

PAUL AND THE DEVIL

- A. Introduction: We're talking about praising God continually in both the good times and the bad. It's always appropriate to praise the Lord for who He is and what He has done, is doing, and will do. Heb 13:15
1. One of the themes we've emphasized in this series is that the Bible instructs us to respond to life's hardships with praise. We are told to count it all joy when we encounter troubles. James 1:2-4
    - a. Count comes from a word that means consider. Joy comes from a word that means to be cheerful or full of cheer. Cheer is not a feeling. It is a state of mind. We are to cheer or encourage ourselves with the reasons we have hope even in the darkest circumstances.
      1. This is not an emotional response to your troubles. It is a volitional choice, an act of your will. We are to consider the trial an occasion to respond with praise by acknowledging God.
      2. Life's trials provide an opportunity to work or exercise patience which is cheerful endurance. God's Word says that if we stay faithful to Him (or endure) we will see His deliverance. We will "be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (NASB).
    - b. God works in our lives by His grace through our faith. Acknowledging and thanking God before you see His help is an expression of faith and trust in Him. Praise is the language of faith.
    - c. Praise glorifies God and opens the door to His power in our circumstances (Ps 50:23). Praise stops the enemy and stills the avenger (Ps 8:2; Matt 21:16). Praise to God is a powerful weapon in our struggles with the devil.
  2. The Bible says that we are not to be ignorant of the devil's tactics (II Cor 2:11). So, as part of our discussion of praise to God, we've been examining what the Bible says about how Satan works.
    - a. On the one hand, many Christians are very afraid of the devil. Then there are others who attribute every wrong thing in their lives to the devil. Neither idea comes from scripture. We found that:
      1. The devil works on our minds through thoughts. He attempts to steal God's Word from us by persuading us to disbelieve or disobey. We're particularly vulnerable to his strategies when we encounter the hardships of life. Mark 4:14-17; Matt 13:21; Eph 6:11,12; II Cor 11:3
      2. Nowhere are we told to beware of the devil's power. Rather we are instructed to be aware of his mental strategies. He beguiles or deceives through trickery. We combat his lies with the truth of God's Word. Eph 6:13-18
    - b. For a Christian, the devil is a defeated foe. Jesus triumphed over him at the Cross and broke his power (authority) over us. We now enforce his defeat in our lives by taking our stand on the Word of God, recognizing and resisting his mental tactics and schemes. Heb 2:14; Col 2:15; Matt 4:1-11
  3. Most of what we know about how Satan works and the fact that he is a defeated foe comes from Paul.
    - a. Paul received the gospel he preached directly from Jesus who commissioned him to deliver men from the authority of Satan. Acts 26:16-18; Gal 1:11,12
      1. Paul accomplished this by preaching Jesus (His death, burial and resurrection). When people believe on Jesus, they are translated out of Satan's kingdom and authority. Col 1:13
      2. Paul accomplished this by informing men about how the devil works and instructing them on how to recognize and deal with his tactics. Eph 6:10-18
    - b. In this lesson we want to discuss Paul and the devil. How did the devil work in Paul's life? How did he deal with Satan? We don't see Paul in fear of the devil nor do we see him rebuking Satan out of his donkey cart.
- B. We have to presume that Paul was attacked in the same ways he warned believers about and that he dealt with it as he instructed others: Paul was presented with mental temptations (lies) and had to resist them with the Word of God. Consider an example.
1. Acts 16:16-34--Paul and Silas were arrested, beaten, and jailed in the city of Philippi. Their crime? Paul cast a devil out of a slave girl. The spirit enabled her to tell fortunes and her masters made money off of this ability. In jail the two men praised God and were delivered by the power of God.

- a. It's highly unlikely that this was an emotional response to their circumstances. In the context of the many troubles he faced as he preached the gospel, Paul wrote in II Cor 6:10 of feeling sorrowful yet rejoicing (a form of the same word translated joy in James 1:2).
- b. Paul and Silas praised God because He is always worthy of praise — it's the appropriate response. They knew what the scripture says: Ps 34:1--His praise shall continually be in my mouth. Ps 119:62--At midnight I will give thee thanks.
2. Since the devil works through thoughts, let's consider what kinds of thoughts Paul and Silas got when they were in jail. They would have had to battle the same kinds of thoughts as you or me. Paul himself wrote I Cor 10:13--No temptation has come upon you that is not common to all mankind (20<sup>th</sup> Cent).
  - a. Paul made this statement in the context of the failures of the generation of Israelites whom God delivered from slavery in Egypt, stating that we all face the same temptations they did. v11-13
  - b. Paul pointed out that their failures were recorded to keep others from making the same mistakes. He listed four specific areas where Israel was tempted and gave in.
    1. v7--Idolatry. When Moses was gone too long on Mt. Sinai meeting with God, they melted gold and formed it into a calf to lead them back to Egypt. Ex 32:1-6
    2. v8--Fornication. At their last campsite before entering Canaan after forty years in the wilderness, some of the men slept with Moabite women and then joined them in sacrificing to and worshipping the gods of Moab (a region east of Canaan). Num 25:XX
    3. v9--Tempted God. When they came to a place with no water they questioned God's presence with them and care of them. Ex 17:2;7--The people argued with Moses and tested the Lord by saying, "Is the Lord going to take care of us or not" (NLT).
    4. v10--Murmuring. They continually talked about what they didn't have and what wasn't right, blaming Moses and even God for their circumstances. Ex 15:24; 16:2; 17:2; Num 14:6; 21:5
  - c. It's hard to see this as anything other than a scene from the movie "The Ten Commandments". But these were real people like you and me. They had fallen flesh, unrenewed minds, and flawed personalities. And when they encountered life's challenges, they didn't handle them well.
    1. Israel was gloriously delivered from slavery in Egypt (real event, real people, but it pictures our redemption through Jesus). They encountered unexpected adversity. They had to pass through a desert wilderness and all the obstacles it presented (little food or water; snakes). They'd never seen the land they were headed to, didn't know how to get there or what to expect once they arrived.
      2. What thoughts would have gone through their minds--either naturally or with the help of the devil: This isn't going like we planned. Let's go back to where we came from. We had it better in Egypt. At least we knew what to expect. After all we've been through, we deserve to have a little fun with these pretty girls. God's been unfair to us. Why is this happening?
      3. We can see the progression in their thoughts and behavior: v7--Go back to the old ways of worship like they did in Egypt. v8--Give in to fleshly desires even though God says don't. v9--Doubt God's care and provision. v9--Be ungrateful for what He has already done for you.
  - d. Although the text does not say that these people were influenced by the devil, based on other things Paul wrote (I Cor 10:13), we know they were. Remember the church at Thessalonica? Paul preached there for three weeks and then was driven out of town by persecution.
    1. He sent Timothy to check on them when he couldn't get back. He was concerned that the tempter had taken advantage of the persecutions to steal God's Word from them. I Thess 3:1-5
    2. What was God's Word to Israel? God said: I'll deliver you from Egypt and bring you into Canaan. I will lead, guide and provide for you. Trust Me and obey Me. They no doubt had thoughts (fiery darts from Satan) aimed at undermining all God's promises to them.
3. Back to Paul and Silas in jail. They've hit unexpected adversity, are in physical pain and vulnerable to thoughts: After all you've done to serve the Lord, this is the thanks you get? What's going to happen? You might be executed. You had it better when you were a Pharisee. But they shut it all down with

praise to God and opened the door to God's help and power.

- C. II Cor 12:7-10--Paul reported that a messenger of Satan was actually assigned to him, a thorn in the flesh.
1. People argue over what the thorn was. Some wrongly say it was a disease which God refused to heal. But Paul clearly states that the thorn in the flesh was a messenger of Satan.
    - a. The Greek word translated messenger is AGGELOS (used over 180 times in the New Testament). It always means a being or a personality. Thorn is used literally in scripture to mean an actual thorn or figuratively to refer to troublesome people. Num 33:55; Josh 23:13; Judges 2:3
      1. This "thorn" came from Satan not God. (God and the devil aren't working together.) It was a troublesome being (fallen angel, devil) sent to harass Paul. It buffeted or hit him repeatedly.
      2. Paul referred to the opposition from this messenger as an infirmity. He defined what he meant by infirmity a few verses earlier (II Cor 11:23-29). It was the persecutions and the hardships he faced as he preached the gospel. Notice that sickness and disease are not mentioned.
    - b. People wrongly believe the thorn was given to keep Paul humble. That makes no sense. Why would the devil be interested in developing Christ-like character in one of God's most effective servants? The thorn came to steal God's Word from the people to whom Paul preached.
      1. Paul had received tremendous revelation from God (v1-4). Satan didn't want Paul's message to be accepted so he sent a fallen angel to harass Paul and his ministry.
      2. That is consistent with the description of events in the Book of Acts. Paul would go to a city to preach and someone or something would stir up the crowd. Paul would be mobbed, put in jail or thrown out of town. Acts 13:45; 14:2-6; 19:21-41; etc.
        - A. The messenger came to keep Paul from being exalted. Exalted is made up of two Greek words: HUPER (above) and AIRO (to lift; used literally of ship sails).
        - B. Knowledge from God's Word can lift anyone above life's challenges. Satan also came to steal the word from Paul through the thorn to keep him from being lifted up above, from being victorious in the midst of extremely harsh circumstances.
      3. Not only did this being stir up angry mobs through influencing them with thoughts and taking advantage of their flaws, he also worked on Paul's mind. How do we know? Paul is the one who told us that's how the devil works.
  2. Leave this passage for a moment and consider what Paul said in Rom 5:3. He wrote that he gloried in tribulation. This same word is translated rejoice (v2) and joy (v11). It literally means to boast.
    - a. Paul knew the importance of rejoicing or boasting about God in the face of tribulation. That's what praise is — boasting about or proclaiming who God is and what He does.
    - b. Paul said that he boasted in the hope of the glory of God (this glory is a different Greek word). Glory is God manifesting or showing Himself in any way He chooses (lessons for another time).
      1. Paul said: I boast of God in tribulation (I praise Him) with the confident expectation (hope) that He will manifest or demonstrate Himself and His power in my circumstances.
      2. Then Paul went on to say exactly what James 1:2-4 says: Tribulation works patience, gives opportunity to exercise endurance. If we stand our ground we will see God's demonstration.
      3. v3--And not only so, but we also rejoice in our tribulations (ASV), triumph even in our troubles (Moffatt) knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance (NASB) and endurance brings proof that we have stood the test and this proof is the ground of hope (NEB) and hope does not disappoint (NASB). We will see God's deliverance if we stand our ground.
  3. Back to the thorn in the flesh. When Paul asked God to remove the thorn he was asking the Lord to do something He has not promised to do (take the devil away). Satan is presently the god of this world (II Cor 4:4) and will continue his activities until Jesus returns. (He's been judged but not yet subjugated.)
    - a. Paul (like us) went through a learning process. God's instructions to His people in regard to Satan is: Submit to Me, resist the devil steadfast in faith and he will flee from you. James 4:7; I Pet 5:9
      1. Paul learned that lesson. He is the one who wrote Eph 6:13--Take up God's armor (His

Word) to withstand in the evil day and still be standing when the attack is over.

2. Withstand is the word “resist” in James 4:7 and I Pet 5:9. What do we resist? The wiles of Satan, the thoughts and lies he presents to our minds to steal the Word in the midst of trials.

b. In II Cor 12 Paul was recounting something that had happened a number of years earlier. He recounted God’s instruction to him and what he learned from it. In answer to Paul’s request:

1. v9--God gave him His Word: My grace, My strength, will see you through this. Paul’s response was: Therefore, I glory (boast) in my weaknesses because His power is sufficient.

My weaknesses give opportunity for God to show His strength in and through me.

2. Paul wasn’t groveling in his inabilities. Rather, he got the message: I have no power in myself to do this, to deal with this. But God does. That’s what God told King Jehoshaphat in II Chron 20:15,17. I’ll do what you can’t do. I am your strength and your victory.

c. Paul knew from God’s Word that nothing could come against him that’s bigger than God. He knew that when he was helpless and powerless God was his help and power. And he learned the importance of proclaiming these truths in the face of the challenges he faced.

4. Through this, Paul was lifted up above in his circumstances and was able to describe his tribulations, persecutions and afflictions as light because God strengthened him inwardly. II Cor 4:16,17

a. This doesn’t mean he enjoyed or was happy about his trials (II Cor 6:10). It means they did not weigh him down. The devil wasn’t successful. He did not steal God’s Word from Paul.

b. Paul also called his many troubles momentary. He had an eternal perspective. He understood that there is more to life than just this life. In comparison to the life to come, even a lifetime of trouble is nothing. In the life to come there is restitution and recompense for present hardship and losses.

c. v18--He was able to maintain his perspective by mentally considering (looking at) unseen realities.

1. He knew: Almighty God was with and for him, working good out of bad, causing everything to serve His purposes of maximum glory and maximum good (whole lessons for another day).

2. Praise to God, boasting about God, in the midst of life’s hardships helped Paul keep his focus on reality as it truly is and not just how things look in the moment.

d. The last time Paul was in jail (shortly to be executed) the last words he wrote were: The Lord will deliver me and preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom (II Tim 4:18). How could he possibly say that? He was about to die and knew it.

1. He proclaimed it because he knew there’s nothing bigger than God. Even death doesn’t defeat God. There’s life, first in Heaven and then on the earth made new when Jesus returns.

2. Paul was lifted up above because he learned to silent the devil’s mental attacks by proclaiming God’s Word. And praise to God helped him do it.

D. Conclusion: We still have more to say but consider this thoughts as we close this lesson. When we learn to praise God, acknowledge God, boast about who He is and what He does in the face of our trials, we will be lifted up above. We’ll be strengthened inwardly to stand until we see God’s deliverance More next week.