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E-votional 70

Afflicted Exaltation

Last week, we talked about afflicted learning. The purpose was to show how God sometimes allows afflictions in our lives to equip us to be obedient to His Word and to come into a powerful and meaningful heart knowledge of who He is. This week, while we are again talking about afflictions and sufferings, we are talking about them in a little different light. Notwithstanding, this is not going to be exclusive from last week nor is this week exclusive from last week because in all reality both can come into play at the same time and often does. However, I find it necessary to stir up your hearts to the truths in the Bible in this way to help and equip you to be effective disciples and witnesses for Jesus Christ our Lord and Messiah.

Sometimes, we go through afflictions and it is not necessarily because we did anything wrong but rather for the glory of God. Check out John 11:4 (ESV),

But when Jesus heard it he said, "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

So, Lazarus was allowed by God to face a physical death to somehow glorify God with the result of being raised from the dead unbeknownst to anyone else. Of course, not in every case are we promised a type of resurrection in this life, but this Scripture shows how God can always get the glory if we simply allow Him to. In fact, in some cases allowance is not even the question because who do we think we are if we can stop a purpose of God? However, our response to the things we go through can completely enhance our faith or alter our perception of what is really going on and in many ways can end up hindering our witness for Christ in this earth or bettering it depending on how we handle the situation.

Afflicted exaltation is very simply when God gets the glory and is exalted through whatever afflictions and suffering we may going through. Now, this is not a theological term, but one that was intended merely to place emphasis on this principle.

Have you ever been around a smoker before? There is a large possibility then that you know what I am talking about when I say that when you leave the presence of a smoker that even though you yourself may not smoke you leave smelling like smoke. There is just no escaping it. It is just a natural law I guess.

I assure you there is a reason for this line of question and answer. The point for this I will show shortly after this passage of Scripture from 1 Peter 5:8-11 (ESV),

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

According to this passage and specifically in verse 8, the devil prowls around looking for believers that he can devour. For this reason, we are called to remain sober-minded and vigilant and firm in our faith. When I think of being firm in my faith amid much testing and suffering, I am immediately reminded of Daniel 3.

As the story goes king Nebuchadnezzar made an image and declared to all in his kingdom that they were to bow down and worship it whenever the people hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music. In other words, it was a national declaration that all peoples that abide in that nation were commanded by royal decree to worship a false god or an idol. However, three Hebrew men chose another way of worship when in verse 12, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused the king's edict and refused to bow in worship to this false god. So, it goes, when, the music started, these men chose simply to not bow. The failure for these three men to not obey this declaration would surely cost them, but rather than bow, they still refused. They were actually given yet another chance by the king to bow down and worship this image but even then their faith did not fail. When I think of this moment in these brave men of God, I cannot help but think of the severity of their resilience to temptation and how they chose to live in light of this crazy edict.

So the king threatened these men by saying in Daniel 3:15 (ESV),

Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?"

The response of these three men of God was priceless as is found in Daniel 3:16-18 (ESV),

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

Praise God! I see a definite firmness and also vigilance with their faith and adherence to it.

Nebuchadnezzar was enraged by this display of integrity and ordered the fiery furnace to be heated seven times more hotly than is normal. It was heated so hot that those who bound and threw these men into it actually perished themselves in the process of throwing them into it. It is a natural law, you mess with fire you will certainly get burned.

However, the story finished by showing that there appeared one that looked like the Son of God in the fire with them and the king had to do a double-take when he asked his servants, "*did we not throw three men bound in the fire?*" Indeed, he did, but the Lord entered the fire with these faithful servants of the Most High God. The king saw that they were not being consumed by this fire and brought them out of the furnace and made a public declaration noted in Daniel 3:29 (ESV),

Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins, for there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way."

Wow! So, the king not only pulled these men back out of the fire, but he declared that God is God and anyone that speaks against Him will be put to death, to put it nicely. Not only this but in the following verse, the king actually promoted these three men of God.

Now back to smelling like smoke after being near a smoker, remember, it's a natural law. But here where we stand in the service of Christ just the opposite is true. When these Hebrew men of God stood firm on their faith, they came out not smelling like smoke and instead were promoted and the name of God was exalted. I wonder if we are truly getting what is said here?

Let's look at 1 Peter 5:10 (ESV),

And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

Praise the Lord! The idea here is that we are literally promised suffering in this present dark age. Yet in all of that darkness, God is steadily promoting us in His own supernatural way so that things like natural laws do not become a hindrance to those who truly remain steadfast under trial trusting in the Lord. We are called to be different. Different looks like these three Hebrew men of God. Look at the marvelous results. It is truly amazing because these Hebrew men were in the smoke but didn't smell like smoke because their lives were lived in firm faith and resilience. I believe that Peter had understanding of this same principle here when he wrote his letter to the church. He was effectively saying that he knew it was going to get tough and that the enemy had a target on their back, but so the enemy also has a target on all the brothers' and sisters' backs. For this reason, Peter tells them to resist the devil and do not give in to his pressure but to withstand him rather in the faith as a firm and faithful soldier in the army of the Lord walking in love as Christ had loved them. The way we fight back is not so much in the political or social field but with the radical expression of our faith. When we chose rather to suffer mistreatment and walk in faith and love entrusting it all into the Lord's hands by humbling ourselves, we have God as our rescuer who knows how to work all things together for good to accomplish His perfect will in this earth. When we choose rather to fight in the political and social arena we take that fight into our own hands and end up stumbling over anger, bitterness, and harsh words and end up resenting those to whom we are called to reach. Let us all resolve to be firm in the faith and to stop letting satan turn us from the truth and integrity of the Gospel by taking matters into our own hands. When we do this we not only come out of the fire not smelling like the smoke, but we come out of the fire bringing others to glory.

Now, I know I have been writing a lot about affliction and suffering, but in my defense so does the Bible. It has really been hardpressed into my heart lately to encourage by way of reminder the need to properly endure suffering and affliction and also to communicate the many reasons and purposes that suffering and affliction play a role in the lives of believers. These past few weeks the Lord has been engraving this on my heart and I believe it is for a major purpose. Although I cannot tell what the future may hold, I believe that God is getting us ready for whatever lies ahead. We often pray for revival and I for one believe that revival must come soon. However, when I read the Scriptures much of the revival that took place took place amid much affliction and trouble. Affliction and suffering produce so much in as well as through the lives of believers to accomplish God's good purposes on the earth. I think it is very important for us to know and

understand so that when we face trials of many kinds we will have the tools necessary to face them head-on in faith, hope, and love.

We pray that the Lord would stir up all of our hearts by way of reminding us that He alone is God and our sole purpose while here is to glorify Him before all peoples and nations. We love you all and ask the Lord to fill you with wonder and amazement each time you read His Word and that He alone would fill your life with all that He has purposed for you, in Jesus name. Amen.

In Christ's Love,
Chris and Jeanne
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