's action shows us the great vision that Solomon had for business, sending his servants to Ophir, a place with a great quantity of gold (v. 18, 2 Chron. 9:10; Isaiah 13:12). Although King Solomon was a great business man, sadly that led him to neglect his relationship with God.

Questions

- Mention at least three achievements reached by King Solomon; and explain them as they're described in the biblical text.
- Which of the above-mentioned victories of Solomon is the one that most amazed you? Why? What risks did Solomon take when marrying pagan women?
- Does this have an application today?

III. God Prospered Solomon In Wealth And Wisdom (2 Chronicles 9:1-28)

This section has a parallel passage in 1 Kings 10 where two issues stand out as a result of what God was doing with King Solomon: The visit of the queen of Sheba and the prosperity of his reign.

A. The Visit Of The Queen Of Sheba (vs. 1-12)

I. An Unbelieving Queen (vs. 1-2)

We don't know exactly where her kingdom was (v. 1), although some believe it was Yemen, a place located in Arabia. Others, a place located in Ethiopia, in Africa. However, most likely it was from Yemen because it agrees with what the Lord Jesus said in Matthew 12:42.

Because of current geographic knowledge, we believe that this queen traveled around 1,500 miles. Likewise, she was accompanied by a large delegation and many camels laden with incense, which was a very valuable commodity at that time, perhaps equal to gold (v. 2). That trip would have been a long and painful journey that could have taken between two to three months, and they would have had to cross the hot desert. Apparently, the queen didn't believe what was being said. She wanted to see it with her own eyes and personally check two things: Solomon's wisdom and the splendor of his kingdom.

It shouldn't surprise us when the unconverted find it hard to believe the great and wonderful things that God has done and is doing in each of our lives.

This queen asked all the questions she had prepared, which surely had to have been many and of all kinds; However, King Solomon revealed to her the secret of

his kingdom: that God had given him wisdom. Nothing remained that Solomon couldn't answer (v. 2), and the queen was satisfied with Solomon's wisdom.

2. An Extremely Astonished Queen (vs. 3-4)

She wasn't only surprised by Solomon's wisdom, but also with his royal house (v. 3). It's very difficult for other leaders to be shocked and amazed. Besides, she must have been accustomed to wealth, but in spite of her own power, it didn't compare with what God had done for Solomon (v. 4).

3. A Queen Who Confirmed That Everything Was True (vs. 5-12)

The Queen of Sheba acknowledged that she was incredulous of Solomon's fame (v. 5). The queen saw for herself what was said about Solomon. It was very difficult for one sovereign to recognize the superiority of another; however, she did. She didn't believe that anyone could perform those works and be so wise (v. 6). But surely it didn't take long to prove that what was said about Solomon was reality. We can remember that Solomon had only asked God for wisdom to govern his people; but God gave him much more (2 Chron. 1:10-12).

B. The Prosperity Of Solomon (vs. 13-28)

The material greatness of Solomon's kingdom is described, including the weight in gold he received, and the taxes and tributes in gold paid by merchants and traders. Solomon surpassed all the other kings in riches and wisdom. They wanted to know him in person and be able to hear the wisdom that God had put in his heart.

What this portion doesn't record is how Solomon broke and abandoned the promise he made to the Lord (see parallel passage - 1 Kings 11:1-13).

Questions

- Do you think God wanted to make King Solomon famous?
- What has more value Wealth or wisdom?
- Solomon's wisdom put him apart from all the other kings. However, we must not forget that this king forgot that God could stop His promise.
- According to 2 Chronicles 9:13-28 What do you think we need today in order to change many social and political situations?

Conclusion

Many kings and nations recognized how great God was through Solomon's wisdom and victories. It's important to have a heart that's obedient to the commandments of God. This must be above personal desires, self-satisfaction and carnal passions.



Choosing The Right Team

César Barco (Ecuador)

Passage to study: 2 Chronicles 10:6-14

Memory verse: "If you will be kind to these people and please them and give them a favorable answer, they will always be your servants." 2 Chronicles 10:7

Lesson Aim: To accept that there's a need to balance the advice of older people with that of young people before making decisions.

Introduction

Rehoboam was the direct successor of the wisest king that ever existed on the face of the earth. As King Solomon's son, at the beginning, he demonstrated wisdom that his father had bequeathed him. He sought advice from the elders of his people and didn't despise the youth of his contemporaries to whom he also sought advice. However, the problem that arose later was that Rehoboam didn't balance both counsels wisely; and decided to lean towards one. The issue wasn't the fact that he had asked the young people, but rather, that he ignored the advice of those who has experience, and this resulted in a terrible mistake. This doesn't mean that in our churches and societies we shouldn't consult with the young people; we should consider their views.

I. The Advice Of Experienced Statesmen (2 Chronicles 10:6-7)

In the people of God, the elders were held in high esteem; they were literally the oldest. In those times, a man could be considered to be an elder when he was 50 or more, while in the case of women, they needed to be 60 or more (Numbers 8:25, 1 Timothy 5:9). In all the nations, the elders either governed with their king or were consulted before any major decision of national interest, and Israel wasn't an exception. Therefore, King Rehoboam wisely turned first to the elders of the nation to seek advice. In this case, the elders of the reign of Rehoboam gave good and precise advice.

The elders gave him three good suggestions. Let's have a look at them:

- i.) *"If you will be kind to these people..."* (v. 7): This means treating them like humans, treat them with kindness, bringing them well-being, with joy, and mercy and above all, seeking their prosperity. The king needed to remember that we have all been created in the image and likeness of God, and thus treat his subjects accordingly.
- ii.) If the king served his people, *"... they will always be your servants"* (v. 7).
- iii.) They told the king to *"...give them a favorable answer"* (v. 7). These counselors were reminding the king that he needed to listen to his people and treat them well and speak kindly to them.

These are wise counsels which our nation's leaders should also listen too. Regrettably, in the story of Rehoboam, he didn't follow these three counsels. This attitude can be compared to many of our leaders who offer us wonderful promises to get elected, but at the end of their government they haven't been able to comply. Often, we discover that rather than bring our countries stability and prosperity, they have feathered their own nests at our expense.

The advice given by the wise elders points to the way the Messiah will rule. It will certainly be a totally different sort of government where love is at the core of everything, and the people of God, His redeemed people, will enjoy prosperity, well-being and joy. It will be the best. He will speak to everyone with kind words, of blessing and not of cursing (Revelation 22:3).

We often need to take the advice of elders. I remember that in the church where I grew up, the older brothers and sisters always gave us young people advice. For the most part, those tips were right. However, nowadays at a global level, old people don't give advice anymore, in part because the young people don't want to listen. The older members don't value the youth and vice versa. One of the results is that young people are often walking in pathways that lead to sin. Young people need to seek the wisdom of the older ones and the more mature must seek how to give it well.

Questions

- Did you ever receive good advice from parents, grandparents, or other experienced people? Do you think they were right?
- What might have happened if the king had listened to his older advisors?
- Would listening to the senior members of our churches teach us something?

II. The Young People's Advice (2 Chronicles 10:8-11)

After listening to the wise and experienced, King Rehoboam sought advice from the young. Why did he do that? Verse 8 says: *"But Rehoboam rejected the advice the elders gave him and consulted the young men who had grown up with him and were serving him."* Ask your students: "Do you have a friend (or friends) that you have known since childhood? Remember the pranks you all did? Remember who advised you? Do you remember with whom you formed a team in your multiple games of childhood and adolescence?"

We understand that Rehoboam's choice was logical, because these young people had grown up with him. Maybe they were relatives, princes like him, servants, etc. However, more than counselors, these were friends and brothers in every way, with whom he had probably done mischief since childhood, with whom he had experienced the development of adolescence. So perhaps they had lived together all their childhood and youth, and especially their formation in the law of God. We can imagine that they may have gone to the temple together and lived through countless experiences as we did when we remember those friends with whom we grew up together. God knew Rehoboam would choose the advice of his friends because he loved them and wanted to be with them. (2 Chron. 10:15, 1 Kings 11:29-33).

This is the advice that his friends gave him: *"The people have said to you, 'Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but make our yoke lighter.' Now tell them, 'My little finger is thicker than my father's waist. My father laid on you a heavy yoke; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions.'" (v. 10-11)* Apparently, Rehoboam saw only the difficulty of governing the country, not the opportunities. He mentioned only the harshest aspects of Solomon's government, and decided to be tougher on the people.

Rehoboam's young friends erred in their counsel. This doesn't mean that young people cannot give good advice. Paul said to Timothy: *"Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity."* (1 Timothy 4:12) A young man with these qualities resembles Christ; the Holy Spirit enables him to be part of a group of advisors, local church board, etc. God has used young people as leaders, pastors, missionaries, presidents, etc.

The advice of those young contemporaries of Rehoboam also teaches us that it's not always good to continue with a model of the previous leadership. The leadership model of the wisest king, Solomon, was very hard on the people according to 2 Chronicles 10:4.

The most logical thing was to continue with this type of leadership, it was what they knew. They had been trained like this, with hard leadership. This means that each government or administration must look for its own model of leadership and not necessarily continue in the same pathway as the previous government, or in the case of the church, the previous pastorate.

Rehoboam had to develop his own type of leadership for his government. A leadership that the people themselves suggested was good advice: *"Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but now lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke he put on us, and we'll serve you"* (v. 4). The people didn't say that the hard servitude of Solomon should be taken away but asked for it to be lighter. They didn't ask for all the hardness to be removed. They were also aware that there needed to be taxes. They couldn't just become idle or over time, they would lose their strength (Proverbs 24:10). It's not difficult to suppose that those who asked for this were the generation that had worked with Solomon, but by the time Rehoboam came to the throne, this generation had already aged.

The duty of Rehoboam as king was to lighten the burden of that present generation that had worked hard with his father in building the temple and the king's palace for 20 years (2 Chronicles 8:1). He needed to raise a new generation of young people with whom he could work. He had to work with his contemporaries, involving them in arduous tasks, without disregarding the advice of the elders. Each young person must listen to the wisdom of those who are experienced, listening to their good advice to be able to make good decisions.

Questions

- Why did these young men give the king this advice?
- Why did Rehoboam heed them and not the wise people?
- Young people have some very clear insights. How can we learn from them?

III. King Rehoboam's Wrong Decision (2 Chronicles 10:12-14)

The king's words were these: *"My father made your yoke heavy; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions."* (2 Chronicles 10:13-15a).

The young people had observed that Solomon was harsh with people, demanding high taxes from them. It would be logical to think that since Solomon was such a wise king, this heavy taxation was a good thing and the young king should continue but with more force. Each decision, each action, generates consequences. King Rehoboam chose the counsel of the young men who were brought up with him, and the people of God ended up rebelling (2 Chronicles 10:16). The problem wasn't the hardness of the servitude itself, but these young men boasted of their strength (Proverb 20:29), and wanted to add more harshness than that which King Solomon had imposed on the people of God (2 Chronicles 10:10-11,13-14).

Notes:

When boasting of their strength, the young people erred in their advice. This teaches us that society is made up of young people and older adults. For successful leadership and governance, the welfare of all has to be considered. To have a balanced society or church community, both young people with their enthusiasm and strength, as well as the wisdom and experience of those who have lived longer, is needed. So, one group leads with its strength, while the other group leads with their advice.

If Rehoboam had listened to the voice of the people (v. 15), perhaps Israel wouldn't have divided into two kingdoms. Maybe they wouldn't have fallen into so much idolatry. Sadly, this king led the people of God to idolatry (1 Kings 12:25-28). Likewise, there would have been no civil war inside Israel during his reign. He needed to choose his counsellors carefully and balance all the suggestions that came from the different sectors of society.

Rehoboam represents many leaders today, leaders who are unhelpful and hard, following modern trends rather than listening to the council of the elders. The alarming thing is that the consequences of this type of leadership divide nations and churches as it did under Rehoboam, King of Judah.

Questions

- How can we listen to the different voices in our churches?
- What's the role of older members in our congregations?
- What do the young people bring to the table?

Conclusion

We all need each other. We need to listen to the advice of our senior statesmen and pastors who have rich experiences to teach us. At the same time, given that society and even our churches are forever changing, we need to listen to the voice of the Millennials and those of Generation X. Together, in unison, we can build the church of Jesus of the twenty-first century for His glory.



Faith Put To The Test

Sharon Viquez Sosa (Costa Rica)

Passage to study: 2 Chronicles 20:1-30

Memory verse: “Our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that’s attacking us. We don’t know what to do, but our eyes are on you.”
1 Chronicles 20:12

Lesson Aim: To be challenged to use the spiritual disciplines as exercises that God has given us to strengthen our faith, and emerge victorious in the face of adversity.

Introduction

In the previous chapter to our study, we find Jehu the prophet exhorting the king of Judah to not make alliances with enemy powers (2 Chronicles 19:1-27). But King Jehoshaphat didn't take heed and made an alliance with the enemies of God (v. 2). However, he also did good things (v. 3). He led the people back to the Lord and sought justice (vs. 6-7). He led the people in truth with an honest heart (v. 9).

As we study 2 Chronicles 20, we'll see that when King Jehoshaphat was in danger, he and the people asked the Lord for help and He responded to their call. We'll identify how the use of different spiritual disciplines was the means of grace that strengthened the faith of King Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah in times of adversity.

I. Testing Times (2 Chronicles 20:1-3)

The on-line dictionary defines “fear” as: *“an unpleasant emotion caused by the belief that someone or something is dangerous, likely to cause pain, or a threat.”* There was a real reason for fear. Verse 2 states that a vast army was coming against them from Edom. They were alarmed.

The issue is that in certain situations in life that seem to us to be a danger, a risk or a threat, we usually react with fear or anxiety. Jehoshaphat was no exception to that. Many people in the Bible felt the same. Moses felt afraid when they were attacked by Og, king of Bashan (Numbers 21:33-34). Zacharias was afraid when the angel announced that he was going to be a father in his old age (Luke 1:12-13). When the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water, they were afraid (Matthew 14:26).

King Jehoshaphat had a real threat to face: Three nations were coming against him (2 Chron. 20:1). As the king, Jehoshaphat knew his army wouldn't be able to win in a battle against the armies, and he felt powerless since he couldn't give his people a satisfactory answer to such a threat.

Fear attacks us in time of trials and shows us that we cannot achieve everything through our own self-sufficiency. It also reminds us that we must depend on each other, and above all, we need to put our trust in God! This is what Jehoshaphat did in this situation (v. 3b). Even though fear had invaded Jehoshaphat's heart, he knew that there was only one way that he could dispel his fear: he needed to turn to God with all his heart and seek His guidance and counsel.

Questions

- What's the attitude that God wants his sons and daughters to have in situations that try to cause fear?
- What spiritual disciplines are reflected in 2 Chronicles 20?

II. Exercising Faith (2 Chronicles 20:3-19)

Jehoshaphat exercised his faith by making use of what we call ‘means of grace’ or spiritual disciplines. The first thing he did was to strengthen his relationship with God. He ordered a fast for all of Judah (v. 3). Seeking God, they would find the answer to this extreme need.

The Beacon Dictionary defines “means of grace” as *“channels established by God through which the influence of the Holy Spirit is communicated to the souls of people”* (1995, p. 423). As believers, we need to exercise these means of grace. They represent a discipline that we must develop in our lives. John Wesley exhorted believers to use all available means of grace.

A. Worship (vs. 3,6)

Worship is the act of attributing reverent honor and homage to God. The first decision that Jehoshaphat made, upon receiving the news of war, was to worship: "...*Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the Lord...*" (v. 3). The Beacon Dictionary defines "worship" as "*the human response to the divine nature*" (p. 32). Jehoshaphat exalted the attributes of God as an act of worship (v. 6).

B. Prayer (v. 4a)

In prayer, we consciously connect with God, communicating with him, or seeking His help in time of need. Making use of this spiritual discipline, Jehoshaphat didn't limit himself to worship and seeking the counsel of God, he also called all the people of Israel together to ask for their help (v. 4a).

C. Praise (v. 7)

Praise exalts God for what He does. Part of Jehoshaphat's worship was to recognize how God had acted on their behalf in history (v. 7).

D. Fellowship (vs. 9-13)

We can only be impressed when we read in the book of Acts that the first disciples: "...*had everything in common*" (Acts 2:44, 4:32). Although they were in very difficult times, given the persecution initiated against the Christians, they remained together and in harmony (Acts 2:1). This close fellowship gained the respect of those who saw them (Acts 2:47).

We find this same attitude in the people of Judah in the time of King Jehoshaphat. The people became united in purpose. They all agreed to cry out to the Lord, asking for His counsel and favor (2 Chronicles 20:9, 13).

E. The Word Of God (v. 15)

One of the spiritual disciplines or means of grace that always strengthens our faith and gives us hope is to take refuge in the promises of God. The people of Israel received word from God that brought them encouragement and hope (v. 15). Fellowship with God helps us correct our perspective. Jehoshaphat remembered that his life and that of the people didn't depend on him, or on an army. The Almighty God told him not to fear, but to believe in Him. God said: "*Listen to me, Judah and people of Jerusalem! Have faith in the Lord your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful.*" (v. 20).

But in relation to spiritual disciplines, we need to realize the following: Wesley Tracy in his book *Spiritual Direction in the Wesleyan-Holiness Movement* states that they (spiritual disciplines) aren't ends in themselves, but create conditions in which grace can flow with greater freedom. Therefore, we call them spiritual disciplines, means of grace. God uses them to nourish and sustain our relationship with Him and to form us spiritually ... all spiritual formation is born of the relationship with God, the fundamental discipline through which grace flows in our lives is worship (Tracy, 1999: p. 44).

2 Chronicles 20:3 says: "...*Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the Lord, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah.*" This shows us the need to recognize that worship is a spiritual discipline which entails total surrender and dependence on God. Jehoshaphat believed that God was trustworthy.

Questions

- How important are the spiritual disciplines in our Christian walk, and how do these impact our level of trust in God?

III. An Act Of Faith (2 Chronicles 20:20-22)

Faith is the indispensable characteristic of the Christian; that's why we're called 'believers.' Faith is total trust in the Lord. Christians are believers because we have put our trust in Jesus Christ as Savior, and because we believe in the reality of God's promises. Faith is demonstrated by concrete actions. John Ortberg in his book *Faith and Doubt* says: "*In the act of defining what we believe, we define ourselves*" (2008 p. 43).

The people of Israel began to act in faith: "*Early in the morning they left for the Desert of Tekoa. As they set out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, 'Listen to me, Judah and people of Jerusalem! Have faith in the Lord your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful.'*" (v. 20)

Beacon Theological Dictionary defines faith as: "*Believing or having faith is the response of the human being to the revelation of God and the surrender of themselves to the control of such truth*" (1995, p. 297). Faith includes an attitude of hope and trust. In its very essence, faith means trusting a person because he or she is found worthy of our trust. Jehoshaphat acted on faith. He abandoned all confidence in his own resources and marched without reserve to see the manifestation of God's mercy for His people. He clung to the promise of victory given by God.

Faith requires full trust in God and total obedience to Him. When we act in faith, the perspective of the circumstances of our life are transformed (v. 21). Jehoshaphat faced the test with praise. His faith was strengthened when he submitted himself to God, sought His counsel in prayer, along with the people, remembering God's portentous deeds and His character. He reminded the people that God is merciful and would lead them through. This is FAITH.

Questions

- Do you remember an important act of faith in your life? What happened as a result? Share it with the class.

IV. A Supernatural Victory (2 Chronicles 20:23-25)

Throughout the Bible, we find God manifesting Himself in unthinkable ways. Let's see some of them.

Moses led the people in the exodus towards the sea and raised his staff and the waters opened before them. He believed in the Lord's promise (Exodus 14:16).

Joshua led the people to march for seven days around the walls of Jericho. With the blasts of the trumpets on the seventh day, the walls fell down. Joshua did this because he believed in the divine promise (Joshua 6:2).

Jehoshaphat was no exception. He was leading his small army against three united kingdoms. He did it because he believed in God's promise: *"You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you, Judah and Jerusalem. Don't be afraid; don't be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you."* (2 Chronicles 20:17)

When the time had come to take up arms and attack, Jehoshaphat gave the order we least imagine to hear in a war context. Jehoshaphat told a group of Levites to sing (2 Chronicles 20:21). Jehoshaphat's confidence in God was compensated in a supernatural way: *"As they began to sing and praise, the Lord set*

ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated." (v. 22)

Jehoshaphat, like Moses and Joshua, acted by faith, knowing that God is true and that the Israelites would see the supernatural act of God, who had promised them victory.

Questions

- Briefly recount an episode where God gave you a supernatural victory
- How did you feel?

V. Gratitude And Joy At The Manifestation Of Grace (2 Chronicles 20:26-30)

God rewarded Jehoshaphat's trust by granting him victory, and Jehoshaphat responded to God with gratitude for what he received from his divine hand: *"On the fourth day they assembled in the Valley of Berakah, where they praised the Lord."* (v. 26a). Gratitude is an expression of praise, for we're grateful for what God has done or promised to do.

The Beacon Dictionary adds that thanksgiving, like praise, is an expression of debt to God for His mercy (1995, p. 38). The people expressed their gratitude with joy (v. 27) and praise to the Lord (v. 28). As we saw in the book of Acts, the other nations around Judah feared and respected the God of Jehoshaphat because He had delivered them from their enemies (v. 29).

Questions

- How can we express our gratitude and joy for the wonderful ways God shows himself and acts on our behalf?

Conclusion

Spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Bible study, fasting, among others are important for our spiritual growth and victory. God has given them to us as exercises through which we can strengthen our faith and face life's adversities. Let's not stop practicing them!

Notes:



A Necessary Transformation

Clever H. Tobar (USA)

Passage to study: 2 Chronicles 29:3-31:21

Memory verse:“...Listen to me, Levites! Consecrate yourselves now and consecrate the Temple of the Lord, the God of your ancestors. Remove all defilement from the sanctuary.” 2 Chronicles 29:5

Lesson Aim: To show what can happen when God revives His people when they have backslidden.

Introduction

Revivals have been a constant in the story of God's people. In the Old Testament, we see how time after time the people strayed away from God and He called a leader to help them repent and renew their alliance and fellowship with Him in obedience. This story about King Hezekiah represents one of these revival moments.

In our study of the book of Chronicles, we have looked at the last part of the reign of David and the wisdom of Solomon as well as his mistakes. We noted the errors of Rehoboam who took the wrong advice. Last week we saw the great challenge that Jehoshaphat had and how he sought the Lord for victory over a huge enemy. This week we're going to examine the life of one of the godly kings of Judah – Hezekiah.

King Hezekiah's reign is discussed in several biblical passages, including 2 Kings 18—20, 2 Chronicles 29—32, Isaiah 36—39, and is mentioned in Proverbs 25:1, Jeremiah, Hosea, and Micah. Hezekiah served as king of Judah from approximately 715—687 BC. He began his reign at the age of 25 and reigned for a total of 29 years. He is considered to be one of the best kings. He brought about some much-needed reforms, especially in the elimination of idolatry and cult prostitution. (2 Kings 18:6-7).

When he came to the throne, the nation had fallen into corrupt practices, including some unimaginable satanic rites (2 Chronicles 28:1-4). Faced with this situation, King Hezekiah had the courage to undertake a reformation of the religious practices of his people.

I. King Hezekiah Reestablished Communion With God (2 Chronicles 29:2-36)

A. What Was King Hezekiah Like? (vs. 2-5)

Verse 2 reads: *“He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father David had done.”* Because he was a god-fearing righteous king, he perceived the ways that the people were disobeying God. He saw their idolatry. In the reign of his father Ahaz, the doors of the temple had been closed to eliminate any desire to return to the worship of God (2 Chronicles 28:24, 29:7). He saw that the temple doors were closed. Verse 3 stated that he opened the doors of the temple and mended them.

At the time of the dedication of the temple in Solomon's reign, God had told them: *“...if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land”* (2 Chronicles 7:14). Ask the students to discuss the meaning of the word “humility,” and provide some personal examples. Humility is an action of the heart that's presented in the Bible as the primary resource for maintaining a real and personal communion with God. Humility is presented as one of the keys for a prayer to be heard and answered.

King Hezekiah recognized that the nation needed to humble themselves before God. He acknowledged that what some of his ancestors had done was bad, and urgently stated that the people needed to come back to God. The first thing he did was to gather the Levites and priests and invite them to repent of illicit religious practices and to consecrate themselves before God.

B. King Hezekiah's Analysis Of The Situation (vs. 6-9)

Read these verses together with your students and get them to make a list of all the things that King Hezekiah is accusing the priests and the Levites, as well as the people as a whole, of doing. Notice especially the verbs used.

Verses 8-9 clearly paint the results of disobeying God. Sin brings consequences. *"The anger of the Lord"* had fallen on Judah and Jerusalem. Other nations were laughing at them. Because of ancestral sins, many had *"fallen by the sword"* and some of their sons and daughters and wives were in captivity.

What would God say about our churches today? Are we as faithful as we should be? What about false doctrines such as prosperity theology, leaders and pastors who fall into adultery, false church accounts, not looking after the poor and the needy, etc.?

Repentance was indicated. The Levites and priests were told to consecrate themselves before the Lord (v. 5). Corruption had contaminated the people, including the politicians, Jewish religious leaders, and their worship and solemn feasts. We too must live in obedience to the Lord.

C. King Hezekiah's Solution (vs. 10-36)

These verses recount what the Priests and Levites had to do to cleanse the temple. Get the students to make a list of what was done. In verse 10, the king states that he is going to renew the covenant with God. He warns them not to be negligent and to do the duties assigned to them in the law of Moses. The Levites listened, repented and began to work cleaning out the temple of all traces of idolatry. When they had finished, they had a wonderful ceremony with sacrifices, music and worship (v. 29). *"So the service of the temple of the Lord was reestablished. Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced at what God had brought about for his people, because it was done so quickly."* (vs. 35b-36)

Questions

- What was the first thing King Hezekiah did to restore the temple service? Why?
- What about contemporary churches? Is there a need for revival? What can we do to bring revival?

II. King Hezekiah Celebrates The Passover (2 Chronicles 30:1-20)

A. A Feast To Unite The People Of God (vs. 1-6)

The Feast of the Passover should have been celebrated every year to remember how the angel of death had *'passed over'* the Israelites' homes in Egypt. This very important celebration was to be handed down from generation to generation. 2 Chronicles 30:5 mentions that they hadn't properly celebrated this important religious feast for a long time.

King Hezekiah and all the sanctified Levites felt a burning desire to obey God. Since they needed time to prepare for the Passover, they made plans to celebrate it in the second month of the year, and not in the first, as God had commanded (2 Chronicles 30:13).

This was to be a great event. Couriers were sent out to both Israel (the northern kingdom) and Judah inviting the people to the great celebration. In verses 5 to 9, we can read the letter that the king sent out to both Kingdoms. Have your students analyze it.

B. A Call For Repentance (vs. 7-20)

The rest of the chapter describes the wonderful Passover feast where many lambs were sacrificed and there was much rejoicing. The chapter ends with Hezekiah's prayer and the final blessing of the Lord. *"May the Lord, who is good, pardon everyone who sets their heart on seeking God—the Lord, the God of their ancestors—even if they aren't clean according to the rules of the sanctuary. And the Lord heard Hezekiah and healed the people."* (vs. 18-20)

Questions

- What were they remembering at Passover time?
- What instructions had God given for this celebration?
- What role does repentance have in our fellowship with God?

III. King Hezekiah Reestablished The Priestly Service (2 Chronicles 31:1-21)

A. The Destruction Of Idolatry (vs. 1-2)

As a result of meeting with God, the people went about in both kingdoms destroying the pagan elements of idolatry. Hezekiah organized the priests in groups to take turns serving in the Temple. King Hezekiah restored the place of worship, and the priests and Levites began to see again the meaning of the life and work with which they had been entrusted (2 Chronicles 31:2).

Hezekiah realized that the people had strayed far away from God. He also realized that he alone wasn't going to be able to change the situation. It was very important to challenge the Levites to repent and return to God, because with a team of holy men, the king was going to achieve much more.

B. Restoration Of Tithing (vs. 3-21)

His team of helpers needed financial support. The members of the tribe of Levi, since entry into the Promised Land, didn't have any land on which to grow their food and keep their animals. The other eleven tribes were to bring 10% of their produce to the storehouse for the Levites' use. But it appears that for quite a long time, this had not been the case, so the people designated by God to serve in the Temple had had to ignore their religious duties to support their own economic interests.

Verse 3 tells us that aware of this situation, king Hezekiah *"contributed from his own possessions for the morning and evening burnt offerings and for the burnt offerings on the Sabbaths, at the New Moons and at the appointed festivals as written in the Law of the Lord."*

He also ordered the people to pay their tithes as set down by the law of Moses.

The people who had repented and had been blessed by the Lord were very generous in bringing in their tithes. In fact, they were so generous that there were heaps of different items. In verse 9 we read that the Chief priest told the king that: *"Since the people began to bring their contributions to the temple of the Lord, we have had enough to eat and plenty to spare, because the Lord has blessed his people, and this great amount is left over."* All the families of the Levites were cared for so that they could minister in the Temple.

Chapter 31:20-21 ends with a really positive comment about Hezekiah: *"This is what Hezekiah did throughout Judah, doing what was good and right and faithful before the Lord his God. In everything that he undertook in the service of God's temple and in obedience to the law and the commands, he sought his God and worked wholeheartedly. And so, he prospered."*

Questions

- How did Hezekiah prepare his team of Levites?
- How did he look after their material wellbeing? Do we look after our pastors and their families carefully?
- What were the results of God's reviving action in the reign of King Hezekiah? What was the king's epitaph?

Conclusion

When God's people in the Old Testament and even today fall into sin, forget Him, and wander away from His ways, God raises up someone to lead a revival. Every revival starts with a clear consciousness of sin, leading to repentance and blessing. This is what happened in the reign of this good king. He also trained and provided for the Levites so that they could be what God had called them to be – guides for the people towards holiness!

Notes:



Always Do What's Right

J. Víctor Riofrío (USA)

Passage to study: 2 Chronicles 33–35:19

Memory verse: “He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and followed the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left.” 2 Chronicles 34:2

Lesson Aim: To learn that God is gracious and forgiving but wants us to always do what's right.

Introduction

Those who occupy a place of leadership, in one way or another, will leave a mark of their times. In other words, their lifestyle will influence decidedly for good or bad in the present and in the future of their people. They will be remembered as either good or bad leaders.

The books of Kings and Chronicles summarize the lives of the kings of Israel and Judah by repeatedly using the following expressions: “*He did evil,*” or “*He did right in the eyes of the Lord.*” In very few cases, there was a second phrase added: “*... without turning to the right or to the left.*” In other words, King Josiah was exceptional, always faithful to God. How will we be remembered, whether we occupy a place of leadership or not?

In this class we'll talk about three types of leaders who made their mark on the history of the Lord's people. We can learn a lot from their successes and failures, and we'll be challenged to be remembered by the marvelous and unforgettable phrase: “*He did right in the eyes of the Lord, without turning to the right or to the left.*”

I. King Manasseh Started Badly And Ended Well (2 Chronicles 33:1-20)

Chronicles dedicates 20 verses to King Manasseh. He reigned in Jerusalem 55 years. He was 12 years old when he began to reign (v. 1). In verse 2, it says: “*He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, following the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites.*” However, verse 13 states: “*And when he prayed to him, the Lord was moved by his entreaty and listened to his plea; so, he brought him back to Jerusalem*

and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord is God.”

Manasseh was a king who made a mark on the history of Judah. Initially, he made several mistakes, which of course we must avoid committing at all costs.

A. He Made Pagan Idols And Worshiped Them (v. 3-7)

King Manasseh built altars to Baal and made images of Asherah and worshipped them. He worshipped the stars, making altars to them in the temple. He also made a sort of totem pole to Asherah, with sexual connotations, and placed it in the Temple. This was an abomination to God. He consulted with mediums and even sacrificed his own baby sons in fire. So, this king was a pagan astrologist with occult practices who sought omens, was given to divinations, consulted fortune-tellers and enchanters. One of the really big problems was that he reigned for 55 years and dragged the people of God down with him. King Manasseh led the people astray “*so that they did more evil than the nations the Lord had destroyed before the Israelites*” (v. 9).

We have to remember that today there are other types of idols that are taking away the place of our Lord Jesus Christ, such as work, money, material possessions, a family member, etc.

B. He Didn't Listen To God (v. 10)

God tried to convince King Manasseh and his people to turn to Him, but they didn't listen to him. It's sad to note that at present, often the people of God are blinded by their own thoughts and doctrines, and don't want to hear the clear voice of God in His Word.

C. The Good News About King Manasseh

Well into his reign, King Manasseh was taken captive to Babylon. In a dark cold prison cell, this evil king remembered God and repented. He ended his reign as a repentant king, but his reign brought much damage to the nation.

I. He Prayed To God, Greatly Humbled (v. 12)

Verse 12 states: *“In his distress he sought the favor of the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his ancestors.”* And God who is merciful answered his prayer and he was able to go back to his throne and his people. Verse 13 says: *“Then Manasseh knew that the Lord is God.”* Like David, and Paul on the Damascus Road we often learn the deepest lesson in our darkest moments.

2. Arranged And Protected The City (v. 14)

When he came back, he tried to reverse some of the damage he had committed. He rebuilt the wall and protected Jerusalem by fortifying the garrisons.

3. He Removed The Gods And Repaired The Altar (v. 15-16)

He repaired the altar of the Lord and started to worship only the Lord God of Judah. He got rid of the other altars to pagan gods on the Temple hill. King Manasseh tried to remedy the evil he had caused; it was the least he could do. Like King Manasseh, we too must remove everything that has come to occupy God's place in our lives. King Manasseh started badly, but finished well. This teaches us that if we have started badly, there's an opportunity to correct and finish well. God is loving and gracious, slow to anger and eager to forgive.

Questions

- What lessons can be learned from King Manasseh?
- What mistakes did he commit?
- What does this story tell us about God?

II. King Amon: A Bad King (2 Chronicles 33:21-25)

The leader who both started badly and ended badly was King Amon. The Bible dedicates only five verses to this king. He reigned in Jerusalem for two years. He was 22 years old when his reign began (vs. 21-22). King Amon only made mistakes. It's necessary to review them so that we don't fall into the same mistakes. The Bible clarifies that Amon increased the sins that his father King Manasseh had committed at the beginning

of his reign (v. 23). He didn't follow the example of his father after he had humbled himself before God and abandoned sin. Amon had a sad end; he was murdered at court (v. 24). King Amon started badly and ended badly. This teaches us that if we live badly and don't change, we'll not even be remembered; or if we are remembered, it will be as a bad example.

Questions

- Are there any lessons to be learned from the life of King Amon?

III. King Josiah A Truly Good King (2 Chronicles 34 -35:27)

The leader who started well and finished well was Josiah. He reigned in Jerusalem for 31 years. He was only eight years old when he began to reign (v. 1). In 2 Chronicles 34:2, we read: *“He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and followed the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left”*. Then, when he died we read: *“Jeremiah composed laments for Josiah, and to this day all the male and female singers commemorate Josiah in the laments.”* (2 Chronicles 35:25) Let's see what he achieved in his life.

A. He Cleansed The Land Of All Idolatry (2 Chronicles 34:3-7)

Josiah began to seek God as King David had done in his time. He removed all the heathen high places and images to Asherah. He demolished all the altars to the Baals. He smashed the sun images. He tore out and pulverized all idols to dust. He burned the bones of the idolatrous priests. In this way, he not only cleansed Judah, but also other tribe lands such as Manasseh, Ephraim, Simeon, and Naphtali. All this indicates that Josiah did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. God is jealous and will bless all who worship Him alone. The Lord challenges us today to clean our homes and our temples of every vestige of idolatry if we want to be recognized as those who have always done what's right before God.

B. He Repaired The House Of The Lord (2 Chronicles 34:8-17)

Josiah made a great contribution in repairing the Temple. Carpenters and stonemasons and many other volunteers worked hard until the work was finished. This must have pleased God and the people. We must make our talents and gifts available so that the Church of our good God may be admired and honored as it should be.

C. He Ruled And Made Sure That Everyone Obeyed The Word Of God (2 Chronicles 34:18-33)

King Josiah was shocked by the reading of the book of the law that Hilkiah found (vs. 18-27). As he listened to the written Word of God, Josiah was deeply moved in his heart.

That's what we have to do today in this 21st century. Whenever the Word of God is read or preached, we must pay attention and be moved to tears by having the privilege of learning from God's written Word.

King Josiah not only heard and was moved and obeyed the Word of God, but he made decrees that all his people should obey the Word of God (v. 33). That's the position of a leader who does what's right before God. While he was king, he did his best to keep the people close to God, helping them not to fall back into idolatry. King Josiah acted in all sincerity, although it seems that the people were still attracted to idol worship. God knew this, and warned them that they would eventually be punished (v. 25).

D. He Celebrated The Passover (2 Chronicles 35:1-19)

Apparently, for a long time they had stopped celebrating this annual feast. King Josiah made sure that all participated with all the pertinent details. It was a true time of celebrating the liberating God and the God who kept promises.

The king exhorted, instructed and encouraged the priests and the Levites to fulfill their office well:

- i). He reminded them of the ministry for which they had been designated by the law of Moses (v. 6), David and Solomon (v. 4).
- ii). He ordered the Ark of the Covenant to be put in its place (v. 3).
- iii). He commissioned the Levites to serve the Lord God and his people (v. 3);
- iv). He also charged them to be holy and train their family members (v. 6). The work of the ministers of God must begin at home, but it doesn't have to end there. They have to do everything in their power to prepare others through admonitions, instructions, exhortations and consolations.
- v). He encouraged the Levites in the service of the Lord's Temple (v. 2).

The priests and the Levites faithfully fulfilled their ministry (v. 10), and also honored God as they also participated in the Passover (v. 14). The singers expressed the joy of the congregation, and the doorkeepers took care that no one or nothing disturbed or profaned the assembly, and that no one left until the celebration was over. All the solemnity was celebrated in agreement with what the law stated (vs. 16-17).

Now, many congregations gather less and less often to celebrate Christ's work of salvation. We see a lot of extravagance, spectacle, superficiality and vanity, but less celebration of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

E. He Had A Grave Worthy Of A Good King (2 Chronicles 35:20-27)

Much more than his grandfather, King Manasseh, who began badly and ended well, King Josiah had all the possible honors at the time of his burial, for he was a king who did what was right in the sight of the Lord, following in the ways of King David, without turning to the right or to the left.

King Josiah was remembered for generations. So we should expect to be, and we'll succeed if we follow the example of this great king of Judah.

Questions

- What happened when King Josiah read the book of the law?
- What did King Josiah do right?
- In what ways did he please God?
- How did his reign affect the people?

Conclusion

We should want to be remembered as men and women who start well and end well. King Manasseh teaches us that God is full of grace and will forgive those who humbly seek Him even if they've been really bad. King Amon was bad, but his son King Josiah was one of the best kings who brought the people back to God. From an early age, he decided to always do what was right before God.

The Life and Visions Of Daniel

Fourth Semester

Faith And Commitment
Obeying God Rather Than Men
King Nebuchadnezzar's Dream
The Value Of Loyalty
Pride Comes Before A Fall
The Writing On The Wall
Courage In The Midst Of Trials
The Kingdoms And God's Kingdom
Daniel's Vision Of A Ram And A Goat
Prayer, Our Greatest Resource
Seeking The Lord In Times Of Conflict
Daniel And The End Time Prophecies
Daniel And Our Future Hope



Faith And Commitment

Walter R. Rodríguez Castro(Uruguay)

Passage to study: Daniel 1:1-7

Memory verse: “To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.” Daniel 1:17

Lesson Aim: To recognize and apply faith and commitment in our lives daily.

Introduction

Daniel is the only book in the Old Testament that's considered to be part of Jewish apocalyptic literature. This literary genre appeared at times of perceived extreme crisis. It's interesting to note that Christians place the book of Daniel next to the major prophets. Probably, this is because Daniel was a ruler that God used as a prophet, although his main occupation wasn't that of a prophet.

Although there's some controversy about the authorship, most biblical scholars agree that Daniel himself wrote the book, and this position has been sustained throughout the history of the church. The book of Daniel is clearly divided into two parts: a historical and narrative section (chapters 1-6); and a second apocalyptic section containing Daniel's visions (chapters 7-12).

In the passage we're studying today, we see that even though the Jewish people were punished for their constant disobedience to God, and a large number of inhabitants of Jerusalem were taken captive to Babylon, God didn't abandon them. Daniel and the young people in this story are an example of this. Here is the beginning of a fascinating story of faith and commitment. Daniel and his three friends were selected for higher tasks because of their fidelity to God and the principles in which they had been trained in Israel.

The Babylonian empire had conquered the Assyrians and the kingdom of Judah was under siege. The world of those times was in turmoil, very similar to what we're currently experiencing. So, as we study the message of this book, it will bring a relevant message for us today.

I. What Was Happening At The Time Daniel And His Friends Lived? (Dan. 1:1-4)

According to the introduction to the section on Daniel in the Beacon Bible Commentary: “*The period covered by Daniel's service in Babylon coincides with a time of tremendous international turmoil. Assyria, which for centuries had ravaged the lands of the Middle East, had been wiped out by the Babylonians, the Medes, and the Scythians. Egypt, which for 1000 years had tried to dominate Africa and also lands east of the Mediterranean, had been reduced to subjection. Under Nebuchadnezzar, the land of the Chaldeans reached the position of power, wealth and world leadership superior to anything known until then.*” (Volume 4. USA: CNP, 1991)

Babylon was located in southern Mesopotamia (in what's now Iraq), on the east bank of the Euphrates River. This city was the rich and powerful capital of a civilization that contributed to the creation of astronomy, the development of medicine, established the science of language, prepared the first legal codes, and taught the Greeks the rudiments of mathematics, physics and philosophy. Likewise, Mesopotamia passed these advances on to the Jews, who in turn passed them on to the Arabs. Examples of this are knowledge of science and architecture.

In the seventh century BC, the kingdom of Judah was subdued by Egypt. In 608 B.C., Josiah, king of Judah, died; and according to 2 Chronicles 36:1-4, his eldest son Jehoahaz succeeded him. However, the Pharaoh, called Necho, dethroned him and installed in his place Eliakim, younger brother of Jehoahaz and changed his name to Jehoiakim.

If we expand our focus a bit more, we find that the Assyrians had ruled the region for almost four

hundred years; but they were weakened by the rise of the Medes, who with the help of Nabopolassar, liberated Babylon and established an independent dynasty, the Neo-Babylonian Empire (626 A.C.-539 A.C.) (Illustrated Dictionary of the Bible, USA: Editorial Caribe, 1982, p.73). On the death of Nabopolassar (605 BC), his son Nebuchadnezzar became king of Babylon and commander in chief of the army. King Nebuchadnezzar, was the legendary conqueror mentioned in the book of Daniel.

Those years were very difficult times for the kingdom of Judah. They were passed from one conqueror to another, and although the prophets who served God in those times warned the governors about the consequences of disobeying God, those responsible for the people didn't pay attention. During the reign of Jehoiakim, God's prophet Jeremiah exhorted the king (Jeremiah 25:1-11). When Jehoiakim had reigned for three years, in 605 BC, Nebuchadnezzar defeated the Egyptians in the famous battle of Carchemish (Jeremiah 46:2), and conquered much of the Near East, which included the kingdom of Judah.

When Judah was conquered, a large number of people were taken captive to Babylon. In that group were Daniel and his friends. They remained captives throughout the government of Nebuchadnezzar, and the first three years of the reign of Cyrus, the Persian. Babylon was conquered by the Persians in 539 BC.

Questions

- Connect the following names with their respective meaning.
 - ◇ Daniel - The Lord is my helper
 - ◇ Hananiah - God is my judge
 - ◇ Mishael - The Lord has had grace
 - ◇ Azariah - Someone who comes from God
- Why were these boys selected?

II. What Did People Believe In That Part Of The World? (Daniel 1:5-7)

Each invader brought his own gods and tried to impose the worship of those deities. Because of his military success, Nebuchadnezzar considered his gods to be more powerful than all the others. So, the population of the kingdom of Judah was officially pressured to worship other gods and abandon the Lord. So being faithful to God wasn't easy in those days, especially when the Jewish rulers were an example of infidelity to the Lord. In the case of the prophets, serving God and representing him before the people

wasn't a simple task. The book of Jeremiah graphically describes the difficulties that Jeremiah suffered.

The national religion was strongly rooted in social and political life in the Babylonian Empire. Religious observances were carried out at the official level and the people followed a more popular form of practices. The king and his government were in charge of the official religion, maintaining the worship in the temples. Around 50 temples dedicated to different deities existed in Babylon.

The Babylonians didn't participate much in the official celebrations, except for the festivities of the goddess Ishtar, one of the principal divinities of the kingdom, together with Bel, called Merodac by the Hebrews, also identified as Marduk, god of the sun and principal divinity of the Babylonians. Ishtar's celebrations were colorful, with much joy, and the worship in her temple included sacred prostitution.

Ishtar was called by many names, and different versions of her mythology was found in peoples of the Near East. This goddess was the goddess of fertility, love and war. She was usually depicted as a naked woman, or at other times, with the head of animals, such as a bull, horse or donkey, as well as other diverse symbols. At the time of the captivity of the Jews, the Babylonians had a series of gods and myths, some of which had come to them from the Assyrians, who had received them from the Sumerians. In addition, the Babylonians had established the cult of the king of their nation.

Parallel to the above, popular religion consisted of a multitude of personal and family gods; myths that were developed orally over time. Likewise, people used amulets, fetishes and rituals to solve a variety of situations and illnesses. People actively participated in these religious ceremonies.

The change of names that we find in Daniel 1:7 has a strong religious content, and is verifiable when we observe the meaning of those names. Remember that for the Jews, too, names were important and had a meaning that the bearer of the name took very seriously. In the opinion of some historians, the change of name, for the person in charge of the service of the royal palace, implied that the young people would be under a new spiritual authority from that moment on.

The Beacon Bible Commentary gives us the following meanings of the names: "*Daniel means 'God is my judge', and they changed it to Belteshazzar which means 'The treasure (or secret) of Bel.'* Hananiah means '*The Lord has had grace' and his name was changed*

to Shadrach, which means 'The inspiration of the sun.' Mishael means 'Someone who comes from God', and they named him Meshach, which means 'Someone who belongs to the goddess Sesac'. Finally, Azariah which means 'The Lord is my helper' was renamed Abednego which means 'Servant of Nego' (which is the morning star)." (volume 4. USA: CNP, 1991).

Nebuchadnezzar, according to the biblical account, used a number of sages, fortune-tellers and magicians whom he consulted when he needed it. The Chaldeans, who are mentioned in the book of Daniel, were the scientists of the time and they supposedly had the ability to interpret all kinds of dreams. This knowledge was acquired through study, and the king indicated that the selected captives had to study for three years to be able to serve in the king's palace (Daniel 1:4-5).

Questions

- What similarities do you find between the religions existing in the place where you currently live and the religion of the Babylonian Empire?
- In what ways do you think you can represent God's wonderful love, mercy and justice in your community?

III. What Can We Learn From This Story?

We have already noticed the similarities between the international hostile situation of Daniel's time and the environment of the world today. We can also observe similarities between the Babylonian religious context and the current religious plurality. We live in a world convulsed by conflicts. Some places are struggling because they want their independence. In the global economic system, there's a lot of inequality and injustice where a small proportion of the global population has most of the wealth.

As far as religion is concerned, the western world is full of many options. Even within the Christian world there's a lot of pseudo-Christianity, where followers don't conform to the teaching of the Word, even though they proclaim themselves as Christians. To this religious scene we must add Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, Hindus, Animists and sects aligned to New Age beliefs. As in Babylon, in many places religion is used for political and even military purposes.

In many places like Latin America, there is a high percentage of Christians (Catholics and Evangelicals), but there appears to be a downward trend. Many are disillusioned with religion and become agnostics or even atheists. There are also a group of what can

be called "believers without a church." Many Christians have experienced discrimination, ridicule and even subtle forms of persecution. Also, the fact that there's an increasing number of church leaders who are bad examples doesn't help the good name of the gospel.

Having seen this scenario, we recognize that the principles that the story of Daniel and his friends teach us are absolutely relevant. In the first place, Daniel and his friends were clear in their minds that despite the hostility of the situation, God was on His throne and therefore, they affirmed His personal fidelity. Their convictions were not based on the circumstances or expecting God to bless them with material prosperity. The keyword was "submission" to the God to whom they had entrusted their lives. Following God was clearly their first priority.

Daniel and his three friends decided to obey the principles and practices that they had been taught back in Judah. They wanted to obey God even in practical things like diet and maintaining their true identity as Jews, while at the same time being good citizens, honest in all aspects of life.

Secondly, as part of the ruling class (Daniel 1:3-4), Daniel and his friends didn't follow the corrupt example of the king (2 Chronicles 36:5). They were faithful to God even though they were young. They saw clearly that there's no value in blaming older people for their mistakes or the leaders' bad examples because each one is responsible for the principles and values that they decide to adopt or not.

The decisions made by these young men teach us that in one way or another, we have to take charge of our own life choices. A little later in the account of Daniel (Daniel 3:17-18), his three friends, with courage and humility at the same time, stood firm in the commitment they had taken before God. They were determined to honor God at any price. They made some dangerous and even heroic decisions. We too, day by day, need to make the right choices which will please God.

Questions

- How can we imitate these young people in our daily lives?
- What did you learn from the lessons that you can apply to your life this week?

Conclusion

We need to be sure that we have placed our trust in God and apply His teachings daily in our lives.



Obeying God Rather Than Men

Francisco Borrallés (Mexico)

Passage to study: Daniel 1:8-20

Memory verse: “The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.” Exodus 14:14.

Lesson Aim: To be persistent in our Christian convictions in any circumstance, remembering that God honors those who honor him.

Introduction

A brother in Christ who works as a contractor and construction manager shared the following testimony: *“On one occasion, I was hired by the town council of my town to carry out street paving work in which I would be in charge of the supervision and would also be responsible for the control of the material to be used. At the beginning of these projects, and on one of the first occasions that I received the necessary materials (cement, sand, etc.), I noticed that the quantity received was less than what was specified in the delivery note sent by the supplier company. When asked the reason for this, I was informed that the rest of the material had been delivered to the house of an official of the town hall; and I was also told that I, as the person responsible for the work, had to sign to make a record that I had received the material as it appeared in the note.”*

Where we work, or in social situations, at school or university, even in our family circumstances, on certain occasions we may be presented with situations that are in direct opposition to the principles that God gives as a rule of conduct for the life of His sons and daughters. Therefore, it's our duty to be attentive in all those circumstances that could cause us, as believers in Christ, to give a bad testimony to the grace of God, and even to turn away from our faith.

I. Daniel And His Friends Were Not Defiled (Daniel 1:8)

To situate ourselves in the context of the present lesson, let's remember that Daniel was chosen, along with three of his companions (Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah), to reside in the court of Nebuchadnezzar, where he found favor with them in a similar way as Joseph in Egypt.

As members of King Nebuchadnezzar's court, Daniel and his companions had the right to participate in the king's food, as well as the respective drinks and all the delicacies included in the menu (Daniel 1:5). Analyzing the privilege mentioned above, we must confirm that it was the food of the court which the king was providing for them. This situation brought a real dilemma for Daniel and his companions because they were four young Jews who had strong convictions and who had committed their lives to serve the Lord in whatever situation He put them in. Their dilemma was as follows: Accepting the privilege of participating in the king's meal would contaminate their lives, but remaining faithful to their God and rejecting that privilege would bring royal disapproval on them, and that was dangerous.

Why did participating in the king's food mean getting contaminated? Because the aforementioned provisions were often offered up first to an idolatrous cult. That is, these foods were in contact with the idols; therefore, from the Jewish point of view, they were ceremonially impure, and consuming them represented violating God's law. In this regard, we read in Exodus 34:15 the following: *“Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land; for when they prostitute themselves to their gods and sacrifice to them, they will invite you and you will eat their sacrifices.”*

Keeping this law of the Lord in his mind and in his heart, Daniel demonstrated his conviction of fidelity to the one true God: *“...Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine”* (Daniel 1:8). We must highlight here Daniel's determination to remain faithful to his convictions in such a way that he had no hesitation in rejecting the privilege offered to him or in disobeying a direct order from King Nebuchadnezzar. In addition, he made public the

decision he had made; since *“he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way.”* (v. 8)

Faced with this situation, Daniel and his companions assumed the commitment to go through a consistent test of not contaminating themselves with the king's food, being able to choose their own food (vegetables and water). After ten days, their appearances were as good as those of the other young people who had consumed the same food as the king. Since there was no unfavorable difference, they were allowed to eat the food that seemed best to them (Daniel 1:13).

As sons and daughters of God, we need to be firm in our convictions and completely determined about how we'll behave in specific situations in which our fidelity to God is called into question or compromised. Our Lord Jesus Christ told us in Matt. 5:37 where we read: *“All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.”*

Questions

- What kinds of foods did Daniel and his friends ask for and why?
- Do you think that currently there's also some types of foods that we should abstain from?
- Could its consumption contaminate us spiritually?

II. God Rewarded The Integrity Of The Young Men (Daniel 1:14-20)

Daniel and his companions showed their commitment and faithfulness to God, while at the same time they showed their willingness to comply with those who were over them. While it's true that these young Jews decided to reject King Nebuchadnezzar's food, they undertook the commitment that this wouldn't limit their physical abilities or prevent them from fulfilling the tasks assigned to them. So, they continued to study science, languages, among other matters (Daniel 1:4).

As soon as Daniel showed his desire to be faithful to God, regardless of the circumstances that surrounded him, God intervened in his life, supporting the decision he had taken. In Daniel 1:9-10, we find that God put Daniel in the good graces and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs, even when this man expressed his doubts about responding affirmatively to Daniel's request. The eunuch argued that when the king observed the physical condition they were in after refusing to eat the food prepared for them, if they didn't look good, the Eunuch could lose his own life.

When Daniel and his companions decided not to contaminate themselves with the king's food, God Himself was the one who He took charge of the situation that his servants were going through. Therefore, we must always keep in mind that the Lord is the one who makes every circumstance work for good in the lives of those who trust in, honor and keep His commandments (Romans 8:28). This episode of Daniel's life proved God's favor in a clear way, confirming that His grace is abundant, manifesting itself in the following aspects:

A. Physical Appearance (v. 15)

Their faces had a better appearance and were more robust than the rest of the people who ate the king's meal. This teaches us that even in the first impression we give to other people, God's presence in his children is evident.

B. Knowledge And Intelligence (v. 17)

God was the one who gave knowledge and intelligence to these young men, but not only that, they also received the ability to interpret the dreams and contribute to the science of Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom. Daniel also received understanding to interpret dreams and visions; confirming in this way what the Word says: *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”* (Proverbs 9:10)

C. The Recognition Of The King (v. 19)

After the time that had been agreed upon to show that abstaining from the king's food wasn't going to affect them in any way, the head of the eunuchs took the four young men before Nebuchadnezzar for his approval. The result was that the king, after speaking with them, determined that among all the other young men in his court there were no others like Daniel and his companions. Nebuchadnezzar came to this conclusion after examining them on various matters in which wisdom and intelligence were required. They proved to be more advanced than the magicians and astrologers that were in the whole kingdom.

Questions

- What is integrity?
- What evidence of this is observed in the life of Daniel and his companions?
- How did God reward the faithfulness of these young Jews?

III. Similar Challenges Today

The case that I'm going to share next is a real testimony of a Christian, who for reasons beyond his control, was immersed in a situation and a dilemma similar to that faced by Daniel and his three friends in King Nebuchadnezzar's court.

At Steven's workplace (not his real name), an opportunity for job promotion was published so that employees who complied with the requirements established could be promoted to a better job, and therefore, would obtain an increase in their salary. When Steven presented his file with the required documentation, he was informed that he needed proof of a training workshop that he had not attended. But one of his co-workers told him that this wasn't a problem, since this document could be acquired, although he had not gone to the workshop, for a small amount of cash. Faced with this situation, Steven decided that he wouldn't participate in the promotion and would wait until the next occasion in which he would have all his documentation in a legal and honest way, giving testimony that the children of God trust in the Lord's name (Psalm 20:7, I Chronicles 16:29).

Regarding the testimony of the construction manager whose case was presented in the introduction to this lesson, we can say that he faced a real dilemma, similar to Steven's case. On the one hand, this employment was wonderful for him from the salary point of view, but at the same time, it implied accepting and endorsing fraudulent practices that represented a bad testimony of the Christian faith before his church, the authorities and society. But by the very nature of what he had been asked to do, his honesty was being tested, with the risk of suffering the legal consequences of such acts. Faced with this situation, this Christian brother decided to renounce the position he held, glorifying God with a dignified attitude and placing his trust only in Him.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul tells us: *"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."* (I Corinthians 10:31) We must bear in mind that our duty and commitment as God's people who have been saved and cleansed with the precious blood of Jesus Christ our Lord, is to always give honor and glory to God with each one of our actions. Let's remember that we have around us a great cloud of witnesses who must see in our own lives the transforming power

of Christ Jesus. Therefore, we must not allow the pressures of our current society with its wrong way of life to influence us in such a way that we're willing to renounce or relax (not even 'a little') our holy moral and spiritual convictions that we have received as a blessing of a life renewed by our Lord and Savior.

Remember: *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"* (2 Corinthians 5:17) Likewise, let us keep in mind the call to holiness that God has made to each one of his children: *"But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do."* (I Peter 1:15)

Let's live in such a way that we don't conform to this world, but that we ourselves are transformed through the renewal of our thinking, so that we may prove the good will of God that's pleasing and perfect (Romans 12:2). We must trust in the promise He made to us in His Word: *"... Don't be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today... you need only to be still."* (Exodus 14:13-14)

Questions

- In our daily context, we're presented with different types of pressures to break our promise of faithfulness to God. Can you give an example for each of the following areas?
 - a) Social:
 - b) Workplace:
 - c) Civil Society:
 - d) Families:
- When we're going through a difficult situation in our lives, what are the ways in which we can witness to God's faithfulness? How can we express our trust in Him?

Conclusion

We must always keep in our minds and hearts that our God is the omnipotent God, Creator of heaven and earth, for whom there's no situation that's beyond his control. So, we must trust in Him and in His Word. With transformed minds and hearts, instead of imitating the world and its standards, practices and customs, with grateful hearts, let us show that Jesus Christ reigns in our being.



King Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

Daniel Pesado (Spain)

Passage to study: Daniel 2:1-48

Memory verse: "...there's a God in heaven who reveals mysteries." Daniel 2:28

Lesson Aim: To understand that God always seeks people who know Him in order to reveal His will to the world.

Introduction

Dreaming is part of human life and, perhaps for this reason, we call different things a dream. For example, we say we 'have a dream' of something we hope will come true, or we tell about the dream we 'dreamed last night', or the dream marriage partner or dream job, etc. But 'having a dream' and 'dreaming' aren't quite the same. We all have 'dreams', and at the same time, we all usually dream while we sleep. Some dreams come to us during the night, while others are 'dreams' that remain in the mind, even when we're awake. It may also be that things we dreamed about became a reality and by coincidence, we may have dreamed about them in our sleep. We also know that not all our dreams come true.

A clear example of this type of apparent paradox can be found when God speaks through dreams to a person. This was the case of King Nebuchadnezzar. However, although this king lost sleep due to what he saw in his dream, for others, their greatest desires or dreams come true because they have waited for God to make them come true. Daniel and his friends were given the gift of interpreting dreams.

We know that when God reveals something through a dream, we can be sure that it will come true. In today's study passage, we become privileged witnesses because we have seen and still continue to see that the dream interpreted by the prophet of God became a reality and continues to be fulfilled in each and every one of its details. Maybe we should ask ourselves the following: What are we dreaming about? Do we hope that God will make them come true? But, is what we dream about and God's will the same thing?

In this story of dreams and reality, of life and death, of present liberation and future consummation, we need to distinguish two key aspects in the dream shown by God to King Nebuchadnezzar: Interpretation and revelation. We strive to interpret the dreams, but this is a unique attribute of God. God reveals His purposes to us. God used Daniel as His agent to interpret the king's dream.

I. Nebuchadnezzar's Dream (Daniel 2:1-13)

In the second year of his reign, King Nebuchadnezzar had some dreams but didn't understand them. He was very confused. The Bible tells us that because of those dreams "his mind was troubled and he couldn't sleep" (v. 1). From this we can ascertain the following:

A. He Was A Superstitious King (vs. 1-4)

Nebuchadnezzar was, like every political leader of his time, enormously superstitious. The importance that mythology occupied in each one of the empires mentioned in the Bible is well known; "*So the king summoned the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed.*" (v. 2)

They had books in which the meaning of dreams was defined, and when they dreamed of something such as bread, or the moon, or some animal, they would consult the book and supposedly find the meaning. This is equivalent to what many people do today when they choose a lottery number after having dreamed of something specific. Other people even consult tarot cards or the horoscope. But we must ask ourselves, "Does doing this please God?"

B. He Was An Astute King (vs. 5-11)

Nebuchadnezzar was superstitious, but he was also cunning. It's probable that some time earlier, some of his magicians may have pretended to deceive him with false interpretations. Maybe that's why he decided that this time it wouldn't be like that. Therefore, he asked them not only for an interpretation, but also to remind him of the dream he'd had. This was very difficult since the only way to interpret his dream was to know its content, and the king appeared to have forgotten it. The circle that surrounded the king were considered to be the wisest men of that time, consulted when making important decisions. For some unknown reason, King Nebuchadnezzar suspected that this dream was of extreme importance.

C. He Was A Relentless King (vs. 12-13)

Nebuchadnezzar, due to suspicions that his wise men were trying to deceive him, became very angry and decided to end their lives. This dictator was characterized by his mood swings and his violent temper (chapters 3, 4 and 6 show this aspect of Nebuchadnezzar's personality). However, this terrible decision shows at the same time that his determination to find out the content of his dream, which he considered extremely important, was firm.

Questions

- Looking at Daniel 2:1-4 do you think this is seen today as well? In what ways?
- How can we respond to someone who considers these things important?

II. Daniel Reveals The Dream (Dan. 2:14-23)

"The astrologers answered the king, 'There's no one on earth who can do what the king asks!'" (Daniel 2:10) Daniel also affirmed this truth (Daniel 2:27). The astrologers and wise men knew that it was impossible to be able to tell the king about the dream he had forgotten. When all looked lost and it seemed that the King was going to put them all to death, Daniel stood up and said that God could reveal it to him.

A. God Reveals His Purposes To Those Who Are Attentive (vs. 15, 19)

God had given Daniel the ability to interpret dreams. He had been chosen among the best Jewish youths in Jerusalem to be deported to Babylon. Daniel and his friends had been chosen because they were: *"without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace."* (Daniel 1:4) But

Daniel made a key decision from the beginning of his entry into the absolutely pagan environment of Babylon. This young Jew *"...resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine..."* (Daniel 1:8) He was able to give God his undivided attention. God not only revealed to him the content of King Nebuchadnezzar's dreams but also protected his life, and magnified him and his companions even over the Babylonian citizens.

B. God Reveals His Purposes To Those Who Are Brave (v. 16)

Daniel needed to be very courageous after asking the captain of Nebuchadnezzar's guard (v. 15) to take him to the king who had resolutely ordered them to kill all the wise men and astrologers of his kingdom (including Daniel and his friends). The Bible tells us that an edict had already been published (v. 13) and, like other stories we know, the publication of an edict implied that it couldn't be easily annulled (cf. Esther 3:14-15, 8:13, 9:1, 13, Daniel 6:8-9, 15, etc.). Thus, compliance with that edict could only be avoided with the publication of another one annulling it (Esther 8:13-9:1). As in the cases of David, Joshua and other characters, courage and strength come from knowing the one true God.

C. God Reveals His Purposes To Those Who Humble Themselves Before Him (vs. 17-18)

Daniel was also humble enough to go home, share the urgent need with his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. We need to ask ourselves if our faith is real and solid. We'll find answers when we pray together with others in unity of purpose. So, these young people prayed and fasted like Esther did. The disciples in the upper room prayed unanimously before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14, 2:4). When we seek God together, He is with us and can bless us and answer our requests.

In addition, Daniel and his companions prayed to a God *"...who made the world ...doesn't live in temples built by human hands."* (Acts 17:24), to the *"God of heaven"*. And the striking thing in Daniel's intercession request to his friends was that this wasn't to ask for strength, courage or skill; but to ask for *"the mercies of the God of heaven"* (v. 18). This points out that Daniel knew very well on what basis the God in whom they waited would act.

D. God Reveals His Purposes To Those Who Trust In Him (vs. 19-23)

Daniel had absolute trust in God, the God of his parents. This young man believed that God is the source of wisdom and power; that He controls time;

that He puts kings on their thrones and removes them; that true wisdom comes only from the Lord; and that God can reveal the deep and hidden things.

Why is it so important to understand what Daniel believed about God? The fundamental reason is this: Everything he knew about God gave him the confidence to believe that the divine will always triumph by becoming reality.

Questions

- In Daniel 1:17b, what does it say God gave Daniel?
- What gifts has God given you? Are you using them carefully?
- What advantages did Daniel have over the astrologers and diviners of Babylon, according to Daniel 1:3-4?

III. Understanding God's Will (Dan. 2:24-49)

A. Set Aside Everything That Distracts Us

We need to know in which direction to look. When Daniel understood the magnitude of the challenge, he knew in which direction to look. When we want to understand what God's will is, we must like Daniel look to the "God of heaven" (v. 18).

In order to listen to God, we need, like Daniel, to differentiate between the wisdom of the world (the wise men of Babylon in the time of Daniel, or the Greeks in the time of 1 Cor. 1:18-29) and the wisdom from above (James 3:17), which is from God (Dan. 2:27-28). Only the God of the Bible is the source of "power and wisdom" (Dan. 2:20). Nothing should distract us.

B. Understand God's Present Will And Its Connection To Future Reality

The different materials of which the enormous statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream was made of represent the greatest kingdoms or empires built by men at that time (Daniel 2:32-33). But these kingdoms would survive only until "a rock was cut out, but not by human hands" (v. 34). This rock wasn't part of the statute. This rock would bring the great statue down. Everything these human emperors had built, everything for which they had worked tirelessly, everything for which they had fought and even killed, what they were proud of, would end up crumbled and blown away by wind until there was no trace anywhere on earth.

C. Understand That History Moves Toward The Consummation Of The Kingdom Of God

Nebuchadnezzar, the emperor in power at that time, called here "king of kings" (v. 37), would be

followed by other kingdoms (vs. 38-42), which in their turn would also be destroyed, etc. God will bring about His Kingdom. Let's not doubt that He will do it. Therefore, Daniel said the following: "... *The dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy.*" (v. 45) The day announced by Isaiah will come (Isaiah 9:6-7, see also Daniel 2:44). Jesus encourages us to seek above anything else God's kingdom (Matt. 6:33). This Kingdom will encompass everything and the will of God will be manifested over everything created.

D. Understand That Jesus Inaugurated The Kingdom

What's this kingdom? Jesus the Messiah sent by God, is the 'key piece', the foundation and the one who inaugurated God's rule with his arrival on earth (Matt. 12:28, Luke 17:21). Jesus is the rock (Matt. 16:16-18, 21:42), not cut by the hands of men, but sent by God who will impose His rule over the whole earth (Dan. 2:35). Paul summarizes this reality in the following way: "For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen" (Rom. 11:36).

Paul wrote to Timothy that one day ... "If we suffer, we'll also reign with him [Jesus] ..." (2 Tim. 2:12a, Rev. 3:21). Nebuchadnezzar granted Daniel many honors and great gifts (Dan. 2:48) besides being governor of the province and chief of the wise men in whom he had trusted for so long. Daniel asked that his faithful friends could occupy places of great responsibility in the government of Babylon. As we see, God didn't change His plan. He always fulfills what He promises and, as He promised Abraham a long time ago (Genesis 12:2), He magnifies the name of those who trust and serve him.

Questions

- If one of Daniel's characteristics was that he was attentive to the voice of God, what prevents us from being attentive today?
- Daniel 2:35-45 refers to a stone that will destroy everything and establish a new kingdom. Who is the Bible referring to here (Matthew 12:28, 16:16-18, 21:42, Luke 17:21)?

Conclusion

Many people have all sorts of dreams. God used Daniel to reveal the true meaning of the King's dream. Although His thoughts and ways are much higher than ours, God chooses His children to cooperate with Him in the task of reminding the world of the transient and ephemeral nature of their kingdoms, in contrast to the permanent and lasting kingdom of God.



The Value Of Loyalty

Joel Castro (Spain)

Passage to study: Daniel 3:1-30

Memory verse: "Then Nebuchadnezzar said, - Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him..." Daniel 3:28

Lesson Aim: To be motivated to be loyal and faithful to God in the midst of false worldly adoration and to always give a true testimony of the power of God.

Introduction

One day I read a story about an Indigenous man who came to a missionary, very distressed because his dog had eaten some pages of his Bible that had been given to him only a few days before. "Don't worry so much about the loss of a Bible," the missionary replied, "we can easily get another one."

"It's not that," replied the hunter, "it's not about the book, it's about my dog. He was a magnificent hunter, and now, how am I going to feed my family?"

"What do you mean?" The missionary replied.

"I'll explain it to you," the man said.

"I have seen many cases of people who have come to the mission, and by the spell of this book, those who were once warriors and quarrelsome have become as tame as lambs, and no longer want to fight or kill anyone. If my dog has fallen under the spell of this book, then it will also become meek, and how will I be able to catch the hunt? Poor me!"

The missionary explained that what he had seen wasn't a spell, and nothing would happen to the dog. Rather, he told him that the change he had seen in the people of his community was because they believed and accepted the teachings of the sacred book, the Bible.

The argument of the village man, and his declaration of what he had seen in his fellow citizens who were influenced by the gospel, was a source of rejoicing for the missionary, and a proof of the power of the Word of God when accepted with simplicity and loyalty.

The story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego is also a great example of the power of the Word of God in the lives of those who accept it. Because of their loyalty to their Creator, even King Nebuchadnezzar glorified God, and many witnessed God's marvelous

power. Now, let's let Daniel 3 reveal to us what God wants to teach us in this lesson.

I. Worship Demanded By King Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 3:1-7)

From the beginning, when the people of Israel were formed, God demanded that His people be faithful to Him, and that meant not worshipping other gods (Ex. 20:2-5). However, that wasn't exactly what the Israelites did; rather they did the opposite. For that reason, they were defeated and taken captive to Babylon. At that time, and far from their land, the pressure of idolatry was even heavier.

Nebuchadnezzar represents the earthly powers of the past and the present, like the Pharaoh of Egypt or Herod was in the New Testament. However, all of them, as well as those who have risen up arrogant and defiant in every century until today, will be defeated by the supernatural power of God (Exodus 15:19, Acts 12:21-23).

Likewise, it could also be said that Nebuchadnezzar is the typical monarch who used religion for his convenience. After receiving the meaning of his dream, he was convinced of the power of God, but when the fear had passed, he again showed his pride. (Dan. 2:47). Nebuchadnezzar's attitude wasn't a sign of humility, but of convenience, because in Daniel 3, we observe this king, who continued with his arrogance, ordering idolatrous worship.

Perhaps King Nebuchadnezzar thought more about the image in the dream he'd had, where Daniel had told him that he represented the golden head of that image (Dan. 2:32,37-38). In his vanity, he commanded the men to carve a statue with not

just a head of gold, but gold in the entire structure, measuring approximately 27 meters in height (similar to a building of 9 floors) and 2 and a half meters wide.

For the dedication of the statue (Daniel 3:2-3), this Babylonian king demanded that all the people who occupied political offices throughout his kingdom meet, among whom were the new officials: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, since Daniel had interceded for them to be in charge of the affairs of the province of Babylon (Dan. 2:49). At the sound of the imperial orchestra, all the people had to prostrate themselves and worship the golden statue (Dan. 3:4-5).

Our world is full of buildings that show idolatry. There are also many special dates that have been chosen in honor of idols that Catholicism certified centuries ago. For example, in Zaragoza, Spain, there are the 'Fiestas del Pilar,' which in 2017, brought together more than one million people. More than eight tons of flowers were sold, which amounts to many millions of euros. All this destined was for the statue of a virgin more than 15 meters high and 16 wide. The people who attend these religious feast days originate from many countries; although the visitors are mostly from Hispanic nations, who parade with the typical costumes from their places of origin.

Celebrations like the one described can be found in many gatherings of the idolatrous idiosyncrasy that exists in our countries.

Questions

- What did Nebuchadnezzar order and what did he ask?
- Before which statues do people bow today?
- What did Daniel's friends do about the idolatry?
- What should be our attitude towards the forms of idolatry today?

II. A Firm Attitude In The Midst Of Trials (Daniel 3:8-20)

Maliciously, some Chaldeans realized that Daniel's three friends were not following the king's order. Therefore, they denounced that denial and 'lack of respect' to Nebuchadnezzar's statue (vs. 8,12). In this passage, two specific lessons can be detected: In the first place (Dan. 3:12), we see the blackmail to which Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were subjected. These Chaldeans believed that because the young Jews worked for the government, they would do everything the king ordered.

Currently, we live in the midst of a world that demands that we live according to its standards and rules. However, it's up to us to know how to detect what the devil proposes and what God wants of His children. The material blackmail has made many Christians renounce their faith. However, we must remember that although work and business are important, they aren't more essential than obeying, being faithful and loyal to God.

The devil knows that work is a necessity, and he uses it as a means to blackmail us. So, the following warning is relevant: Beware of bowing to the current statues! Remember that we're going through these trials, and our faith must come out victorious, trusting fully in the promises of the Lord. Remember that service and worship should only be for our God; then He will provide what we lack (Matt. 6:25-33).

In the second place, Daniel's three friends teach us not to conform to the social environment in which we live. Some believers, living with the values and priorities of this world, little by little enter an atmosphere of conformism and religiosity. Maybe at the beginning they said 'no'. but then they become familiar with what this society offers until they tolerate it and see it as normal. This process occurs with the 'idols' of the world, such as music, fashion, hobbies, etc. Compliance makes us slowly flexible, and not radical against these things. Such tolerance can imminently lead us to adopt the worldly lifestyle.

Compliance is potentially subtle; it starts in our mind, and then it goes to our actions. For this reason, the apostle Paul recommended that we consecrate all our life, without conforming ourselves to this world. As disciples of Christ, we must let the Holy Spirit transform our minds to live according to God's will (Rom. 12:1-2). This can only be achieved by being loyal to the Lord by keeping and obeying His Word. Daniel's friends didn't conform to the times or the social context in which they lived. Their constant prayer led them to stand firm in the face of the trial, knowing what to do, no matter what might happen to their lives (Dan. 3:16-18).

Pastor and lecturer Felix Ortiz presents four consequences of Christians when they start to conform: 1) We become like the world around us; 2) We lose our sensitivity to God and His outlook on life; 3) We lose our prophetic authority in society, and 4) It makes us incapable of carrying out the ministry of reconciliation (Ortiz, Felix, "Recurso Caos!", Spain: Editorial Clie, 1998, p.31).

As a church, we're called to be salt and light in the world. Therefore, we must not and cannot conform to the thinking of this world if we want to make a difference (Eph. 5:7-8, 11). The three young men in our story, even though they knew they were disobeying a direct order from King Nebuchadnezzar, didn't acquiesce because they were foreigners and didn't hide, but they spoke out bravely and confidently. In this same way, the church needs to make a difference at all costs.

Questions

- What was the attitude of the youth according to Daniel 3:12?
- What's the teaching of Matthew 6:25-33?
- How can we impact the world with the redeeming message of Christ in the world we live in today?

III. God's Faithfulness And Exaltation (Daniel 3:21-30)

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were faced with Nebuchadnezzar's harsh punishment. There was no escape. Because of their faithfulness to God, the lives of these men were in danger in the furnace of fire heated seven more times than usual (Dan. 3:19), so much so that the men in charge of throwing them into the fire died (v. 22). So, our Jewish heroes ended up tied up and thrown into the hot oven (v. 23).

However, something totally unexpected and surprising happened before the eyes of the king himself. Full of fear he asked, "*Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?*" (v. 24) Once his question was confirmed, and still with horror, he said: "*Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.*" (v. 25) What Nebuchadnezzar was seeing was the power of God to guard and protect His people.

The Bible is full of miracles that honor the power, majesty and sovereignty of God. This story is one of them. God is faithful to His promises, and their fulfillment is for His glory. Even when the entire nation had departed from the commandments of God, resulting in slavery, there was a remnant who always remained faithful to God. That remnant also suffered from slavery, nevertheless, God guarded them from all evil. This is how God cares for His people, those who truly are His faithful followers, those who make the difference in the midst of a nation that was mostly religious.

God's faithfulness became evident. God looks out for us, and He knows that positive testimonies will bring glory to His name and people will be reached for him. In the New Testament, we find that Paul was willing to die so that the gospel could reach other people. However, there were Christians who persuaded him not to go to Jerusalem because sure death awaited him there (Acts 21:4-14). But the apostle knew in Whom he had believed in (Acts 21:13).

Unfortunately, there are many believers who seek God's faithfulness more for their own benefits than to honor Him as He deserves. So, they ask for God's care for their own wants, but very few are willing to suffer so that others might know Christ. There's a vain and heretical belief that says that children of God shouldn't have to suffer and should have everything they want. However, the Bible is full of examples of followers and disciples of Christ who lived in the midst of want and suffering. Even Jesus himself had no place to lay his head (Matt. 8:20).

The faithfulness of God led Daniel's three friends to come out of the oven intact, without any evidence of being in the fire. Glory to God! (Daniel 3:27) Let us bear in mind that one day there will be a terrible eternal fire awaiting those who were not faithful to the Lord (Revelation 21:8). Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego received the reward of God's faithfulness, and as a result, these men were unharmed, and the Lord was exalted by King Nebuchadnezzar himself before all his governors and leaders (Daniel 3:27-29, similar to what we saw in Daniel 2, where this same king magnified the Lord before Daniel.

Questions

- How was the faithfulness of God shown in the lives of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego? What's the purpose of God's faithfulness in the lives of his children?
- Are my sufferings because of my testimony of Christ, or because of my foolish way of living?

Conclusion

In our societies, we also have idols, godless decrees and statutes as evidence of false worship. However, just as those young people remained faithful to God, so we too must be brave and reflect a strong testimony according to biblical principles. We'll have protection and security in God when we make wise and correct decisions based on true biblical values and principles, because God is faithful.



Pride Comes Before The Fall

César Barco (Ecuador)

Passage to study: Daniel 4:1-37

Memory verse: “And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.” Daniel 4:37b

Lesson Aim: To reflect on Nebuchadnezzar’s sin of pride; how to avoid it, and if necessary, how to deal with it.

Introduction

Daniel 4 tells us about King Nebuchadnezzar’s pride. Many people (including Christians) have problems with pride, leading to boastfulness, unforgiving attitudes, being unmerciful, hardening of the heart, etc. Pride has led many to fall into countless sins (Proverbs 16:18). We’ll develop the theme of pride. In this regard, we can say the following: if it were not for the grace of God, pride would have destroyed us completely. It was and is the grace of God that intervenes to lift us from falling, and helps us to renounce, and seek to be cleansed, of pride.

I. Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream And Its Interpretation (Daniel 4:1-27)

A. The Tree, The King And His Kingdom

Nebuchadnezzar appeared as the king of all nations. History tells us that he converted Babylon into a city possessing one of the wonders of the ancient world, its hanging gardens. Babylon was also one of the most influential empires, not only in the Middle East, but also in the whole world of those days. Perhaps for this reason, the tree mentioned in verses 11 and 20 could be seen from all corners of the earth, referring to the glory of the Babylonian Empire and its king Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel declared that God had entrusted this imperial governmental work to Nebuchadnezzar as king. God allowed Nebuchadnezzar to rule all the nations, and especially the people of God who were captive in the capital of his empire. God had entrusted the care of His people to many kings of the Jewish lineage, but most failed. Now, he was giving this task to a foreign king, Nebuchadnezzar

(Jeremiah 29:7,14). However, we must bear in mind that the Lord is always in control, so that He can even use enemies to bless His people.

B. The Spirit Of The Holy Gods Or The Presence Of GOD

In his dream, the king received the following message: “*The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of people.*” (v 17) Daniel was known for his godliness. He had interpreted the king’s dream before. So, the king called him because he perceived that Daniel had “*the spirit of the holy gods*” (Daniel 4:18). Nebuchadnezzar recognized the presence of God with Daniel, but he attributed this gift to his gods, and not to the one and only true God.

C. Correction Or Divine Punishment

The tree was going to be cut down, divine judgment comes sooner or later. We have a chance to correct our ways before God acts. Daniel faithfully presents this opportunity to the king. Daniel 4:27 mentions: “*Therefore, Your Majesty, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what’s right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue.*” However, the punishment that God promises to send to the king is a hard one. Daniel 4:25 says: “*You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox and be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over*

all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes.” Here is his option to repent, to be healed and restored, but this can happen only when the king recognizes that God is superior to him.

We see in the history of the people of God that God makes us suffer the consequences of our own sins. He intervenes to restore us when there’s genuine repentance. Such was the case of Israel (Hosea 6:1), and of King David who wasn’t removed from office because he sincerely repented. But in any case, David had to suffer the consequences of his actions; He lost four children (2 Samuel 11-18).

Questions

- What did the king dream?
- How would you define pride?
- What does it produce?
- What do you think about Jeremiah 29:1-7?

II. The Consequences Of Pride (Dan. 4:28-33)

A. Haughtiness, Everyone’s Problem

Throughout history, pride has been the stone on which many have stumbled, for it gives rise to many sins. Nebuchadnezzar said the following: *“Is not this the great Babylon that I have built as my royal residence by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?”* (Daniel 4:30)

The editor of the present lesson is Peruvian married to a lady from Ecuador. We have a beautiful son, and currently live in Ecuador. In my youth, I walked through the streets of Lima. One day, I saw a group gathered in the Plaza San Martin, a place where the thinkers of the city meet. This aroused my curiosity, and one day, I began to chat with them.

I thank God that I had a good Sunday School teacher who prepared us to defend the Christian faith. Among the many topics of discussion, the topic of work and the things we acquire arose. I remember saying something that caught their attention: *“It’s God who gives us everything we have.”* But one of them refuted me saying: *“God gives us strength and health, we do the rest ourselves by our own effort.”* It seemed to me that this reply was somewhat arrogant.

God uses us as instruments. We work hard, but we must recognize that God is the one who provides strength and health for us to get material things, academic achievements, etc. We must also recognize

that all those things that we achieve by our own efforts come from God, as King David declared (Psalm 24:1).

To finish the story I was sharing with you, I have to confess that I only managed to tell that person that God is the one who gives the strength and health to be able to work and acquire our goods. The Bible says that even our goods belong to God. Therefore, we must recognize that He is the giver of everything we have. In fact, the young man who replied wasn’t happy with that response.

Nebuchadnezzar confessed that he had built his kingdom, not for the purpose of glorifying God, but to glorify his own majesty. Hence, he had extolled and enthroned his own ego by saying that he had built all with his strength, when in reality, his reply should have been that it was by the grace of God that he had been able to build and execute. God was and is the one who gives and will give the strength to achieve a common good, an academic achievement, a family, a job or employment, social or ministerial leadership, etc. Everything that doesn’t glorify God, He will correct, for everything belongs to God, and everything that exists is from Him and for Him (Rom. 11:36).

B. Nebuchadnezzar Was Punished And Corrected

1. The Kingdom Was Taken From Him.

Dan.4:31,36 confirms this. King Nebuchadnezzar was removed from his kingdom, but only temporarily. This teaches us that the divine discipline in this life is severe, but temporary. In the case of Nebuchadnezzar, it lasted seven years and after that, the punishment ended.

2. He Was Taken From Among Men (vs. 32-33).

That is, divine discipline will often take us away from our loved ones, friends, family, church, society, even God. Paul mentions something similar in 1 Cor. 5:11, but his discipline is temporary (2 Cor. 2:6-8), for if it were not so, we would all die (Isaiah 57:16).

3. He Lived Like The Beasts Of The Field (vs. 32-33)

Nebuchadnezzar appears to have lost his mind. He began to eat grass from the fields, his body got wet with the dew, his hair grew like eagle feathers, and his nails became like birds’ claws. We don’t know what exactly happened, but we can conclude that sin transforms people physically and spiritually into animals, into irrational beings who have lost their sanity by unleashing their

debauched desires, darkening and cauterizing their reasoning, hardening their hearts. Pride leads us to this.

Sin has reduced humanity to a state of bestiality by disfiguring the image of the God with which we were created. We find our societies full of people who have lost their way, whose values have been distorted: sexual immorality, murder, and violation of human rights seem to be the order of the day and the plot of the soap operas presented to us daily on the TV. We hear of modern slavery, pornography, drug related crimes, where often people are corrupted by the love of money. All of them have disfigured the image of God in themselves, but even in the midst of this personal and social bestiality, there's hope.

Questions

- What consequences came to Nebuchadnezzar because of his arrogance?
- What are the consequences of pride today?

III. Repentance And Restitution (Dan. 4:34-37)

A. Grace For Repentance

Daniel 4:34 mentions that at the end of the seven years, Nebuchadnezzar looked up to heaven with an expression of a request for mercy and help, and also as a sign of repentance, humiliation and recognition of the sovereignty of God. God, in his great mercy, restored the king's reason as he abandoned his pride and praised the one God (vs. 34-37).

Nebuchadnezzar's sanity was restored (v. 34). He felt better and ceased being a beast and became a man again in the image and likeness of God. But God first began with his spiritual health, when this man recognized him as the only King of heaven and earth.

B. Fully Restored

After Nebuchadnezzar repented, the following happened:

1. **The majesty of his kingdom was returned to him** (v. 36). Many times when we fall into sin, we lose some of what we prized. For the king, it was his kingdom, but for us it could be work, a job, society, clients, friends, family, home, etc. Adultery can cause the rupture of the family, even material losses. However, when we repent, God is able to restore a divorced home, a lost job, distant friendships, clients who trust us again, and more. The majesty of the kingdom that God gave us at

the beginning and that we lost because of our pride may be returned to us by God's grace.

2. **His dignity and greatness were returned to him** (v. 36). The fall into sin may also cause the loss of dignity. For example, when a pastor or leader falls, not only does he lose his place, but also his title or dignity, his pastorate. However, when there's a humiliated and repentant heart, God can restore our self-worth and sense of dignity.
3. **His leaders sought him** (v. 36). Falling into sin also affects any circle of people to which we belong. But there's a call to the people of God to restore the fallen, for when one is healed, all are healed (2 Cor. 2:10-11). Leaders should look out for those who have fallen into sin. God can use them in the process of restoration. People can be restored when there's a heart that has confessed its sin and has asked for forgiveness, not only from God, but also from the aggrieved or affected people.
4. **He was restored in his kingdom** (v. 36). I have listened to the testimony of leaders who have fallen, but when they repent, they have been returned to their positions as pastors or in the sphere of secular work. Nebuchadnezzar returned to his throne as king over Babylon by the grace of God. I know that many people recover what sin took away from them. This wonderful transformation is part of the grace of God.
5. **Greater greatness was added to him.** Finally, we could say that when God hurts, he heals, when he punishes, He restores. God is fair. However, God isn't only fair, He is also generous, because He often blesses us more than we deserve. This is the glory of his grace. God is good and exceedingly kind.

Questions

- When a member of the church falls into sin, do you believe that he should be forgiven and restored, or should he be disciplined and thrown out of the church? Why or why not?
- What does the restoration of a person in the church involve today?

Conclusion

Just like Nebuchadnezzar, many have been tested by pride, but not all were victorious. However, God is good and his mercies are new every morning, and they reach out to the repentant heart that seeks Him.



The Writing On The Wall

Wilson Sánchez (Peru)

Passage to study: Daniel 5:1-31

Memory verse: “But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory.” Daniel 5:20

Lesson Aim: To understand that sin brings destruction to our lives. We need to remember that we cannot escape from the hands of a sovereign God who has control of everything.

Introduction

Daniel 5 tells us about the failure of the king of Babylon. History tells us that King Belshazzar was the last of Nebuchadnezzar’s dynasty. Afterwards, the Babylonian Empire passed to the Medes and the Persians. The character that stands out in this passage is undoubtedly Daniel as an older man. He had come as a young lad as one of the captive princes of Israel, taken as an exile by Nebuchadnezzar. He was very committed to God, and from his youth he had proposed in his heart to obey the laws of God and be a witness of blessing to all those around him in the palace where he lived.

When Belshazzar, grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, reigned, the Babylonian Empire was at the height of greatness. All the countries of the world were subject to the political, religious, economic and cultural directives of this empire. But, as always with all empires, corruption, idolatry and all kinds of perversions brought down all the greatness that Babylon had enjoyed. Daniel 5 tells us the cause of that failure. This passage begins with a huge party; let’s see, then, what happens.

God is sovereign. He possesses supreme authority, so nothing nor anybody can be above that authority. He places and removes authorities (Dan. 4:25). In the previous lesson, we saw how God revealed His sovereignty to King Nebuchadnezzar, and in this lesson, we’ll see how He also showed it to King Belshazzar.

I. A Great Banquet (Daniel 5:1)

History teaches us that although the text calls Nebuchadnezzar the ‘father’ of king Belshazzar, he was in reality his grandfather. Many years had passed since the invasion and destruction of Jerusalem. This chapter describes a great banquet or party dedicated to the

pagan gods of Babylon. The king had invited a thousand of his princes, his wives and his concubines. The party was at its height of noise and celebration. Everyone was drinking wine and praising the pagan gods. There was loud music, dancing, lots of drink, the tables were spread with the most exquisite delicacies. Everyone was getting very drunk, and according to them, having the greatest time and fun. The king was the center of attention and the object of applause and admiration among the top society of the Babylonian kingdom.

Questions

- What scene does Daniel describe on the last day of Belshazzar’s reign?

II. A Drunken Brawl (Daniel 5:2-3)

Economic abundance without the fear of God becomes a curse for man. Since the liquor was plentiful, King Belshazzar decided to take another step in the twilight of his glory. It occurred to him to use the holy utensils dedicated to the Lord that had been taken from the temple of Jerusalem when they conquered the kingdom of Judah. This would lead to the end of his reign.

As Paul says: “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.” (1 Tim. 6:10) In the Word of God, poverty is never an ideal. The desire of the Lord is that we prosper in every way, but we need to make good use of the riches that He gives to us.

In the case of Belshazzar, he used his economic power to unleash his carnal appetites, and in his moral debauchery, he went on to another stage in his personal failure. Due to the foolishness and weakness

of Belshazzar, proud Babylon was soon to fall. As usual, the king was willing to pass party time with his young friends. He boasted of his power, and his heart became proud against the God of heaven. But in the drunkenness and orgy of that terrible night, God was going to open the doors that had been predicted by the prophet Isaiah many years before with these words: *“This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut.”* (Isaiah 45:1)

Belshazzar, well into his cups, lost his mind. He ordered the sacred Jewish vessels to be brought so that everyone could drink from them and so that they could all worship their pagan gods together. Although Nebuchadnezzar repeatedly and presumptuously challenged the eternal God, he never dared use the utensils of the temple that were known to be sacred. However, his grandson Belshazzar did. The king wanted to prove that nothing was too sacred for his hands. So, the people drank wine and praised the gods of gold, silver and bronze.

Questions

- What events occurred when Belshazzar was under the influence of wine?
- How can we associate 1 Timothy 6:10 with what happened in Daniel 5:1?
- How do we relate 1 Timothy 6:10 to our day?

III. A Great Blasphemy (Daniel 5:4-31)

Do you know what blasphemy is? Blasphemy is disrespecting God, to make improper use of anything that belongs to God. Thus, Belshazzar was laughing at God by using the cups of the Jerusalem temple to drink with his princes. So, our sovereign God immediately removed him from his kingdom and the Babylonian Empire fell as Daniel had prophesied. King Belshazzar drank in those sacred vessels to express his hatred against the people of Israel and against Daniel's God.

Daniel had many opportunities to stand up for God in the presence of the kings of Babylon. In this case, king Belshazzar rejected the grace of God, and, instead of receiving and accepting the Word of God, he rejected the Lord. He expressed his disrespect for God by committing great blasphemy. Prov. 23:31 says: *“Don't gaze at wine when it's red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly! In the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper.”* Solomon

advised Lemuel with these words: *“It's not for kings, Lemuel— it's not for kings to drink wine, not for rulers to crave beer.”* (Prov. 31:4)

There are millions of failures, accidents, etc. in the world because of the consumption of alcohol. People lose control of themselves under the influence of alcohol. So, under the effects of alcohol or drugs, people are exposed to commit the greatest misfortunes.

In the banquet of Belshazzar, drink helped cause the king to commit this great blasphemy against God. What appeared at first to be something innocent became a great tragedy. Sin doesn't always appear as something bad; often it seems to be attractive and innocent. But when the person succumbs, it shows its true nature. By blaspheming, Belshazzar was challenging God.

We observe what sin is doing around us and feel tempted to ask why doesn't God do something to stop these people? But, God has a lot of time; He doesn't hurry to act. He will take care of the situation in the same way that he took care of King Belshazzar. We must never forget that God is just.

A. A Great Judgment (Daniel 5:5-28)

Daniel 5:5 tells us: *“Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote.”* God was intervening. He didn't speak through a dream or a vision because this was a man whom God intended to punish. God couldn't bear this evil insult to heaven, so he wrote on the wall of the banquet hall. We believe that the one who wrote this on the wall was the same one who wrote on the sand when they presented that woman who had committed a sin (John 8:1-11).

With the lady taken in adultery, Jesus was writing a message of forgiveness, but in the banquet of Belshazzar, it was a message of judgment, of death. This Babylonian king had ignored the God of heaven, and Daniel would soon clarify that. Let's look at the king's tremendous reaction: *“His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his legs became weak and his knees were knocking.”* (Dan. 5:6) This man couldn't possibly stand at that moment; he was too drunk to get up. But faced with this mystery, he found himself suddenly sober.

What he had seen written on the wall had terrified him and he was overwhelmed by fear. Next, the following occurred: *“The king summoned the enchanters, astrologers and diviners. Then he said to these wise men of Babylon, “Whoever reads this writing*

and tells me what it means will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around his neck, and he will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom.” (v. 7)

The promised reward was to become the third highest ruler in the kingdom. The book of Daniel tells this dramatic story well. At the height and excitement of the party, a phenomenon occurred; suddenly, a hand appeared on the whitewashed wall reading “MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN” (v. 25).

As soon as the hand began to write, the party, the music, the dancing, the laughter, the feasting, the praises and the applause to the king ceased. There was a pregnant silence as God transmitted His message. King Belshazzar’s knees knocked with terror. The king was disturbed by only one hand. Think about the situation of unbelieving sinners on the day they have to give an account of their sins before the glorious judge, our Lord Jesus Christ, King of kings and Lord of lords.

Belshazzar gave the order to bring the magicians, fortune-tellers and other people related to the occult to the palace, a matter that was very common in Babylon. But none of them could give the interpretation to the king. The only one who could do it was Daniel. He lived close to God and feared Him and he was able to interpret the message. The prophet Daniel, with great serenity and aplomb, gave the king the interpretation of the writing on the wall. But before the interpretation, he told the king of all the failures he had committed by sinning against God, and that therefore he had to face the God of justice (vs. 22-23).

The Bible says that God is love. But the Bible also says that God is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29). Daniel told King Belshazzar that God had put an end to his kingdom. He also told him that he had been weighed in the balance of God and had been found wanting (Dan. 5:27). To this he added that his kingdom would be taken away from him and given to the Medes and the Persians (v. 28). This drunken heathen party provoked blasphemy, and blasphemy provoked God’s judgment. Let’s be careful with what we do! Galatians 6:7 says: “Don’t be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.”

B. A Great Punishment (Daniel 5:29-31)

What was written on the wall said: “MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN”. Now in terms of interpretation, we’re going to notice a variation in the last word. Peres is the singular form of PARSIN. Literally, they can be translated as “counted, weighed, and divided”. The interpretation of the writing on the wall is: “MENE:

God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end. TEKEL: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting. PERES: Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians. “ (vs. 26-38)

Something else that we should note is that these were common words that any Chaldeans could understand. How is it possible that the wise men couldn’t read them? There are many opinions about it. There are those who say that perhaps the words were written without words. Others believe that the inscription was made in a block of letters that didn’t form a specific sentence. Or maybe the Lord simply confused the understanding of those men. In Isaiah 44:25, the Lord declares: “who foils the signs of false prophets and makes fools of diviners, who overthrows the learning of the wise and turns it into nonsense.”

King Belshazzar died that same night (v. 30). His death was premature. Sins against God often accelerate the departure to eternity. The kingdom was taken from him; all his glory vanished in a few moments, and he went to eternity without God and without any hope. Let’s not be rebellious against God, let’s not be proud, because our lives can vanish at the least expected moment. Let’s give our lives to the Lord Jesus Christ so that He will forgive us and transform us, and we can look forward to eternal life with Him.

In the story of King Belshazzar, we can clearly see that the wages of sin is death. This king fell into various sins such as pride, drunkenness, and blasphemy, and all this was judged by God, ending in his sudden death.

Questions

- What blasphemous acts did Belshazzar commit?
- What divine action interrupted the king’s feast? (Daniel 5:5-28)
- What was Belshazzar’s sin?
- Why was his guilt so great? (Daniel 5:29-31)
- What are our greatest sins?
- What’s the solution for them today? (James 4:17, John 9:41)

Conclusion

One day we all must go before God to be judged according to our walk here on earth. Is there a hidden sin in our lives? If so, we must repent with all our heart and ask the Lord for forgiveness! But if we feel that every day we’re walking with God, let’s pray that we’ll continue advancing with firm steps on the path of holiness.



Courage In The Mist Of Trials

Eli Porras Salinas (Peru)

Passage to study: Daniel 6:1-28

Memory verse: “My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight.” Daniel 6:22a

Lesson Aim: To learn to trust in the promises of God and determine to not give up in the midst of trials.

Introduction

History tells us of the great empires, such the Egyptian, Syrian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian and many more, some much closer to our own times. The book of Daniel tells us about the great Babylonian Empire and its policy of captivity of subjugated and conquered peoples. In this story, the Medes and the Persians have conquered the Babylonian kings. Remember the drunk feast from the last class.

Throughout his life, Daniel had faced great changes and also suffered various political crises. Various events happened which are recorded in Daniel chapters 1 to 5. In chapter 6, Daniel, now a much older person, is adjusting to the new empire – the Medes and the Persians under their king Cyrus.

This new empire was more extensive than the Babylonian empire. It extended from the Persian Gulf in the east, to Macedonia in the West, to the North its limits reached Armenia, and in the South to Egypt to the Euphrates River. This empire wasn't as rich as the Babylonian, although its army was much more powerful. The kingdom of the Medes and Persians lasted 208 years, from 539 until 331 BC.

Daniel was well advanced in years, maybe over 80. He was respected since he had gained a privileged place in the various political scenarios of his time. In this class we're going to study the days when he was thrown into the lion's den.

I. When Faith Is Challenged And Put To The Test (Daniel 6:1-13)

A. Daniel's Place On The Political Scene (vs. 1-2)

Daniel had served under the Babylonian government in positions of importance; he even interpreted the dreams of King Nebuchadnezzar.

For that reason, he was elevated to the position of governor of the province of Babylon (Dan. 2:48). When the change of government took place, Daniel was still respected as a faithful public servant due to the qualities that God had given him. So, he continued to serve under the reign of Darius, the Median king, and Cyrus, the Persian king. During Darius's reign, the large empire was consolidated under the efficient organization led by satraps and local governments.

Satrap was the official title of the viceroy appointed by the King of Persia to exercise the civil and military authority over several small provinces that formed a governorship. Each of these provinces had its own governor (Ezra 8:36, Esther 3:12). The title of satrap appears in Aramaic after the Persian conquest.

We find that King Darius appointed 120 satraps and three administrators (governors) in order to control the system of government (vs. 1-2). The satraps were officials who were accountable to these three administrators or governors, and these three in turn would render direct accounts to the king. And Daniel was one of those three main administrators of government (v. 2).

It's assumed that these three rulers were people of utmost confidence and proven loyalty. Likewise, they were subordinates who were only held accountable by the king. They were over all the satraps, who were like the administrators of the various provinces. In appointing these governors, the aim of the king was to not suffer any loss (v. 2). The three governors had to take care that the interests of the king were not affected. They had to watch out for any public official in the kingdom who was succumbing to the temptation to keep funds from the treasury.

Daniel was one of those three trusted men whom the king had placed as governors. What's amazing is that he wasn't a Persian, but simply a Jew, but whose quality was, without a doubt, integrity.

B. The Integrity Of A Faithful Man (vs. 3-4)

Daniel 6:3 says: *"Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom."* (v. 3) The reason was very clear; this Jewish man, government administrator, was loyal and scrupulously honest. How important is the impressive testimony of a man of integrity in spheres or positions of authority!

This testimony of integrity must have been noticed by the other public servants. How come this Jew was held in great esteem by King Darius? It's easy to imagine that Daniels fellow administrators must have felt very uncomfortable, and also afraid to have such an honest and loyal man over them, monitoring and pointing out any indication of corruption in the public administration of the government.

So, it's not surprising that they tried to do everything to get him out of power and accuse him to the king. The Bible says that the other governors and the satraps tried to accuse him on several occasions about bad administrative management or some managerial fault in his work, but they found no fault (v. 4).

C. A Malicious Trap (vs. 5-9)

Faced with the impossibility of accusing Daniel, the officials resolved that the only way to discredit him would be through his faith, related to the *"law of his God."* They got together and planned his downfall (v. 5). Then, they suggested to the king that he sign a decree stating that for a period of thirty days, no one could pray to any god or human being except to the king (v. 7). The plan was to catch Daniel worshipping God.

Their idea was to make the king feel how important he was in the empire. The king, of course, fell into the trap by signing a decree that, according to the laws of the Medes and the Persians, couldn't be dismissed. Of course, the purpose of that decree was to harm Daniel and make him look bad in the eyes of the king.

D. Devotion To God In The Midst Of A Hostile Scenario (vs. 10-13)

When Daniel learned of the decree, far from being frightened or afraid, he went to pray to God in his chamber (vs. 10-11). He didn't suppress his devotion to God. Another person in his place probably would have been very careful and opted to hide or simply abide by the edict by not doing his three devotions a day. A man of integrity shows it not only when he is at work, but throughout the day. Daniel showed his devotion to God, not caring that the enemies had set a trap for him. This reminds us of what the apostles replied to the council *"We must obey God rather than human beings!"* (Acts 5:29). This attitude isn't simple civil disobedience, but a firm determination of obedience and devotion to the Lord.

Questions

- How would you define integrity?
- What actions showed Daniel's integrity?
- How can we show integrity today? Mention examples from daily life.

II. God Protects And Accompanies His Faithful (Daniel 6:14-24)

A. A King Who Couldn't Free A Subject (vs. 14-20)

Daniel was accused by his enemies of not respecting the king's edict. It was evident that the trap they had engineered was successful (Daniel 6:13). However, King Darius felt very bad about having yielded to this request (v. 14). Added to this, it was by law that the royal authority couldn't be contradicted or dismissed (v. 15). If the laws of the land could be easily broken, political control would be lost.

The egocentricity of the king had brought consequences, but Darius' great esteem for Daniel is surprising; he searched all day for a legal mechanism to free him from the sentence he had dictated (v. 14). However, the deceivers reminded him that there was no legal way to save Daniel from the sentence to the pit (v. 15). Undeniably, the royal edict had to be fulfilled.

Daniel was thrown into the den of the lions. Darius, feeling very sad, mentioned his only hope for his beloved official Daniel: *"May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!"* (v. 16).

The Bible tells us that the king was sad and couldn't sleep, probably feeling bad for having harmed one of his most loyal subjects by signing a hasty edict (v. 18). The next morning, the king went straight to the pit and asked about the fate of his beloved Daniel (vs. 19-20).

It's clear that this human king couldn't deliver Daniel, although he wanted to. But God, the King of kings, could; for Him, nothing is impossible (Luke 1:27), and he doesn't let his servants who trust in his name be ashamed (Psalm 22:5).

B. The Presence Of God For Those Who Trust In Him (vs. 21-23)

Darius' expectation was to know if the God of Daniel had been able to save him from the lions (v. 20). We can imagine his surprise when he heard the voice and response of his beloved official Daniel: *"My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty."* (v. 22)

What a great surprise! This caused much joy in the king, but above all, what a great testimony to a pagan king! God had delivered his faithful servant! Daniel didn't have any injuries when he was taken out of the lion's den (v. 23). The biblical explanation of this event is simple: *"... because he had trusted in his God."* (v. 23) God was present in this distressing experience. Psalm 138:7 says: *"Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life. You stretch out your hand against the anger of my foes; with your right hand you save me."*

C. Justice Was Done To All (v. 24)

Daniel didn't need to ask for compensation for this bad experience. The circumstances were very clear: Daniel's enemies had been *"unmasked"* before King Darius himself. For that reason, Daniel's accusers were thrown into the lions' den, but unlike Daniel, the lions attacked them (v. 24). God knows how to provide justice to those who have integrity of heart!

Questions

- What did Daniel's devotion lead him to?
- Think of an example in which your devotion to God was put to the test?

III. The Exaltation Of God Is A Consequence Of The Courage Shown (Daniel 6:25-28)

A. The Powerful Recognize The Living God (vs. 25-27)

The final result of this lived testimony resulted in another edict of the king to the entire population of his empire in which he commanded everyone to honor and tremble before the presence of the God of Daniel (Daniel 6:22-27).

Darius added that the Lord was a *"living"* God; that is, real. He also acknowledged that his government never ends (v. 26). In this way, we can see that the king understood that the offense wasn't really against Daniel; but against the true God. That's why he clarified that God is capable of doing wonders in heaven and on earth (v. 27). It was the same king who testified about what happened: *"He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions."* (v. 27)

B. Devotion Brings Prosperity (v. 28)

As we have seen in this story, Daniel's devotional habit wasn't going to change because of an edict. This man was never going to betray his conscience. He was even willing to go to the lions' den rather than give up his faith. The result was that Daniel became prosperous once again.

Today, many Christians have their faith put to the test. But, our relationship with God must never be compromised. People of integrity will be successful. Let's remember what the Word says: *"So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian."* (v. 28) God honors those who show integrity in all circumstances and show courage at all times.

Questions

- Why did King Darius exalt the name of God?
- Did the prosperity in Daniel's life bring about any change?
- What can you do so that prosperity doesn't alienate you from God's purpose for your life?

Conclusion

God is always present in the midst of the trials that His children go through, and He will be glorified by the integrity and determination of His children who are faithful to Him.



The Kingdoms And God's Kingdom

Loysbel Pérez (Cuba)

Passage to study: Daniel 7:1-28

Memory verse: "But the holy people of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever—yes, for ever and ever." Daniel 7:18

Lesson Aim: To motivate resilience in the Christian life, although sometimes we don't see all the desired results, we should not get discouraged, but keep moving forward in the plans that God has for us.

Introduction

The book of Daniel belongs to the group of eschatological books which present a large number of images, symbols and visions. It uses prophetic language and is full of typologies. As a result, it's a bit difficult to reach one clear interpretation. The best option is to present the most united scholarly opinions.

When presenting this lesson, we must keep in mind that we don't have the ultimate answers or the exclusive interpretation of the text. Our approach should be to present the ideas which have been accepted in history as well as those of current scholarship. In the text of the vision of the four beasts, most of the commentators have coincided in very similar interpretations.

I. The Vision Of The Four Beasts (Daniel 7:1-14)

A. Historical And Interpretative Vision

Before we can interpret Daniel's text, we must analyze the vision. Daniel had a dream and saw visions during the first reign of Belshazzar in Babylon (v. 1). This vision isn't in chronological order following the lion's den, which occurred in the time of the Persian Empire. The vision of chapter 7 predates the Belshazzar drunken party by approximately 16 or 17 years. This celebration took place in the year 17 of his reign. So, the arrangement of the material in Daniel's book is theological and not chronological.

Daniel saw that four huge beasts came out of the sea, each one different from the other (Daniel 7:3). This language is very similar to that used by the apostle John in the book of Revelation, where it's also written that a beast came out of the sea (Revelation 13).

The first vision of Daniel (Daniel 7:2-14) contains several symbolic elements:

- i). The sea, typifying the nations of the Gentile world (Isa. 17:12, Rev. 17:15). It can also refer to the pristine abyss, which was defined as the abode of

sea monsters that were hostile to God (Job 26:12, Psalm 74:13-14);

- ii). The storm, typifying the world war (Isaiah 17:12);
- iii). Beasts typifying the kingdoms of the world powers. The beasts in this chapter represent the same as the metals in the image of Daniel 2. That's to say: Babylon, Medes-Persia, Greece and Rome;
- iv). The Ancient of Days refers to God (Daniel 7:13);
- v). The Son of Man mentioned in Daniel 7:13, representing the figure of Jesus.

Daniel points to Christ in a divine/human and in a messianic sense. One such as "... a son of man ..." (v. 13) became the Son of Man, the Savior of the world. In contrast to the domain of the beasts, he is given a universal and eternal kingdom. Undoubtedly, this terminology used in Daniel is referring prophetically to Jesus and the establishment of His Kingdom.

B. The Four Beasts (vs. 4-8)

1. First Beast – Like A Lion (Daniel 7:4)

This first beast is considered to represent the nation of Babylon. This conclusion has been reached, among others, due to the revelation of Daniel 2, where he clearly identified the head of gold as Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. There's also symbolism in this as Babylon had statues of lions with wings, and also the prophet Jeremiah spoke of Nebuchadnezzar as a lion (Jeremiah 50:17).

2. Second Beast – Like A Bear (Daniel 7:5)

It represents the Medes and Persian Empire, successor of the Babylonians. Historically, it's recognized in this way. In Palestine, it was very common for the bear to be considered second in ferocity, always after the lion.

3. Third Beast - Like A Leopard (Daniel 7:6)

While Babylon had two wings, this empire had four wings. This was referring to Greece, a powerful nation of antiquity that, under the orders of Alexander the Great

and his armies, managed to defeat the civilized world in short periods of time. Also, it's very possible that "the four leopard heads" are typifying the four divisions of the Greek Empire led by four generals after the death of Alexander.

4. Fourth Beast (Daniel 7:7-8)

Although the three previous beasts showed similarities of animals, this fourth beast was different. It was more powerful. This beast referred to the Roman Empire. Rome was in history the successor of Greece.

All the descriptions made in these verses of Daniel corresponds with the Roman Empire.

Questions

- Explain the meaning of the following terms:
 - * The sea:
 - * The storm:
 - * The beasts:
 - * The Ancient of Days:
 - * The Son of Man:
- Match the beast with the description.

1. First beast 2. Second beast 3. Third beast 4. Fourth beast

Bear (Medes & Persians), Rome, Lion (Babylon), Leopard (Greece)

II. The Explanation Of The Vision And The Eschatological Explanation (Daniel 7:15-28)

A. Biblical-Historical Interpretation

The passage of Daniel 7 shows us the development and progress of human government during the Gentile period. This is shown through the symbolism of ferocious, terrible, wild beasts. All this has been characteristic of the kingdoms of this world, that achieve their power through military achievements, often by brute force, in contrast to the kingdom of God that's glorious and eternal for all peoples and languages, and which will never end (Dan. 7:13-14).

Daniel 7:17 is key to understanding this passage. The writer tells us clearly that the four beasts represent four kingdoms that will emerge from the earth. This shows us a historical progression and Daniel 7:18 illuminates us in the eschatological interpretation of this vision. But Daniel wanted to know in detail the meaning of the fourth beast, because it was by far the most aggressive of all the beasts (Dan. 7:19). The characteristics of the fourth beast (Rome) are found in verses 23 to 25.

Next, let's look at some similarities between the fourth beast, mentioned in Daniel 7:7-8, and the one mentioned in Revelation 13:1-7.

- The two rise from the sea.
- The two cannot be compared to any known animal.
- Both have 10 horns.
- Daniel and John saw that the empire would be divided into 10 kingdoms in the future.
- The two make war against the saints.
- Both exist during the same period of climatic catastrophes.

It's important to note that they never formed 10 kingdoms in the Roman Empire. From a historical perspective, this has never happened, which suggests that this part of the vision has a futuristic meaning. At the end of time, an empire will arise that's typified in this prophecy as Rome. It will be the empire of the Antichrist who will assume the political direction of the 10 kingdoms, which the 10 kings will deliver to him (Rev. 17:12-13). However, these numbers should not necessarily be taken literally.

The scope of this empire will be worldwide (Dan. 7:23), governed by the Antichrist in several areas: political, religious and commercial. But the judgment of God will fall on the Antichrist and his empire (Dan. 7:11, Rev. 17). The other nations (other beasts) will lose their rights, and will be governed by the iron rod (Rev. 12:5).

B. Eschatological Interpretations Of The Fourth Beast

It's remarkable in the biblical text that starting with Daniel 7:19, the writer shows great interest in the fourth beast, since it was very different. That's why we should consider some interpretations such as the following:

History points to Rome. This interpretation considers the beast to be Rome, and the ten horns represent an indefinite number of kings and governments until the return of Christ. The little horn will be the one who will rule at the end of time and oppress the people of God. Christ will return, destroy him and judge the world.

Questions

- Name three characteristics of the fourth beast.
- As for the church, what did Daniel write about the fullness of this kingdom in verse 22? In verse 27?

III. Teaching For Today

Although it's very difficult to define all the mysteries that are revealed in the book of Daniel, we do understand that his prophetic expression had historical and also eschatological fulfillment. Therefore, we now know that there are events written in this book that have already been fulfilled, and others that are about to be fulfilled.

When analyzing carefully, we observe that in the first six chapters of the book of Daniel, he is the interpreter of the dreams that other people had, but in the last

chapters, it's he who has visions and dreams, and asks for help in their interpretation.

In chapter seven, which may have a very unusual and incomprehensible language for some, we can draw practical lessons for the church today.

A. God Shows Visions To His Children (Daniel 7)

All of Daniel's revelations brought consolation to the people of Israel who were suffering and being oppressed. Through these words, God demonstrated to the people of Israel that He remained on their side, just as He was with Daniel and his companions. This was one of the purposes of this vision.

The biblical text shows us that God speaks to His sons and daughters, and even in hopeless conditions, His Word never fails. These two visions revealed in Daniel 7 reflect the character of a God who communicates with His people and announces what's to come and that He has control of the future. God reveals himself to people who walk in integrity, people who don't fail him even if the cost is to be thrown into the den of lions.

God continues to reveal Himself to the church today. He continues to give visions to His sons and daughters for well-defined purposes (Acts 2:17). The visions and revelations that God gives have two fundamental characteristics:

- i.) They're for the edification of the body of Christ. They aren't someone's personal benefit, or for the exaltation of a leader; and
- ii.) They're in full harmony with the Bible. Nothing that contradicts the Scripture can be taken as a revelation from God.

B. God Is In Control Of The Kingdoms Of This World (Daniel 7:10-11)

Although powerful kingdoms like these four have existed in history, and others that we know today, God is in control and they all have to submit to His authority and power. These kingdoms are temporary. One day, they emerge, reach splendor, but then they fall, and end up weakened. All the kingdoms of this world are subject to divine judgment (v. 10). Everything is under the control of the supreme Lord.

The time will come when the books will be opened and the Judge will sit in judgment, and all will give an account before Him. The apostle John shares this in Rev. 20:12.

C. God Always Gives Victory To His People (Daniel 7:27)

Daniel reflects a principle that appears throughout Scripture, God always gives victory to His people. Even when beasts, nations, demons, etc. rise up against the people of God, He gives victory. We experience daily a God who helps us go from triumph to triumph, but

the final victory will be consummated with the second coming of Christ. The passage in Daniel 7 emphasizes that the righteous went through trials, and other trials will come, but the hand of God will always be present. He never abandons those who wait for Him (Deut. 31:8).

D. God Promises A Kingdom Without Equal (Daniel 7:14, 18, 22, 27)

A word very frequently used throughout the passage of Daniel 7 is 'kingdom.' Although in the first vision these four beasts are shown as four great kingdoms, God reveals the majesty and character of His Kingdom. Prophetically He announces the kingdom of the Messiah, of Christ, where the King is the Son of Man (v. 13). Authority comes from God (the Ancient of Days). It's not a carnal kingdom, but a spiritual one.

This promised kingdom is universal. It's not just composed of a chosen group, or of those who believe they have super faith. The Kingdom is for all His body (the church), and He has dominion over nations, peoples, and languages (vs. 14, 27). It will be eternal, it will not end, it will never be destroyed (v. 14). The kingdoms of this world have dominion only until the final reign of Christ comes into action (vs. 9-10).

Regarding the church, Daniel wrote about the fullness of this kingdom:

- i.) The saints will receive it (v. 22);
- ii.) The saints are granted dominion and majesty of the Kingdom (v. 27).

Without a doubt, Daniel presented a prelude to the Kingdom of Christ. Today, the church enjoys the privileges of that Kingdom. Jesus said that "... the kingdom of God is among us" (Luke 17:21), although the final consummation will be when the family is fully reunited with the Lord.

The church today must have a full understanding of God's kingdom. So, to master this subject becomes essential since it was announced by the Old Testament literature and is in full compliance today. We must fully live out the values of the kingdom of God, as His children, doing everything we can to contribute to the eternal purpose of God.

Questions

- What has God has taught you today with the study of this lesson.

Conclusion

Several kingdoms have been typified as beasts and each of them with peculiar characteristics of carnality and ferocity, descriptive of humans without God. But He has declared in His Word the greatness of His Kingdom, which is incomparable. This is an unparalleled Kingdom that brings hope to all of us.



Daniel's Vision Of A Ram And A Goat

Sergio Solano (Peru)

Passage to study: Daniel 8:1-27

Memory verse: "He said: 'I am going to tell you what will happen later in the time of wrath, because the vision concerns the appointed time of the end.'" Daniel 8:19

Lesson Aim: To reflect on the inevitable manifestations of evil and the faithful sovereignty of God in favor of His people.

Introduction

We need to understand some Jewish history of the intertestamental period. Antiochus IV (175-164 BC) was the Greek ruler based in Syria. He gave himself the surname 'Epiphanes' which means 'the visible god.' He was violently bitter against the Jews, and was determined to exterminate them and their religion. He devastated Jerusalem in 168 BC, defiled the Temple, offered a pig on its altar, erected an altar to Jupiter, prohibited Temple worship, forbade circumcision on pain of death, sold thousands of Jewish families into slavery, destroyed all copies of Scripture that could be found, and slaughtered everyone discovered in possession of such copies, and resorted to every conceivable torture to force Jews to renounce their religion. This led to the Maccabean revolt, one of the most heroic feats in Jewish history (Wikipedia).

This chapter refers to this period, although Daniel is living still during the Babylonian period when he saw his vision. Daniel 8:14 promises that the desecrated temple would be recovered. "He said to me, - It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be re-consecrated." The Jews celebrate the day they were able to re-consecrate the temple in their feast of Hanukkah today. The pictures recorded in Daniel's vision are hard to imagine. The geographical backdrop in this whole vision is the Middle East of those days.

I. The Vision Of The Ram And The Goat (Daniel 8:1-14)

In the third year of Belshazzar's reign, Daniel had a vision which began with the description of a ram with two horns, followed by a goat that had only one horn. (vs. 1-5). The ram seemed to be very powerful since his territory extended towards the four cardinal points of the earth. He was haughty and attacked other countries without anyone being able to stop him (v. 4). However, it wasn't long before the strength of this ram was weakened

by the appearance of the goat from the west (v. 5). This goat slaughtered the ram with great success, wounding it and destroying its horns. What's more, he even trampled on it, and there was no one who could defend it! (vs. 6-7). Then the goat became very powerful (v. 8). What's striking in this image is that in its heyday, its only horn was broken, and in its place grew four new horns pointing to the four cardinal points of the earth (v. 8).

A. Purpose Of The Emergence Of The Goat

Notice the representation of the little horn, mentioned in Daniel 8:9. This horn that suddenly blossomed from one of the four horns presented in this same chapter is the same figure as the 'little horn' of Daniel 7. The purpose of its appearance is to have supremacy over the territories of the earth, including the 'glorious land' (Daniel 8:9), probably Palestine. The mystery that we find in this section is alarming. This horn sought to dominate every earthly empire that was around it, even the heavens and everything there was. It wanted to be over everyone. (v. 25).

Although this chapter is referring to an earthly king, he was motivated by the evil one who intruded into our history. We know that God has gloriously redeemed us from the clutches of his power. We worship Him for all that He has done for us, giving us victory over the enemy, Satan.

B. The Purpose Of The Angelic Presence

Daniel was overcome by the presence of the angel, and needed to be revived and comforted by the angel (v. 18). After this vision, Daniel was exhausted! He lay ill for several days and was astonished and appalled at what he saw.

Questions

- Where was Daniel when he saw the vision?
- What was the ram like and what did it do?
- What was the goat like?

II. Gabriel Explains The Vision To Daniel (Daniel 8:15-27)

A. Meaning Of The Ram And The Goat

The angel Gabriel explained what these animals represented. The ram represented the power of the Medes and Persians who ruled from 539 to 331 B.C. (v. 20) and the goat, represented Greece (v. 21).

Here we're seeing two of the empires which dominated the world at this time. The Medes and the Persians under Cyrus conquered and took possession of the Babylonian empire. But in due course, Alexander the great, a powerful Greek warrior, conquered the Medes and the Persians. When he died at thirty-three years of age, his four generals divided the kingdom among themselves (the four new horns). *"In the latter part of their reign, when rebels have become completely wicked, a fierce-looking king, a master of intrigue, will arise."* This refers to one of the Greek rulers who dominated the rest (v. 23). Here the prophecy is alluding to Antiochus IV, who appropriated large geographic areas, subjugated crowds of inhabitants, and even persecuted many of the people of God (vs. 24-25).

B. The Endless Dominion And Power Of The Little Horn

Although verse 14 describes a happy ending, what God was warning the people was that they were going to suffer through the eruption of this horn. For a time, the people of God would be devastated. This vision, for Daniel, would have represented a frightening experience. Daniel was terribly moved by the suffering that was prophesied by the angel and he shuddered and fainted. Bad times were coming, but God was promising them that it would be made right in the end.

How many times has the church, when experiencing trials, not wanted to patiently accept the way of the cross of pain, and suffering! However, the Lord is ready to strengthen our spirit in the midst of desolation, just as the angel Gabriel acted before the unexpected reaction of Daniel, servant of God (Daniel 8:18).

Questions

- Historically, what nations are referred to in Daniel 8?
- How did Daniel feel after seeing the vision and receiving the interpretation? Why do you think he felt that way?

III. Message For Us Today (Daniel 8:1-27)

Some have said that Daniel chapter 8 is a preacher's nightmare. Even noted scholars hesitate to be dogmatic in their interpretation of this chapter. Although the angel Gabriel explains the historical meaning to Daniel, we have

to ask ourselves if this passage has some bearing on times beyond these empires that came and went.

Antiochus IV caused havoc in Palestine of the second century BC. He did his best to destroy the Jewish religion. The deuterocanonical book of the Maccabees tells of how one family stood up against this powerful and evil Greek-Syrian king, and with prayer and reliance upon God, they accomplished something extraordinary, Judah got free of their Greek imperial masters, and until the Roman conquest, was independent of world powers.

Although the passage is talking about those times, there's a relevance for all times. Tyrants have come over and over again. We see this in the period of the Roman persecution, which is the context of the book of Revelation, for instance. The Bible seems to predict some evil power at the end of time. The "little horn" seems to change before our eyes, from a mortal man to an incarnation of Satan himself. The focus seems to shift from the Israelites, Israel, Jerusalem, and the temple, to the "host of heaven" and the "stars of heaven." This picture could also represent some sinister future powerful figure who could bring much suffering and tribulation to God's people. Since God gave the victory over Antiochus IV, in whatever crisis or political persecution that we may have to pass through, we know that He can do it again.

History has shown that what Daniel saw during the Babylonian period in a vision of the future came to pass. God's Spirit has inspired the biblical authors to record these prophecies to remind us that God is in control. Many of the Old Testament prophecies were clearly fulfilled in the New Testament. We look back in wonder, confessing that we would never have planned it that way. Prophecy assures us of God's infinite holiness, wisdom, power, and goodness. We can trust Him.

Questions

- Name some prophecies that have come true?
- What does this tell us about God?
- Even if some terrible person like the little horn should come into power and persecute the church today, how could this passage in Daniel encourage us today?

Conclusion

Therefore, we must strengthen ourselves in the joy and future intervention of our Lord Jesus Christ. We faithfully believe that all evil will be overcome. Meanwhile, let us fight with courage and great trust in God. Let's not look at any cardinal point; but rather upward, to the true God, and with great conviction, let us declare as Moses did: *"With God we'll gain the victory, and he will trample down our enemies."* (Psalm 60:12) Amen.



Prayer, Our Greatest Resource

Raúl Soto López (Chile)

Passage to study: Daniel 9:1-27

Memory verse: “Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary.” Daniel 9:17

Lesson Aim: To reflect on the great blessings and benefits of developing a life of fervent prayer, as Daniel did.

Introduction

The prophet Daniel had to exercise his ministry while living in captivity. He was taken to Babylon in the first deportation of the Jews by King Nebuchadnezzar (605 BC). Part of the prophecies of the prophet Jeremiah, who had long ago announced the destruction of the temple of God and Jerusalem, was fulfilled (Jeremiah 25:11).

Daniel lived during the transition from the splendor and glory of the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar, which was considered to be the golden age of Babylon, and the subsequent fall of that empire under Belshazzar. Daniel also saw the rise of the Empire of the Medes and Persians under the mandate of Cyrus, who would become a key player in the restoration of the kingdom of Israel.

Daniel exercised his prophetic profession for several years, and when he was advanced in age, he studied Jeremiah’s prophecy and saw that the captivity was approaching the 70 years that Jeremiah had prophesied. This motivated him to turn to God in prayer, asking him to fulfill his prophecy (Jeremiah 25:11-13).

I. Daniel Prays For His People (Dan. 9:1-19)

A. His Prayer

By having an encounter with the Word in the writings of the prophet Jeremiah, Daniel had a desire in his heart to seek the face of God in prayer. A burning fire began in his heart.

In the same way that God motivated Daniel to seek Him through the Scriptures, God is calling us to seek His face now. He desires that we too have hearts with a burning desire to seek His presence through prayer (Psalm 105:4, Amos 5:4).

Daniel not only prayed, but he **sought** the Lord in prayer (Daniel 9:3). He pleaded with the Lord for his people. The word to plead implies his attitude of humble submission and prostration, seeking with all his heart the mercy of the Lord. Praying or pleading with the Lord denotes our dependence on the mercy of God. We understand that He alone has control and authority. God is unique and incomparable.

B. Daniel Fasted

Daniel not only sought the Lord in prayer, he fasted (v. 3). This is one of the most powerful weapons that God has put at our disposal. To use this weapon, we must understand it and know how to use it. In Isaiah 58, Jehovah rebukes his people because they fasted, but didn’t live as He commanded. So, obedience is extremely important in the midst of the search for God in fasting.

Fasting without obedience to the Word is only abstention from food. Therefore, fasting in sincere obedience to the Word continues to be an important part of the search for God. It’s the time that we separate from everything to devote ourselves to having an encounter with Jesus Christ.

In the New Testament, we see that even our Lord Jesus Christ fasted. After Jesus came out of the waters of baptism, the Spirit took him to the desert where he fasted for forty days and forty nights (Matthew 4:1-2).

Our Lord Jesus has also revealed to us that there are unclean spirits that cannot be expelled but with help and prayer. The disciples were challenged by Jesus that this demon would only be exorcised with prayer and fasting (Mark 9:29). Fasting is extremely important if we want our prayers to be heard by God, and receive a positive response according to the will of God.

C. Sackcloth and Ashes

Sackcloth was a rough garment that was used as a sign of mourning or great sadness. It was uncomfortable. Sometimes they also slept on ashes (Esther 4:3, Jonah 3:6). Maybe the equivalent would be to find a place to kneel on the hard floor, rather than praying in our beds.

Although at present, we don't need to feel pain by wearing scratchy clothing, but we can wear sackcloth in the heart. Remember that our sackcloth shouldn't be because of carnal or selfish sadness, but for love of the Lord and His work as the Holy Spirit directs us.

Prostration in ashes was the expression of the greatest humiliation and pain for the believers of the past. As we said, we don't need to prostrate ourselves in ashes to show that we feel pain or that we're humbled before the Lord, but we need to come to the Lord with humble hearts.

In his prayer, Daniel confessed to God for his sins and the sins of the people (Daniel 9:4-6). Although he had remained faithful to God in Babylon, and God had revealed great things to him, Daniel had the humility to recognize that he wasn't greater than the others. His prayer moved the heart of God, and without waiting for it to end, God sent the angel Gabriel to speak with him (Daniel 9:20-21).

Questions

- How did Daniel pray and what was he praying for?
- What means of grace do we have at our disposal today in order to get closer to God?

II. God Reveals Himself To Daniel (Daniel 9:20-23)

A. God Is Real

Daniel 9:20-21 says: *"While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and making my request to the Lord my God for his holy hill— while I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice."*

This verse teaches us that we must be fully sure that when we seek God, we'll find Him. He shows Himself to us when our faith is right. We need to believe in our living, real and present Lord. The appearance of the angel Gabriel (no longer in visions, but in person) was a supernatural manifestation on God's part (v. 21).

When we pray to God, we must approach Him with faith and full assurance that we'll find a response from God. In this regard, the Bible exhorts us in the

following way: *"...without faith it's impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."* (Hebrews 11:6)

In order to have an answer from God, it's fundamental that our faith be strong and well founded upon Christ. Without this faith, it's impossible to please God. How can we get a response from someone we don't believe in!

Daniel searched with all his heart for God. Likewise, this man used all the resources he knew to meet with God. Daniel knew that God was present, and that He could answer his prayer. This teaches us that when we pray, we must do so with full faith that He is real, and that He is there, present and willing to not only listen to us, but also to give us an answer.

B. God Reveals Himself

This God whom Daniel was praying to was the God he had seen in visions and whom he had never doubted was real. His faith was strong and well founded so that nothing and no one could shake it.

On that occasion, God went further. He allowed the angel Gabriel to show himself in a visible and real way (v. 21). This was a shocking event for the prophet, for it went beyond what he himself expected as God's answer to his prayer. This helps us to reflect on how many times we pray to God and actually expect a reply to our faith. It's in those moments that our faith makes us wait for something, but God can reward us and surprise us beyond what we were asking for (Ephesians 3:20-21).

Faith must not only be focused on being sure that God answers us, but also on being sure that He is with us and is willing to send his angels to come to our help (Luke 22:43). Daniel 8:16 says: *"And I heard a man's voice from the Ulai calling, 'Gabriel, tell this man the meaning of the vision.'"*

God uses many means to answer our request. So on that occasion, when Daniel was crying out, God sent an angel, although God could also have used any other form of manifestation. Let's pray not only with faith for an answer, but with total confidence that the Almighty God will be glorified in the midst of our genuine search and faith in Him.

C. God Gave Daniel Understanding And Wisdom

Daniel 9:22-23 says, *"He instructed me and said to me, 'Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding. As soon as you began to pray, a word went out, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed. Therefore, consider the word and understand the vision.'"*

What impressive words must these have been for Daniel's heart! God answered Daniel because He loved him very much. No doubt we can learn a lot from these verses. God's response came in a supernatural way because Daniel's communion with God was deep and solid.

Many seek an answer or a supernatural manifestation of God, but their lives leave much to be desired. They don't have a deep relationship of faith, or live according to God's commands. This should lead us to reflect that when we want to have an answer from God, we must have the support of a holy life. Daniel not only demonstrated his faith in the time of prayer, but he also showed it throughout his life lived in holiness. Remember that God's response is in accordance with a good testimony.

It was God who helped Daniel understand the vision. Humanly, Daniel wouldn't have been able to understand it. God opened Daniel's mind and heart to help him understand. In a similar way, God acts with us. If we ask Him, He will give us wisdom and understanding to understand the answer He is giving us (Proverbs 2:6).

Questions

- How did God reveal Himself to Daniel?
- How does He reveal himself today?
- How does God answer prayer?

III. God's Answer (Daniel 9:24-27)

A. The Restoration Of Israel

Remember that Daniel was looking for a reply from God at the end of the period of Babylonian exile that he and his compatriots had suffered. Daniel knew there was a portion of the biblical prophecy that assured that God was going to bring a restoration, and thus put an end to the slavery of the people of Israel in Babylon.

So, what the angel Gabriel was revealing to Daniel was precisely the exact times when this would happen; but at the same time, it would take him beyond that (Daniel 9:24). He understood that Israel's true freedom wouldn't come just with the restoration, but with the true perfect sacrifice that would make them free from all spiritual bondage.

In Daniel 9:25, we see that the prophecy would begin to be fulfilled with King Cyrus when he gave the edict of rebuilding Israel, and which was carried out through Nehemiah, Ezra and others.

B. The Times

Almost all commentators agree that the seventy sevens should be understood as seventy 'weeks' of years. In other words, a period of 490 years. These verses provide a kind of 'clock' that gives an idea of when the Messiah would come and some of the events that would accompany His appearance. The prophecy proceeds to divide the 490 years into three smaller units: one of 49 years, another of 434 years, and one of seven years.

The last 'week' of seven years is subdivided in half (Daniel 9:25). Daniel understood that the times of true freedom aren't brought about by mankind, or a words spoken by us; our times are planned by God, and things will happen according to what He says. When we seek God, we must be willing to obey the way God decides to act, and in His timing. He wants to act. The matter of restoration was urgent, but it wasn't yet God's timing. So, the Lord revealed His plans to his servant Daniel.

C. The Crucifixion

In Daniel 9:26-27, we read a great revelation. These verses are talking about the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Anointed One of God. Beyond understanding prophecy, what we must understand is that God's response to Daniel's prayer was clear and concise. When we seek God in the right way, we'll also receive God's response directly.

Perhaps, God's answers many times will not be what we want to hear, but we need to seek God in a sincere and true way with a spirit of extreme obedience, willing to receive the answer and obey it under God's parameters.

Questions

- Do you believe that total obedience is necessary in order to receive God's response? Why?
- How is your prayer life?
- Do you have a special time each day set aside for prayer?
- How should we be praying for our nation(s)?

Conclusion

Prayer is the greatest resource a Christian can have, but at the same time, it's one of the greatest challenges because it demands a lot from us if we want to see the glory of God manifested. We need to live in obedience and wait with faith for the answer to our prayers. Let's not abandon prayer. Prayer and intercession are important aspects of our Christian life if we want to live for the glory of God!



Searching For The Lord In Times Of Conflict

Marco Rocha (Argentina)

Passage to study: Daniel 10:2-21

Memory verse: "...Then he continued, 'Don't be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them.'" Daniel 10:12

Lesson Aim: To encourage the students to decide to seek the Lord, especially in difficult times.

Introduction

Start the class by asking your students how they react to conflicts and difficult situations in life. Next, write a list of these contributions on the board. Then conclude by emphasizing how important it is to seek God in the most difficult moments of life. You can also request some testimony that you consider to be uplifting and could help as an introduction to the study.

The last three chapters of the book of Daniel must be seen as a single unit, where the action of the governors of the world and the affliction of God's people are revealed until the consummation of His kingdom. This revelation, which has distinctive features with respect to the previous revelations made to Daniel, allowed him to know more deeply the glory of God and the manifestation of His power in times of conflict for his people. The message of this chapter is relevant for all times. Daniel 10 especially helps us recognize the importance of fasting, worshipping God and valuing his Word.

I. Fasting, A Powerful Weapon (Dan. 10:1-3)

After four years had passed since the vision of the seventy weeks, in a time of political conflicts and before a future that seemed uncertain for the people of God, Daniel, now an old man, decided to start a campaign of prayer and fasting. He set apart special times where he chose to seek more intensely the guidance of God and His holy presence. He deprived himself of food and drink as well as ointments or perfumes (v. 3). In this way, he was putting aside for a certain time, legitimate daily pleasures, in search of a greater good: The presence of God and guidance to do His will. This brought immediate results for Daniel and his times, and points to an important means of grace which has eternal value.

When we're faced with conflicts in life, many of them unexpected, how should we face them? We may be tempted to immerse ourselves in affliction and pain. In times like these, spiritual disciplines such as fasting, praying or reading the Scriptures will direct our mind and heart toward God. All this will help us deepen our communion with Him, strengthen our faith and grow spiritually by concentrating on His eternal purposes over our daily struggles. Therefore, we should consider fasting as a powerful weapon, especially in the time of conflict.

Taylor says the following: "*Fasting is a spiritual discipline, usually related to prayer that involves voluntary abstinence from certain foods. The term can be used in the general sense of abstaining from normal or pleasure activities in order to allow more time for prayer. For example, refusing sleep, recreation or normal work routine.*" (Taylor, Richard, Beacon Theological Dictionary, USA, CNP, 1984)

We need to acquire the habit of incorporating this spiritual discipline into our lives to strengthen our communion with God, especially in the most difficult days of our lives.

On the other hand, there are certain dangers related to the abuse of this spiritual discipline that we must consider when deciding to use this powerful weapon for our spiritual growth. One of these dangers is to believe that fasting is an end in itself, as the Word in the Old Testament expresses it: "*Ask all the people of the land and the priests, 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months for the past seventy years, was it really for me that you fasted?'*" (Zechariah 7:5)

If the fast isn't directed towards God, then it's only a human practice whose results don't edify us or make us grow spiritually, but, on the contrary, they distance us from Him by concentrating our effort, mind and heart on ourselves and our reality. On

the contrary, by directing fasting to God, we divest ourselves of our own interests and surrender to His direction and will.

Another danger is to trust that through fasting, we can win God's favor. Jesus teaches us about this in his story about the Pharisee and the tax collector where the Pharisee boasted of fasting twice a week (Luke 19:12), trusting in his own righteousness and belittling others, ignoring even the tax collector who was by his side, repenting of his sin, who Jesus said would be justified before him (Luke 18:9-14).

Finally, another danger is to use fasting to show religiosity or to demonstrate before the eyes of others a supposedly higher level of spirituality. Jesus warned us of this danger in Matthew 6:16, where we read: *"When you fast, don't look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they're fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full."*

Just as Daniel decided to fast with a sincere and humble heart in a time of conflict and uncertainty, so we can do the same and incorporate the powerful weapon of fasting as a spiritual discipline on a regular basis when we have to face the most uncertain moments that happen to us.

Questions

- Describe Daniel's fast.
- What are some of the dangers that the believer who is preparing to fast can fall into?

II. The Lord Shows His Glory And Splendor To Daniel (Daniel 10:5-9)

Daniel 10:5-9 tells us how this Jewish man had an encounter with a glorious being, reminding us of the vision that the Apostle John had on the island of Patmos (Rev. 1:9-20). There are coincidences between both cases in the description of this glorious being. We can observe that in both cases, this being was girded with gold, shone from head to foot with exalted light, his eyes were like torches of fire, and He had a voice like the sound of a multitude.

The person that John saw identified himself in the following way: *"I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever!"* (Revelation 1:18). Who could doubt that Daniel saw, in a different context, the same being - the eternal Word?

According to Daniel's vision, the man's garment was made of linen, the same material from which the garment of the high priest was made. His body glowed like topaz, a very valuable precious gem in different colors.

Although there were people who accompanied Daniel, he was the only one who saw the vision. The rest realized that something glorious was happening, and they fled and hid out of fear (Daniel 10:7). This situation is similar to the meeting of Saul of Tarsus with the Lord Jesus on his way to Damascus. Those who accompanied him were astonished without being able to see what Saul saw, but they could hear a voice that made them aware of the glory of the Lord (Acts 9:3-7).

When we go through situations of conflict that cause us distress, we can decide to plunge into despair and pain, or seek the Lord with greater zeal. At such times, spiritual disciplines such as fasting will help us focus on this intense search for His guidance and presence. Daniel's experience reminds us that nothing that happens to us will change the beauty and splendor of our Lord. Even in the darkest moments of life, believers can approach His glorious presence to find clarity to face our needs. In doing so, we can recover the ability to see what's happening to us from a spiritual point of view, rather than just seeing the hardness of reality that's hitting us. Our faith will be strengthened as we behold the glory and radiance of our Lord.

If we can turn our attention away from our own problems and difficulties of life with sincere and humble hearts, and realize the glorious presence of the Lord, the perspective of our problems will take on true dimensions. This isn't just about amazement or admiration, but implies coming willingly to listen to His holy voice and do His will. The glorious presence of the Lord will help us be aware of our imperfections and our need for dealing with them. A person with a proud heart, unwilling to depend on the Lord, won't be able to recognize the divine glory and will continue to be submerged in their own inconveniences and personal difficulties.

Faced with the conflicts of life, and especially in times of affliction, we can decide to seek the Lord in more depth, becoming aware of His guiding presence in our lives. To this end, fasting is one of the most powerful weapons that our God has provided for us, but we should avoid falling into certain dangers that threaten the true meaning of this uplifting discipline.

Questions

- What happens when we seek the Lord with sincerity of heart?
- What are the qualities that a believer who yearns to seek correctly for the Lord in prayer should have.

III. The Lord Speaks To Daniel (Daniel 10:11-21)

Daniel 10:11-12 tells us in detail what the Lord said to Daniel. The Lord touched him and gave him words of comfort and security (vs. 11-19). In a time of political conflicts and affliction in his heart, Daniel had been praying for three weeks. The Lord told him that he had been heard even from the first day of his prayer (v. 12).

When we're willing to surrender faithfully to the will of the Lord, and seek and worship Him with our whole being, we must avoid the temptation of believing that the Lord doesn't listen to our prayers, especially if we're going through a situation of conflict or if there's affliction in our heart. But we must continue to persevere in prayer, "*being watchful and thankful*" (Colossians 4:2), with the certainty of knowing that the Lord hears our prayers. As the writer to the Hebrews says: "*And without faith it's impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him*" (Hebrews 11:6).

Faith occupies a central place in the life of the person who prays, opening his heart to the Lord with the confidence of knowing that He is attentive to his words. The combination of spiritual disciplines such as fasting and prayer will help us find in the Lord what we need to overcome the harshest and most unexpected circumstances of life. The Lord trains His people to emerge victorious, even in situations that seem impossible to overcome on our own. When we submit to His will, we can receive the benefit gained through his sovereign victory on the cross.

It's very difficult to know for certain what the three-week struggle with the prince of the kingdom of Persia consisted of, but we can recognize the intensity of the struggle in which the angel Michael had to intervene (v. 13). Biblical scholars, for the most part, agree that "*the term prince refers to supernatural beings who exert special influence over the affairs of nations. Since the prince of the kingdom of Persia as well as the prince of Greece (20) are in conflict with the Glorious God and his assistant, Michael, it would seem evident that at least some of those beings aren't good angels.*" (Beacon Bible Commentary, Volume 4. USA: CNP, 1991)

Prayer is presented as part of a spiritual struggle, hence the importance today that we must accept the challenge of valuing prayer as spiritual discipline with the importance and reverence it deserves. The use of empty, repetitive or big words, but without commitment to Christian action, may not bring results. Prayer is another powerful weapon for the encounter with the Lord and his glory, as expressed

by the apostle Paul in 2 Cor. 10:4-5 where we read: "*The weapons we fight with aren't the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*"

Even if we decide to ignore this dimension of the Christian life, the church needs urgently constant, fervent and faithful prayer.

At the end of the study passage, Daniel was guided to "*what's written in the book of truth*" (v. 21). The prophet shouldn't listen to anything that contradicts the Word of God. This is true today too. John Wesley summarizes the place of the Scriptures in the life of the believer, taking as central the passage of 2 Timothy 3:15-17, explaining the following: "*From Paul's words to Timothy, we learn that this is a means by which God not only gives, but also confirms and develops true wisdom. The same truth, namely, that God has instituted this means of communicating to man his manifold grace ...*" (Wesley, John, Volume 1, Sermon XVI "The means of grace").

At present, where many believers are attracted by the temptation to listen to extrabiblical doctrines, the message revealed to Daniel reminds us of the importance of the Word of God to evaluate the truthfulness of any teaching or practice. Today we must consider the Bible, which was given to us through plenary inspiration, as a rule of faith and final authority in the life of the church. Scripture is a definitive revelation for believers, and it can never be replaced by Christian thought. Although new teachings and practices appear attractive as means to renew the church, we must examine them carefully in light of the Scriptures.

Questions

- What place should the Word of the Lord occupy in the life of the believer?
- Write a list of concrete actions you will take this week to more intensely seek the Lord and his will.

Conclusion

As we search more deeply for the Lord, He will strengthen and guide us to take the correct steps. True worship will lead us to surrender to His will and adore Him. Also, we need to recognize that the Lord will guide us by His Word, which can never be replaced by any other teaching or human practice. The Lord is looking for believers who seek him sincerely, using means of grace like fasting, prayer and having a passion for His Word.



Daniel And The End Time Prophecies

Elvin Heredia (Puerto Rico)

Passage to study: Daniel 11:2-39

Memory verse: “Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there’s no other; I am God, and there’s none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what’s still to come. I say, ‘My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.’” Isaiah 46:9-10

Lesson Aim: To understand the practical purpose of biblical prophecies so that we can strengthen our relationship with God.

Introduction

Biblical prophecy has always been one of the most fascinating topics for believers, and certainly one of the most challenging topics for biblical scholars. Unfortunately, this combination of fascination and a desire to understand prophecies leads many to divert their attention from the practical applications for everyday Christian life. With this affirmation, we don’t intend to subtract merit or importance from the themes of biblical prophecy, but when we come across some ‘difficult’ matters of theology, we should not lose sight of the fact that, in the first place, some of these issues represent divine mysteries that aren’t within our reach on this earth. On the other hand, some biblical prophecies have already been fulfilled, so that their knowledge and confirmation are already part of the reality that defines our theology.

However, and as a third point of perspective, some biblical prophecies are still part of the program of divine fulfillment, so we need to examine them to avoid confusion and deceit on the part of ‘false prophets’ who want to distract us from our eternal goal and hope. Therefore, our intention in this lesson is to create a prophetic framework for Daniel’s prophecies from the perspective of time (past, present and future), as well as presenting a practical analysis of how these prophecies influence our dynamics of the Christian life.

I. Prior Historical And Prophetic Considerations (Daniel 11:2-4)

The prophecy of Daniel 11 contains particular details about great empires and political powers that would affect the Jewish people in the end times. Note

that from the dream of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2), and the vision of the four beasts (Daniel 7), God was already revealing to Daniel about the four world empires which would precede the kingdom of God. The vision of Daniel 11 has its introduction in the previous chapter. Daniel 10:1 says: *“In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia, a revelation was given to Daniel (who was called Belteshazzar). Its message was true and it concerned a great war. The understanding of the message came to him in a vision.”*

Daniel then presented some important and more specific details about those four coming kingdoms, as revealed to him by God through the angel sent by the Lord. Daniel 10:14 indicates that this angel was sent to let Daniel know the following: *“Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come.”*

This evidently confirms that the vision of Daniel 11 is talking about the period starting with the empire of the Medes and the Persians, the first of these four great empires, up until the reign prevailing in the time of the end, just before the second coming of Christ.

A. Prophetic Elements Fulfilled

The initial elements of the prophecy of Daniel 11 have already had their fulfillment. Thus, the fourth king spoken of was King Xerxes (v. 2). This king invaded Greece and reigned during the years 485-464 B.C. Then, the ‘brave king’ mentioned in Daniel 11:3 was, without a doubt, Alexander the Great, who in a period of approximately eight years achieved the most impressive military conquest in history. Daniel 11:4 tells us that this reign would “be

broken up and parceled out toward the four winds of heaven." This was fulfilled when on his death bed, Alexander the Great divided his empire between four of his generals: Cassander controlled Macedonia and Greece, Ptolemy took the lower part of Syria, Palestine and Egypt, Lesymachus took Asia Minor, and Seleuco Nicator upper Syria. The Ptolemy section and the Seleucian section represent the two Greek kingdoms that affected Judah, Egypt – the “*king of the south*” and Syria the “*king of the north*”.

The historical importance of mentioning these two kings (the corresponding reigns and all their respective kings) is due to the fact that from the start, the Jews were under Egypt and later under the Syrian Greek kings. The other two Greek kingdoms were apparently excluded from the prophecy, giving greater emphasis to the kingdoms related to Judah.

B. Prophetic Elements To Be Fulfilled

Daniel 11 doesn't reveal the names of the kings of the north and south; nevertheless, the historical elements of prophetic fulfillment present these names to us through history itself. Of course, it would suffice to review historical events to find the names of the kings of these conflicting kingdoms, but which cannot be detailed in this lesson for reasons of space.

Also, it's worth mentioning that the expressions ‘*king of the north*’ and ‘*king of the south*’ are generic mentions for each kingdom at certain times in history. Here the prophecy isn't referring to particular kings but to their jurisdiction over Judah. On the other hand, the identities of the kings for the end of time aren't defined. These details of the revelation correspond to unknown parts of the prophecy, and those parts, among others, have been sealed until the time of the end (Daniel 12:4).

Questions

- What was God revealing through the prophecies of Daniel 2 and Daniel 7, and confirmed in Daniel 11?
- According to Daniel 10:14, when was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Daniel 11 projected?

II. The Kings Of The North And South (Daniel 11:5-39)

Let's begin by establishing that the empire located north of Jerusalem was the Syrian Empire, and the empire settled south of Jerusalem was Egypt. History records Antiochus' attack from Syria to Jerusalem, and the war against the Maccabees, a Jewish family that resisted attempts to conquer the Syrian Empire (Daniel 11:7). Later, between the years 65-30 B.C., both Syria and Egypt fell to the Roman Empire.

Now, notice that between verses 39 and 40 ('at the end of time'), we're given the impression of a very long historical leap, given the context of the end time of which the prophecy speaks. This responds to two historical considerations:

1. The names of the possible kings of the north and the south during that long period of time aren't identified, although the constant contention between both empires is affirmed.
2. Perhaps the main reason is that during all that long time there was no constituted nation of Israel. The creation of the State of Israel in 1948 marked an extraordinary prophetic fulfillment. Since then, the empires of the north and south (Syria and Egypt, respectively) again became important in the prophetic moment of the Jewish people, as we see in the 6-Day War in the year 1967.

Christian people who have been attentive to all this historical and prophetic events must consider, today more than ever, that all the fulfillment of the prophecy was and will continue to revolve around Israel. Therefore, we must look very carefully at the clock of God in the Middle East. Israel remains the people of God. Therefore, the prophecy and the end time include Israel in its historical and prophetic framework.

Questions

- What are the two empires identified by Daniel as “*kings of the north*” and “*kings of the south*”?
- What are the two historical considerations why the prophecy locates its fulfillment “*in the end time*”? (vs.39-40).

III. Practical Implications (Daniel 11:5-39)

Among all the teachings that we can derive from the prophecies of Daniel, we can highlight the following:

1. Biblical prophecies are interconnected in different biblical and historical times. The same prophecies of Daniel 2 and Daniel 9 seem to be related to each other, and which have been fulfilled. Also, the 70-week prophecy is related to that of Jeremiah 25:1-11. Another prophecy recorded in Revelation 17 is also connected to that of Daniel 11 but has not yet been fulfilled.
2. The prophetic fulfillments are evidence and confirmation of the existence of God. From the prophecies of Isaiah, through those of Daniel, we see the marked evidence of a true God above the other gods of the heathen nations, gods with whom the people of Israel were unfaithful to God on many occasions. Now in our time, the examination of biblical prophecies re-affirms the existence and the presence of our God in all the historical events of humans.
3. Fulfilled prophecies are the guarantee that the end-time prophecies will also be fulfilled. Since the same story confirms the truth of God's prophecies and the actual existence of the God of prophecy, we must have no doubt that our God is real, and that His Word will be faithfully fulfilled.

It's important to emphasize that prophetic events and their dark details should not detract from the goal that's laid out in Christ. There's a grave danger in the fascination with future things, and many 'false prophets' take advantage of this theological conjuncture to deceive and divert the saints. The prophecies of Daniel reaffirm to us the same words of Jesus in John 14:3 where we read: "...I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." Our Redeemer will return for us. Fulfilled prophecies assure us of this truth. Let's wait for His coming. This is prophecy of the true God.

Questions

- What should Christians be aware of in relation to the prophecies and the Jewish people?
- What lessons can we draw from the prophecies of Daniel for our Christian life?

Conclusion

Daniel's prophecies represented a comfort and evidence for the Jewish people that God had not abandoned them, despite the captivity they were living in. Today, we can reaffirm that divine truth among us. We can trust that God will fulfill what he has promised in His Word, and that despite the signs of the end times, the people of God will receive their reward. God's prophecies confirm His faithfulness. The prophecies given to Daniel anticipate difficult times for us. However, they also assure us victory over the forces of evil.

Notes:



Daniel And Our Future Hope

Elvin Heredia (Puerto Rico)

Passage to study: Daniel 12:1-13

Memory verse: "But you, Daniel, roll up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge." Daniel 12:4

Lesson Aim: To understand end-of-time prophecy as God's future hope of redemption and salvation, motivating us to establish a closer relationship with God.

Introduction

The prophecies recorded in the book of Daniel warn us of future difficult times for the whole world. Daniel 12 seems to place us historically in the immediate times of the restoration of the nation of Israel in 1948, a historical event with great prophetic implications for the end times. In fact, verse 1 begins by making a reference to the context of the previous passage (Daniel 11:36-45), which implies that the prophecy of Daniel 12 is projected to our times.

We aren't going to pretend to clarify all the mysteries of this prophecy, which might lead us into useless speculations. The passage itself indicates that some prophetic elements are 'sealed' for the end times (v. 9). We can consider the future projection of prophecy as an opportunity to reaffirm God's truth for us, and the urgency we have to advance the church's mission to preach the gospel.

Jesus quoted this passage from Daniel 12 in Matthew 24:21 where he said: "*For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again.*"

With great sadness, we must say that the Bible teaches that the worst is yet to come for Israel and the Jewish people. (Revelation 12:13-17) What is it that will make this terrible time arise? John describes the fury of the evil one directed against the Jewish people during this time. The trumpets, the seals, and the bowls of Revelation all describe the terrible conditions of the world in general during this end time.

We will consider three important approaches to the analysis of the passage to facilitate our understanding and its practical application.

I. A Promise Of Salvation And Resurrection (Daniel 12:1-2)

A. Dimensional Extension

For the first time in the Old Testament, resurrection is considered as a reward for the faithful. The resurrection at the end of time is part of the freedom promised to the people of God. Of course, and as Daniel 12:2 suggests and as Jesus himself said later in John 5:29, there will be another resurrection reserved 'for those who did evil, a "resurrection of condemnation"'.

The first resurrection is prophesied as a separate event for the salvation of God's people, the faithful believers in Christ, who will receive their reward of eternal life (1 Thess. 4:16). The prophecy of Daniel 12 has a historical projection for the people of God, Israel, in times before and after Daniel, which includes us today, and all believers through the centuries.

B. Michael, The Great Prince

The figure of Michael in this prophecy has been the object of important considerations due to his participation in the events of the end times. Some consider Michael as prince among the angels (archangel) like the archangel Gabriel, the messenger of God. Michael is presented in the Scriptures as a warrior angel who came to the aid of the messenger angel (possibly Gabriel), so that he could deliver the prophetic message to Daniel (Daniel 10:13). Also, this warrior angel appears as leader of God's armies in the great battle against the dragon and his angels (Revelation 12:7). In this prophecy of Daniel 12, he is referred to as "*the great prince*" who acts on behalf of the children of God.

Due to this unique participation of Michael, others consider him as a figure of Christ, and Gabriel as a figure of the Holy Spirit. However we interpret this passage, he himself says that his prophecy will be fulfilled, affirming the undeniable existence of God.

Questions

- In what way is the resurrection considered in the prophetic framework of Daniel?
- According to Daniel 12:2, there will be two resurrection events. Explain the prophetic occurrence of both.

II. The End Of Time (Daniel 12:3-9)

A. Labor Of The People Of God

Verse 3 contains a reward for those of us who carry the gospel message to the whole world, and for those who remain faithful and firm to the end. Therefore, the church of God must remain active in the great commission.

As for the prophetic words of Daniel, it's to be noted that the church, the people of God for end times, are *"those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever."* It's no coincidence that Jesus calls his followers *'the light of the world'* (Matthew 5:14).

The church has the responsibility to carry the message of God, warning about the end times. The prophecy of Daniel, to a large extent, is the reaffirmation of God's justice for all of us who have received Jesus' message. Today's church has the mission of forming the church for the end of time, and it has had this mission since Jesus himself entrusted it to His disciples (Matt. 28:18-20).

B. "Seal The Book"

In verse 4, Daniel received the order to close the words and seal the book, which implies confusion for many. If we're to preach the gospel, and the preaching of the gospel includes the prophecy of the events of the end, why close the curtain so abruptly? Why are some matters of prophecy forbidden to us if the prophecy itself is part of our message?

Let's consider some issues. The biblical commentary of Matthew Henry quotes Charles C. Ryrie, considered one of the most influential theologians of the twentieth century, defender of premillennial dispensationalism, and who explains

what this apparent contradiction means. Ryrie says: *"It's not that its meaning (that of the book) is to be left unexplained, but that the book was to be preserved intact, to help those who live in the days of the future Tribulation."* (Matthew Henry Biblical Commentary, 1999)

This implies several things. In the first place, it suggests that some mysteries of prophecy will not be revealed to the church of the end times, reaffirming that the church's message must be salvation by faith.

On the other hand, and according to Ryrie's commentary, the secrets hidden and sealed in the prophecy will be for the exclusive use of those who will understand the allusion to the Antichrist, and who will lead others to the truth during the period of the great tribulation. This is important because without considering this interpretation as accurate, this will allow the people of Israel to return to the mission that has now fallen to the church, and to continue the prophetic events of the Apocalypse in the Holy Land.

That's why it can be a dangerous deviation from our mission to want to know and decide aspects of the prophecy that aren't to be revealed until it's necessary.

The message that we have is all we need for now. Let's not be seduced by wanting to dig deep into mysteries that aren't for our time, or pertinent for our mission. That was the attitude that was pointed out to Daniel (vs. 8-9). Daniel, like us, wanted to know the precise and exact detail of these mysteries.

Many have believed that they have uncovered these mysteries. Nevertheless, we already know, from what the biblical passage in question suggests, that these mysteries haven't yet been revealed, nor will they apparently be revealed to the church that's to be taken up to heaven. With this in mind, let's consider the last part of Daniel 12.

Questions

- What's the work of the church within the prophetic framework of Daniel?
- Why is it dangerous to dwell on the full interpretation of the prophecy of Daniel 12?

III. Daniel's Question: Everyone's Question (Daniel 12:10-13)

A. Details Concerning The Time Of The End

Verses 10 through 12 contain very interesting elements which have been considered within all the known eschatological possibilities. It goes without saying that the understanding of this prophecy requires a spiritual mentality and the direct assistance of the Holy Spirit.

The figures of 1,290 days and 1,335 days have been interpreted as referring to the so-called great tribulation. The 1,290 days represent the three years and a half subsequent to the period of false peace that will be perceived during the manifestation of the Antichrist. Those days will be nuanced by a terrible time of tribulation, especially for the people of Israel.

The 45 additional days, which complete the figure of 1,335 days, suggest a period of implementation of the new millennium administrative procedures. Those 45 days following the 1,290 days of the prophecy suggest a period of general cleansing, in which those who have overcome the tribulation of the previous 1,290 days will be considered blessed (v. 12).

Another important detail concerning the end times is that the ungodly, those who despite revelation and the message from God through the church, will continue to act impenitently; that is, they will not understand or be able to discern the end times (v. 10). Fortunately, and by the grace of God, the opportunity to discern the times, receive the message and turn away from evil is still a reality. Therefore, our mission remains relevant, necessary and vital for the salvation of souls. Let's keep insisting on our work. Still, many can be saved.

Notes:

B. The Consolation Of God

Finally, Daniel received from God the consoling promise that every believer in Christ receives. The Lord affirmed through this prophecy that he rewards the faithful. The future of the righteous is guaranteed in Jesus and in the fulfillment of the prophecies.

This consolation and this guarantee will not disappear with our eventual death, but the resurrection of the dead in Christ will be for eternal salvation. Jesus' resurrection is the sure first fruit of ours (1 Corinthians 15:20). Therefore, we can rest calmly and confidently on the certainty of prophecy, and on the assurance of God's promises. Daniel rests with the same expectation that we do if we pass to eternity before the coming of our Lord. He should not doubt God's truth, or the assurance that He offers us in His Word. The promises of our Father are guaranteed by the very presence of God in history, and in the actual fulfillment of the prophecies.

Questions

- Why is the mission of the church still relevant in our times? Briefly share how you have been impacted by what has been shared in today's lesson.

Conclusion

Fulfilled prophecies tell us that God is real. The promises of God will be fulfilled. Let's remain firm and constant in our mission. Today, we're the ones who have to shine because we're the light of the world. If we remain steadfast in the Lord and fulfill our mission, our reward will be great in the heavens. Work in the Lord is never in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58).

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