

REALITY, SORROW, AND JOY

- A. Introduction: For a number of months we have been talking about how to handle life's challenges by learning to see reality as it truly is or renewing your mind. Rom 12:2
1. There is more to reality than what we see around us (II Cor 4:18; Col 1:16; etc.). There is an invisible realm that can and does impact this life. God's kingdom of full power and provision is in that realm.
 - a. God has given us the Bible to show us the way things really are. Reality is everything as God sees it. We must learn to live according to what God says about reality. Part of that process involves learning how to deal with our emotions (how we feel).
 1. We are called to live by what God says. Sometimes our emotions agree with what God says, but often they don't. When our feelings contradict God's Word we must side in with God.
 2. That doesn't mean we deny what we feel. It means we recognize that there is more to reality than what our feelings are telling us in the moment.
 - b. Last week we began to talk about dealing with sorrow and want to continue in this lesson.
 2. Sorrow is sadness or anguish due to loss. When we lose someone or something dear to us we feel the emotions stimulated by that loss -- sorrow, grief, mourning.
 - a. All of us experience sorrow in this life because loss due to disappointment and death is part of life in a sin cursed earth -- a world that has been damaged by sin.
 - b. There is no way around grief when you've experienced a loss. You can only go through it. Therefore it is important to know how to deal with sorrow in a godly way.
 - c. You must learn to rejoice in hope in the midst of your sorrow (II Cor 6:10; Rom 12:12). To rejoice in hope does not mean pretend you don't feel bad or act like you feel good.
 1. It means you encourage yourself in the midst of your sorrow with the reasons you have hope or expectation of coming good even in the midst of your sorrow.
 2. That won't take away the pain of your loss. But it will keep your sorrow from turning into despondency and hopelessness until you feel better and begin to adjust to life without whoever or whatever you've lost.
 3. It is not possible to rejoice in hope unless you see reality as it truly is. This is reality:
 - a. For a Christian there is no such thing as a hopeless situation because we serve the God of hope (Rom 15:13). All loss is temporary. Missed opportunities are postponed opportunities.
 1. We are eternal beings and the greater and better part of our existence is ahead, first in Heaven and then on the new earth -- earth renewed, renovated, and restored, delivered from the curse of corruption and death to which it was subjected when Adam sinned. Rom 8:19-22
 2. What is ahead is not the afterlife. This is the pre-life. The best is yet to come. There will be reunion, restoration, and recompense. Rev 21:4--God will wipe away every tear...and death shall be no more, neither shall there be anguish—sorrow and mourning—nor grief nor pain any more; for the old conditions and the former order of things have passed away (Amp).
 - b. That does not mean there is no restoration here and now. Some does occur in this present life.
 1. Job lost everything due to the hardships of life in a sin cursed earth -- family, property, health. In the end God delivered him and restored to him twice as much as he had, including more children. But the ones he lost in his trials were not restored to him until he joined them at death. Job 1:2,3; 42:10,12
 2. Ps 27:13--Had David not expected God's help in this life he would have despaired. "I had fainted" is not in the Hebrew. It reads like this: Unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living—What! What, alas! Should have become of me!
 4. One theme we see in scripture is the idea that the Redeemer will turn sorrow and mourning into joy. Why? Because sorrow due to loss is part of the curse and He came to reverse the curse. Isa 35:10; 51:11; Jer 31:12,13; Ps 30:5, 11,12; etc.
 - a. That's part of our hope. It's not always going to be like this. I'm not always going to feel like I

feel now. None of this is bigger than God and He will get me through until He gets me out. There is a great day of reunion and restoration ahead for me and my loved ones.

b. The point is not: Get over it. The point is: Get through it with the knowledge that all loss is temporary, the ultimate stage for the reversals of life's sorrows and troubles is in the life to come, and you will eventually feel better

5. Isa 61:1-3 (Luke 4:16-19)--At the beginning of His public ministry Jesus applied a powerful scripture about turning mourning into joy to Himself. Notice these points:

a. v1--The Redeemer will bind up the broken hearted. The word bind was used to describe binding a wound so healing would occur. There is help now. Although our hearts are broken due to loss they can be healed. You can and will feel better as time passes if you feed your hope.

b. v2--He will comfort those who mourn. The word means to sigh or breathe strongly. It has the idea of be sorry. God is aware of the hurt and pain we experience in this life. He is moved with compassion. There is something in Him that longs to help those who are suffering.

1. Ps 56:8--You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book. (NLT). God is well aware of what needs to be fixed and restored. Nothing is forgotten. In the life to come He will make all things right.

2. Comfort means to ease the grief or trouble by giving strength and hope. That's present help.

c. v3--God gives joy for mourning. What could turn mourning into joy? Obviously reunion your loved one and or restoration of what was lost would do it. But what does that mean right now?

We want to spend the rest of the lesson talking about joy.

B. This joy is not an emotion (although it can and will affect your emotions). It is first and foremost a state of mind based on your perception of reality. Joy comes from knowing the end result. That knowledge gives hope which strengthens and cheers. John 16:20-22; Heb 12:2

1. But there is more to it. When we were born again God indwelt us by His life and His Spirit and we become partakers of the uncreated eternal life of God.

a. We were united to the life in Jesus as truly as a branch is joined to a vine. Whatever is in that life is in us because that life is in us. John 3:16; I Cor 6:17; I John 5:11,12; John 15:5

1. As branches of the Vine we partake of the life of the Vine. We can now demonstrate outwardly what is in us through this union with Jesus and the life of God.

2. The branch is the portion on which fruit grows. Fruit is outward evidence of the life within. A tomato branch produces tomatoes because it is connected to the life in the tomato vine.

b. One of the fruits of the recreated human spirit is joy (Gal 5:22). Joy is a noun (CHARA) from the word CHAIRO or cheerfulness. It means to be "cheer" full or to rejoice or be glad. It is a volitional action or state of being as opposed to a feeling.

1. The joy in us because we are born again is a spiritual strength. It is one of the provisions we have from God to strengthen us (now) to deal with the hardships and sorrows of life.

2. It is a strength (not a feeling) that keeps us going until we feel better. However, we must learn how to draw upon that spiritual strength.

2. In John 4:14, while talking a Samaritan woman at a well, compared the life that He was going to bring to men through the Cross and the new birth to a well of everlasting life.

a. Isa 12:3 gives us insight we draw on the joy of the Lord in us. It says to draw water out of the well of salvation with joy. Joy comes from a word meaning to be bright or cheerful. Cheerful is not first and foremost emotional. When you cheer someone you encourage by giving them hope.

1. v4 goes on to describe how we draw strength out of the well of salvation: We praise the Lord. This is not an emotional or even musical response to your situation. To praise someone means to extol them by talking about who they are and what they have done.

2. We praise God by proclaiming His name (talking about what He is like) and His doings (talking about what He has done, is doing, and will do).

3. That praise activates the fruit of joy in us because we are born again. That's how we draw living water out of the well of salvation to strengthen us until we feel better.
- b. Neh 8:10 says the joy of the Lord is your strength. This is more than a cliché. It is a powerful statement about God's provision for us and how we access it.
 1. The word joy in the Hebrew means rejoicing. It comes from a root word that means to rejoice. "For rejoicing in the Lord must be your strength" (NAB). Strength means a fortified place or a defense. Rejoicing in the Lord is your "safe place", your refuge (AAT), your stronghold (AMP).
 2. But notice that this verse also speaks of doing (making a choice to rejoice) rather than feeling. You cheer yourself by recounting the reasons you have hope and God, by His life and Spirit in you, becomes your strength.
- c. This is just what Paul said. In the context of the many trials he faced, he spoke of being sorrowful yet rejoicing (II Cor 6:10) or feeling sad yet cheering himself by praising God.
 1. Rom 5:2--He also spoke of rejoicing in hope of the glory of God. God's glory is God manifesting or showing Himself. These are whole lessons but consider these thoughts.
 - A. Hope of God's glory means the expectation of seeing Him face-to-face and being glorified or fully conformed to the image of Christ in the life to come.
 - B. It means that in this life we'll see God glorified as He moves in our behalf and helps us.
 2. The word rejoice means to boast. We rejoice by boasting in the Lord -- by talking about who He is and what He has done, is doing, and will do. That is fully consistent with Isa 12.
3. Philippians, written by Paul, is known as the "joy epistle". A form of the word joy is used sixteen times in his letter. Consider these points.
 - a. Paul was jailed in Rome when he wrote this epistle. His friends and converts in the city of Philippi had heard of his situation and he wrote to encourage and comfort them. At the time he wrote he did not know if he would be released or executed.
 1. Paul was not pretending that he felt no negative emotions in this situation. He wrote about a man named Epaphroditus who got sick and almost died. Epaphroditus had been sent by the Philippians to Paul with supplies to help him while he was imprisoned.
 2. Although this is Paul's joy epistle he said that if Epaphroditus had died he would have had sorrow upon sorrow -- the sorrow of losing him to add to my suffering (2:27, Phillips).
 - b. The Philippians would have understood the context in which Paul talked about rejoicing in the midst of troubles. They had seen Paul jailed at Philippi when he cast a devil out of a servant girl who told fortunes and her masters accused Paul of troubling the city. Acts 16:16-31
 1. Paul and his ministry partner, Silas, praised God while in prison after having been beaten and placed in stocks. They were supernaturally delivered and the prison keeper was saved.
 2. Did Paul and Silas feel like praising God? It's highly unlikely. They did it because it is always appropriate to praise the Lord and because they knew the value of rejoicing in hope.
 - c. We can see Paul's mindset or his view of reality from what he wrote. That perspective enabled him to rejoice or cheer himself in the midst of his difficulties.
 1. Phil 1:12-18--God is working this for good. The gospel was not silenced by his imprisonment, rather it was going farther than he could have imagined.
 2. Phil 1:19--For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, all this will turn out for my highest welfare (Goodspeed); [for the spiritual health and welfare of my own soul and avail toward the saving work of the Gospel] (Amp).
 3. Phil 1:20--I just want God to be glorified whether that is accomplished by my life or my death.
 4. Phil 1:21--For me, to live is Christ—His life in me; and to die is gain—the gain of the glory of eternity. (Amp)
 5. Phil 1:22-24--But if I live, it means more opportunity to serve Him in this life. And it is better for you if I stay here. But I long to depart and be with Christ which is far better. Note that

this is coming from a man who saw Jesus face-to-face (Acts 9:1-6); was personally instructed by Jesus (Acts 26:16; Gal 1:12), and actually spent time in Heaven (II Cor 12:1-4).

4. Paul understood that nothing is bigger than God. He knew that God is able to cause everything to serve His purposes of maximum glory to Himself and maximum good to as many people as possible. He knew that God is able to bring genuine good out of genuine bad. He knew that this life is not all there is. He knew that this life, this world, is not as it should be nor as God intended it to be because of sin. He knew we were only passing through earth as it is. But there is coming a day when all will be made right. Rom 8:18 Rom 8:28; Eph 1:11; II Cor 4:17,18; Heb 11:13-16; etc.

a. Paul saw death as gain. That was his perspective, his view of reality. That didn't erase the pain of the separation that takes place when someone goes to Heaven. Paul would have had genuine sorrow if his friend Epaphroditus had died.

1. But Paul understood that death is not the end of anything. It is the beginning of the next chapter of our life. Death is an enemy. But we don't have to be afraid of it because it has been conquered and defeated by Jesus. I Cor 15:26

2. As an Old Testament scholar schooled in the Law and the Prophets Paul expected his body to be raised from the grave. He knew he would one day be reunited with it and live on the new earth (earth renewed and restored) in the kingdom of God. Gen 50:24,25; Job 19:25,26; Dan 2:44; 7:27; 12:2; etc.

3. Paul expected reunion with the people he knew on earth. They would be part of his joy in the life to come. I Thess 2:19,20; 4:13-18; etc.

b. Paul was not executed that time. He was released. He was later imprisoned again and it ended with his death. He wrote his final words to his son in the faith, Timothy. II Tim 4:6-8

1. Look at his mindset: He was ready to go. He called the event his departure. He knew there were rewards ahead. Like the other apostles he had left all to follow Jesus. But he knew he would regain it and more. Matt 19:27-29

2. Note his attitude as he faced death by beheading: v18--[and indeed] the Lord will certainly deliver and draw me to Himself from every assault of evil. He will preserve and bring [me] safe into His heavenly kingdom. (Amp)

C. Conclusion: We have a lot more to say next week. But consider these few thoughts as we close.

1. You really can't experience the joy of the Lord unless you realize this life is not all there is. We're on our way somewhere. The hurts, losses, pains, and injustices of this life will be reversed. That is reality. That's the way things really are.

2. If you have hope (confident expectation of coming good) you can be of good cheer (encouraged and strengthened) no matter what you see or how you feel. In the face of sorrow and loss encourage yourself. Boast about the hope we have in the Lord. And you will be strengthened by the joy of the Lord.