

## REALITY AND REGRET

- A. Introduction: For a number of weeks we have been discussing how to overcome in the trials of life by learning to see reality as it truly is. Reality is the way things really are. Reality is everything as God sees it. Part of the process of overcoming involves learning how to deal with emotions.
1. Although emotions were given to us by God, like every other part of human nature, they have been corrupted by sin beginning with the fall of man in the Garden of Eden.
    - a. Emotions often give incorrect information and they motivate us to act in ways that are destructive and sinful. They must therefore be brought under the control of the Word of God. Eph 4:26
    - b. In the last two lessons we focused on dealing with sorrow. Sorrow is sadness or anguish due to loss of someone or something dear to us. Such losses stimulate feelings of sorrow and grief.
  2. Dealing with sorrow does not mean denying what we feel or pretending we're not sad when we lose someone or something important to us. It means remembering God and His Word in the midst of it.
    - a. Paul experienced much sorrow in his life. However he spoke of being sorrowful yet rejoicing (II Cor 6:10), rejoicing in hope (Rom 12:12), and rejoicing in hope of the glory of God (Rom 5:2).
      1. That doesn't mean Paul acted like he was happy or pretended he wasn't sad. Paul made a choice to rejoice despite how he felt. Rejoicing in hope is an action not a feeling.
      2. To rejoice means to encourage and strengthen yourself by talking about who God is and what He has done, is doing, and will do. To rejoice means to boast in or about the Lord.
    - b. The Bible tells us that God gives us joy for sorrow. This joy is not an emotion (although it can and will affect our emotions). It's His joy resident in us because we're born again. Gal 5:22; John 15:5
    - c. Joy is a spiritual strength that enables us to keep going until the pain of the loss eases. Joy is activated by talking about God's past, present and future help and provision. Isa 12:3,4
  3. In addition to grief over loss we all also experience sorrow over choices we're made. These can range from poor choices to decisions that don't produce the results we had hope for to sinful choices. This kind of sorrow is called regret and/or guilt.
    - a. Regret is sorrow aroused by circumstances beyond our power to change. When choice produces unexpected negative results that can't be undone we experience regret.
    - b. In this lesson we'll discuss how to deal with regret over non-sinful choices and decisions. Next week we'll deal with sinful choices.
- B. The prophet Samuel, under the direction of the Lord, anointed David to be king of Israel while Saul, the reigning king, was still alive. Although David was supportive of and loyal to Saul, Saul became extremely jealous and set out to kill David. David was forced to flee for his life and was hunted for many years.
1. At one point during his ordeal David went to live for a time in Philistine territory along with six hundred men plus women and children, supporters who followed him into hiding. I Sam 27:1-12
    - a. Although the Philistines were Israel's enemies, King Achish eventually gave David and his band the town of Ziklag for a home. They lived there for over a year. (Whole story for another day.)
    - b. While David and his men were away from Ziklag on a mission, a local tribe raided the city, burned it down, and carried off all the women and children, including David's wives. I Sam 30:1-5
  2. This circumstance stirred numerous emotions in everyone. First they experienced grief over their loss. Not only had they lost homes and possessions, they lost their families and didn't know if they'd ever see them again. v4--(They) wept until they could weep no more. (NLT)
    - a. But then their initial grief morphed into bitterness (v6). Grief is bitterness in the original language: bitterly grieved (Amp). Bitterness is an expression of severe, hard to bear pain, grief or regret. It often expresses itself in anger. v6--All the people were in an ugly mood (Berkeley).
    - b. The men began to talk about killing David. Their grief turned to bitterness was driving them to get revenge for their loss. Revenge is payback. Emotions sometimes compel us to blame someone or something for our loss.

1. We think that if we can get revenge we'll feel better and the situation will somehow be helped. But this is actually a big argument for learning to controlling our emotions and keep them from driving us to act irrationally and sinfully.
2. Had they killed David they'd have killed an innocent man. What happened at Ziklag wasn't David's fault. It was a product of life in a sin cursed earth where wicked men rob and kill other men. Evil happens in a sin cursed earth. But none of it is bigger than God. John 16:33
- c. Killing David wouldn't have solved anything. It would have made their situation worse because David would later get direction from God that ended in them recovering all that they had lost.
3. There's a lot going on here. These men were experiencing a jumble of emotions. As is often the case in the face of severe loss, on top of the pain of their losses they were angry -- not only at David but possibly at themselves. No doubt they were struggling with "if onlys".
  - a. If only we hadn't gone with David to Philistine country... If only we had stayed in Ziklag instead of going on that expedition...if only we had come back from our mission a day earlier...etc.
  - b. All of these are expressions of guilt and regret. "If only" an accusation against themselves. This is our some how our fault.
    1. Despite what their emotions were telling them, what happened at Ziklag was not their fault even though it was their choice to follow David. They made the best decision they could based on the facts available to them in their situation.
    2. Samuel, an established prophet, had anointed him in the name of the Lord; Saul had not been a good king, etc. David and his men had no way of knowing that the Amalekites were going to attack Ziklag.
  - b. It was natural for them to feel regret about the situation. When we make a decision that doesn't turn out as we hoped it's easy to get caught up in the "If only I had done this or hadn't done that".
1. Even if David and his men should have done something different (like leave some men to guard the city), what's done is done. They can't undo it. They can only deal with the situation as it is, not as it should have been.
  2. Fixating on the "if onlys" does nothing positive. Instead it feeds the emotions of regret, guilt and sorrow. If you don't feed those feelings they will eventually subside. Emotions fade when there nothing stimulating them.
4. v6--David was greatly distressed. No doubt he was feeling regret (he'd led his men to this place) and fear (they're talking about killing him) on top of his sorrow. But he encouraged himself in the Lord.
  - a. The word encourage means to fasten upon, to seize, to be strong--Laid hold on the Lord His God (Berkeley); took courage from (Jerusalem).
    1. It's the same word translated "be strong" when God set Joshua over the Israelites in Moses' place and charged him with leading difficult people into the land of Canaan to possess it. Josh 1:6,7,9--Be resolute and strong (Berkeley); firm and steadfast (NAB).
    2. "Be strong" meant: Fasten yourself to these facts. God said: I will be with you as I was with Moses, as I Am (v5). I will never abandon you. I will be with you wherever you go (v9).
    3. Then God directed Joshua to His written Word. By that point the first five books of the Old Testament had been recorded by Moses. v7,8
      - A. The law thou hast in writing must govern every utterance of thine (Knox); (Keep it) in your thoughts day and night (that you may) keep with care everything in it (Basic).
    - B. v8--Meditate on My Word continually. Meditate means to mutter, to ponder. Then, God said, you will be prosperous (to push forward) and successful (to act with insight).
    - c. Joshua was fully human. There is no reason to think that he did not experience certain emotions at this point (fear, anxiety, inadequacy, etc.). So God's instructions to him were:
      1. Don't allow what you see and feel to change your view of reality. Hold on to reality as it truly is according to My Word. Don't be moved by anything but My Word. Set your focus on what I say. Seize it, fasten upon it. It will strengthen and encourage you.

2. I told you when I brought you out of Egypt that I would bring you into this land and defeat every enemy you face (Ex 3:8; 6:8; etc.). None of this is bigger than Me.
5. Back to David in I Sam 30. In the face of all these emotions stimulated by a very grave situation, David fastened himself on God and His Word. (He would have known about Joshua's situation.)
- a. v6--But with renewed trust in the Lord His God (NAB). David renewed his trust in the Lord. Trust is the Old Testament counterpart of the New Testament word faith. Faith or trust and confidence in God comes from God's Word because it reveals God to us -- both His character (what He is like) and His works (what He does). Rom 10:17; Ps 9:10
1. We know from David's psalms that when he was in fear and distress he put his attention on God's Word. Ps 56:3,4--When he was afraid he trusted in God and praised His Word.
  2. Praise comes from a word that means to shine or shout; to commend, to boast, to shine. When emotions were raging David rejoiced in hope by proclaiming who God is and what He does.
- b. Ps 42 gives us additional insight into how he handled his emotions. David could not go before the Presence of the Lord in the Tabernacle at Jerusalem because he was on the run and he was experiencing the emotions that go with not being where he longed to be. He remembers the good times he used to have and is sad (v1-4). Consider these points.
- a. David talked to himself. v5--Why are you despondent, my soul, and why are you so agitated (Harrison). Hope in (wait expectantly for--Amp) God for I shall praise Him again (RSV).
1. David engaging in "self-talk". We all talk to ourselves all the time. That's what meditation is (muttering and pondering). That trait can work for us or against us -- build us up or down, strengthen or weaken us.
  2. In the face of circumstances and emotions David encouraged himself. Self: Hope or expect God's help. This is a temporary situation. I'll get back to the Tabernacle.
- c. Dealing with emotions can be a real battle. We see that in this psalm. David's emotions would rise up and he'd have to encourage himself in the Lord.
1. v6--Oh my God, my life is cast down upon me [and I find the burden more than I can bear] (Amp); I am depressed (Harrison); I am sunk in misery (NEB). THEREFORE I WILL REMEMBER YOU right where I am no matter where I am or what is going on. Jordan, the Hermonites, the hill Mizar are all references to places in Israel.
  2. v7,8--Sorrow overwhelms me at times, one wave of sorrow after another (Adam Clarke). But I WILL REMEMBER the Lord's goodness and proclaim it all night long.
  3. v9-11--When I feel forgotten and overwhelmed I will REMIND MYSELF of the hope I have in you.
6. God's written Word is a record of His promises and it is filled with examples of real help given to real people in real trouble. Those examples were written to encourage us (Rom 15:4) What promises and what examples did David have available with which to encourage himself at Ziklag?
- a. He had the example of Joshua -- the whole story. God did indeed keep every promise and fulfill every Word to Joshua. God brought him and his people successfully into Canaan. Josh 23:14
- b. David also had two stunning examples of kidnappings that turned out right by the power of God.
1. His ancestor Abraham's nephew Lot was kidnapped along with his household and possessions by a confederation of kings. God helped Abraham recover them all. Gen 14
  2. Joseph was kidnapped by his own brothers, sold him into slavery, and told their father was dead. Although Joseph was gone for many years, the family was eventually reunited and God brought tremendous good out of all of it. Gen 37-50; Gen 50:20
- c. No matter how it turned out (immediate deliverance or ultimate restoration and reunion) it was clear to David that his situation was not bigger than God (Gen 18:14). How did it turn out?
1. Instead of being moved by his emotions to do something crazy or get caught in a pit of despair and regret, with renewed trust in God, David asked the Lord what he should do.
  2. God told him: pursue the kidnappers and recover all. That is what happened. v7,8; 18,19

- C. Conclusion: We've all made decisions that did not turn out as we'd hoped for a multitude of reasons. We all feel regret over choices we've made. If we'll trust God He will use it and cause it to serve His purposes of maximum glory to Himself and maximum good to as many people as possible (whole lessons for another night). Eph 1:11; Rom 8:28
1. When decisions don't turn out as you'd hoped remember these points as you deal with your emotions.
    - a. Resist the temptation to play the "blame game" -- even if you or someone else is at fault -- it's not bigger than God. Don't feed the "if only" questions raised by your emotions.
      1. What if Abraham allowed himself to be incapacitated by the anguish of: "If only I hadn't let Lot chosen the Jordan plain as a place to settle when we separated" (Gen 13:11,12) or Joseph had fixated on "What if I hadn't gone to check on my brothers that day" (Gen 37:12-14). Or if David had focused on "Why did I ever come to this place?"
      2. None of them would have been able to move past their challenges and access God's direction, help, and provision.
    - b. None of us can change what we've done so there is no point in agonizing over our choices.
      1. If, in hindsight, you realize mistakes you made in your decision making process learn from them and move on.
      2. Commit them and the consequences to God. God is a God of restitution and recovery -- some in this life and some in the life to come. It's all temporary and subject to change by the power of God. Rom 8:18; II Cor 4:17,18
    - b. Be prepared to battle your emotions. They are real and they are powerful. But they will ease with the passage of time if you don't feed them.
      1. Although you can't will yourself to stop feeling something, you do not have to follow the dictates of your emotions. And you don't have to feed them. Feed your faith with God's Word. Talk to yourself about God -- His love, His faithfulness, His power.
      2. Remind yourself of reality as it truly is. Call to memory what you know despite what you see and how you feel. Remember His past help and promise of present and future provision.
  2. An accurate view of reality is vital as you face life's challenges. The key to dealing with emotions is learning to see reality as it truly is and then proclaiming it in the face of trouble.
    - a. Despite how it looks and feels, nothing can come against you that is bigger than God who is perfectly present with you loving and reigning.
    - b. If you made the right decision, praise God. If you made the wrong decision, praise God. None of it is bigger than God. More next week!