

"... healing for all the nations" Revelation 22:2



"... the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified" Isaiah 61:3

The Tree of Life

Volume 2, Issue 8

"... for the testimony of Jesus"
Revelation 1:9

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Our Attitude in Adversity

In the last articles we have talked about that there will be adversity and that sometimes adversity comes because of our sins. This time we will be talking about adversity that is part of life. I mean, we all can feel the force of Job's words, "Man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not." Yet, even here God has something to say to us.

There is an account about Isaac in the book of Genesis. It is in the sixteenth chapter, verses 16-22. Isaac had went to into the land of the Philistines because there was a famine in the land. After the famine was over, he want back to the land of promise. When he arrived, he found the well his father had dug had been filled in by the Philistines. He started to dig it out, had to have water. When he got the well flowing, then the Philistine herdsmen started to harass and give them trouble. So what did Isaac do? He moved on down the road and dug another well. Guess what happened at the new place? He started to have trouble again. So what is he supposed to do? He moved on down the road the next day and dug another well. The Lord gave him peace at the third well.

As Isaac went through this time of trouble he named each of the wells. The names of the wells take us through the process of finding the right attitude about the stress of everyday life. As we study each of the names, remember that these wells would have been dug with picks, shovels, and buckets. This literally was a life and death situation. With that in mind, let us see what we can learn from Isaac.

The first well was called Ezek. This word in the Hebrew means contention. What do you think when you hear or read that word? Struggle, disputes, bias, bad attitudes? We have a glimpse into the state of Isaac's mind and heart here. Can you hear the servants as they are digging the well? Complaining, sweating, cursing at the animals and then the sun, thirsty, knowing that the only way to water was to sweat some more?

This is the life that is constantly fighting against everything that is perceived to be bad. Let us look at the situation. What were they struggling against? All the physical things, the dirt, rocks, etc? Facts of digging a well. So much of our lives are like that. Facts of life, facts of our continued existence. What would have happened if they would have stopped digging the well? They would have died. Most of the things that we rail against, if they went away, we would not be living either. Driving in traffic is horrible, yet what are the alternatives? Lying in bed sick? What are we being so contentious about?

Striving in itself and of itself is not bad. The Bible talks about striving. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. ... Yea, so have I

strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation: Striving is not the issue. It is what you are striving about.

The second well is named Sitnah. It means striving. This is a change in the momentum and force of the striving. Of course, this seems to make sense. They had dug one well, had to leave, and now they are digging another well. Here they were, with water and peace within their grasp. Yet they had to fight and strive, till finally they had to give up. They move on, start over and the exact same situation comes up before them. Here comes the same frustration, and all the same sweat, tears and hard work. This is just like so many of our lives. We pray about something, seem to get some relief, even deliverance, and then it is right back in the mess worse than before. The striving and frustration becomes so intense, they finally give up and leave again.

What does this all have to do with everyday life? Is this not a picture of our lives? Frustration, sweat, and endless digging. The laundry, dishes, bill paying, and children's crying. It seems that we go from one crisis to another. Yet what is the point?

There is a verse in the New Testament that will help at this point. It reads thus "The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it." We so many times apply this verse to the ministry and the things that go along with it. Prayer, preaching, witnessing. But is that really true? I mean, are those things the limit of the kingdom of God? I would think that the Bible teaches otherwise. When Paul gives his great doctrinal passages of his letters, he then follows it up with instructions about every facet of our lives. We need to realize that there is no separation of our church life and our secular lives. If we are to press into the kingdom of God, that means we are to press into every part of our lives.

This word for press in the Greek comes from the same root that we translate life. In other words, to press means that you are still alive. That to be alive is to be pressing into the pressures of life. That sounds all fine, well and good. To press back means we are still alive. Can we come to the place where we cannot press back? Again I think that the scripture gives us the answer. "For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us" Paul tells us that such a place is possible. He also tells us that it is that place that God comes and causes us to be able to press even further. The press from the enemy and the world's point of view is to bring death. The press from God's point of view is to give us life. The press is the only way we can be brought to the place of death and then the life of God can be given unto us. Did Isaac ever learn this?

The account in Genesis ends with the digging of a third well. Here again we have all the sweat and trouble. Yet there is a difference with Isaac. He calls the well Rehoboth. That means room, abundance, bounty. Isaac had come to the place that he knew that God was the one that gave the strength to dig the first two wells. He was also the one that brought them to the place of blessing with the third well. He realized that whether he was sweating or resting God was the giver of strength, power, and wisdom in both.

Hosea

A day of separation, a day of hope

As we come to the end of the book of Hosea, we find that God is bringing separation to the people who are called by the name of Israel. It starts in chapter 9 with God declaring that the people

should not be rejoicing in their sin, all of their joy is shallow and worthless. They shall be not be able to get full - physically, emotionally, or spiritually. This is the warning, this is the announcement that things are about to change. The people have two choices from this point on. Either repent and turn to God, or be judged and destroyed.

So that there is no misunderstanding, God fingers the issue at hand in 10:2. He says that they have a divided heart. While this is not good, there is hope here. Why is that? Because if there was not still a tenderness, a knowing and wanting for the Lord, they would have a hard heart, not a divided one. So how is God going to proceed from here? Judgment is coming, be assured of that. The place of separation comes in the response to the warning and the judgment. God wants to draw all of us with "bands of love." God is love and wants to show this. He wants to be merciful. He wants and desires to show us the compassion that we so desperately need.

Can you hear the passion in the voice of the Lord? This is what Hosea wrote to us, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee: and I will not enter into the city." (11:8, 9) God is looking for people to quit backsliding, to be His covenant people. He does not want to be Judge, He wants to be merciful. Like a heartbroken Father, He wants His wayward son to come home and leave his wicked ways. The two cities mentioned are the lesser cities that were destroyed along with Sodom and Gommorah. (Duet. 29:23) With all the threatenings, with all the judgment, with all the sin, God does not want to let His people go to destruction!

The promise of deliverance comes ringing clear at the the end of chapter 13. "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction" Here we have the words that we use about the Lord Jesus. We know it was Christ that was our ransom. We know it was Christ that redeemed us from sin, the grave, and the wicked one! In Christ is the hope and promise of all blessing, both in this world and the one that is to come.

The Beatitudes

Blessed are those that hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.

This verse has one of the most important words and concepts in the Bible. For us to understand what it means to hunger and thirst for it, we must first understand righteousness. We will first define it. Then we will see if we have it. If not, the why not.

"Righteousness is the state commanded by God and standing the test of His judgment (2 Cor. 3:9; 6:14; Eph. 4:24). It is conformity to all that He commands or appoints. Since God Himself is the standard for the believer, the righteousness of God means the righteousness which belongs to God or God-like righteousness. (Matt. 6:33; James 1:20) The righteousness of God is the right which God has upon man. " (Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible, Revised Edition, 1991 page 1706, *dikaiosune*)

With that definition in mind, does man in his natural state have righteousness? Or to put it another way, can man stand God's judgment?

That word conformity is where the trouble starts. God commands us to follow the laws and authority over us. "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you." (Hebrews 13:17)

Pick a law then. Take the law about seatbelts for instance. I cannot say that I like this law. If I do not wear my seatbelt, break man's law and therefore I break God's law also. So by our definition, I fail to conform to the law of God, therefore I have no righteousness. So then I say to myself ,Hey! I put the seat belt on, keep your ticket, I am now righteous! However we still have a problem. My heart is not wanting to wear the belt. So my righteousness is only skin deep.

This principle applies to any law you want to pick out. Indeed, the heart is the issue. Man's righteousness is always based on his estimation of what is good. Man's definition of what is righteous is always based on our imperfect values. So are we to hunger and thirst for something we cannot achieve or attain? Before we tackle that, there is another problem.

What are we going to do about the sin that we have committed? With all this failure, how is God going to justify us in His sight, and ours? What is the point of trying to do right if I know that what I did yesterday keeps me from God? What is the point of being righteous if I still remember the hideous thing I did yesterday, two weeks ago, ten years ago? The sin of our lives is a reality that is ever present. A tortured conscience is the beginning of what the Lord called "their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." How and why should I change if everyone is reminding me of what I have done?

God in His mercy and wisdom has dealt with these issues. He has done this in our having faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. What God has done is justify us by faith. Christ took the penalty of sin for us. In taking that penalty, God is able to say that the punishment has been accomplished. This is the act of a Judge. The failures that we have had in God's sight, man's sight, the punishment for these is done.

"... if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification." Because Christ lives, I can be at peace that the sin that I have committed has been fulfilled. Because the punishment has been fulfilled I am peace with God and myself. Herein is the grounds and motivation for hungering and thirsting after righteousness. Because God through Christ has made us right in His sight, this His righteousness is ours to have.

The Vineyard and the Orchard - A Parable

Isaiah 5:1-7; Jeremiah 2:21; Micah 7:1; Matthew 7:16-20; 21:19; 33-41; Luke 13:1-9; John 15:1-16

As we continue on in our study of what causes root failure, we are ready to move on to a second cause. Again I want to remind you to look at the tree and see how lifeless it is. We sometimes think that because someone is coming to church, they have life. That is an assumption that we cannot afford to make.



The next root rot issue that we want to look at is rebellion. We need to understand that we cannot have rebellion in our hearts and expect to have productive and worthwhile lives. The Lord addresses this several times in His word. Let us now go there and see what we can learn.

This is a serious issue with God. The whole of His Kingdom is predicated upon His Authority. We know that in the world to come Christ will rule absolutely. (Psalms 2:9; Rev. 2:27) While this world may not be under His rule in that fashion, our hearts and actions are to be ruled by Him. We are the Kingdom of God now, if we have placed our trust and faith in Him. (Col. 1:13)

So what then is rebellion? It is trying to live by our desires, might, or ideas instead of the Lord's. God has laid down definite moral and social rules for us to follow. These are not negotiable in His sight. If we know what these rules and obligations are and choose to ignore them, then we are living in rebellion and cannot have the life of Christ, much less bear fruit. Rebellion at its core is a direct attack upon God. We are say with our mouths that His is the King, that He is the Lord of our lives. Then we at minimum think something else, sometimes even act on it.

I have six areas that the Bible talks about us being in rebellion. Examine each one of these carefully. If we are wanting to have fruit, if we are wanting to have the blessing of God, we must see if we are being rebellious in these areas.

Civil government (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Timothy 2:1-4; 1 Peter 2:13-17) This would include traffic laws, taxes, business laws

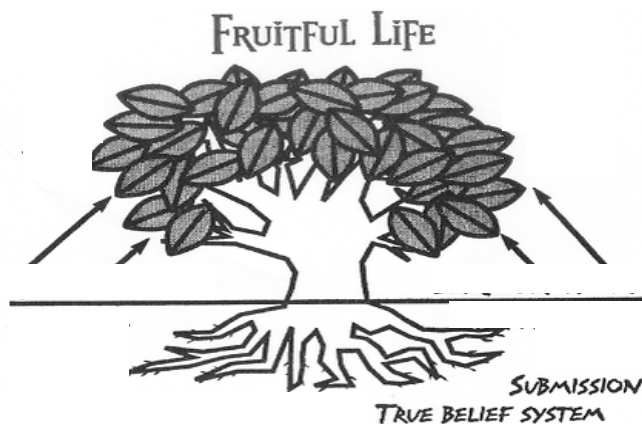
Parents (Ephesians 6:1-3)

Our employers (1 Peter 2:18-21) What a wasted chance to be a witness for Christ!

Husband (Ephesians 5:22-24)

Church leaders (Hebrews 13:17)

God, Himself (Daniel 9:5,9)



As we look at the fruitful tree we see that at the root it is submissive. What is it about us that does not like that word? It shows how deep rebellion truly is part of our being. This is one of the foundations to the Kingdom of God. Paul tells us that submission was the motivation for Christ to come to the earth and die the death that He did. He then says in the same passage that we are to have the same mind in us. (Philippians 2:5-9) In another place Paul tells us to be "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God." This is to be a way of life for the Christian.

How then is this submission going to show itself? First we need to ask the Lord for forgiveness in being rebellious toward Him and those He has placed in authority over us. Second look at the following ways that we can show that we are being submissive to the Lord and the other authorities in our lives.

1. We have to be accountable. In other words, we do as we are asked to do, and report back in accordance to this.

2. We are responsible. We do not shift the blame to someone else.
3. We are reliable. We say we are going to do something and it gets done.
4. We are pliable. We move and adjust to the needs of the authority, and do not grumble about it
5. We do act to the best of our ability. We do our best. The fish (Jonah), the worm (Jonah), and the donkey (Balaam) all did what they were able to do. When they needed something more, God provided because they were submissive to His will.

*Now may the saving grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, rest remain and abide with us all, now and forevermore.
Amen*

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