

Broomfield



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 5 Issue 6

February 19, 2006

From Ashes to Glory, Part 2

Cold Christians

2 Timothy 1:7-8, "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God."

Revelation 2:4, "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love."

2 Thessalonians 3:13, "But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing."

Galatians 2:11, "But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed."

David wrote these words:

Psalm 32:3, "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long."

If these verses teach anything, they tell us that it is possible to profess Christ, be saved by His blood, genuinely love the Lord, and yet grow cold in our walk with Christ and slip into sin.

Consequently, I have no doubt that I am addressing ones who know the struggle of sin, and can look back with envy upon former times in the Lord when their faith was bold and fresh and have spent many a day in the desert. Keith Green captured the testimony of many in the body of Christ when he wrote these lyrics:

"My eyes are dry, my faith is old,
"My heart is hard, my prayers are cold."

Do you find yourself in that place? Are you in a dry and weary land? Are you in a land of coldness and indifference? Are you in that land of compromise and complacency?

If that is the case, then the passage at which we are looking is particularly for you!

While on the surface it appears to be a description of a military victory on the part of God's people over

the Philistines, we know that there is much more going on here. In Judges 13 we read this:

Judges 13:1, “And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years.”

Now 1 Samuel 1-6 overlaps with the Judges. From this we concluded that the trials and difficulties of Israel, the loss of the Ark, the destruction of Shiloh, their defeat in battle, and the loss of their priesthood all point to a spiritual issue. God’s people are being disciplined because of their sin.

Now, when we read in our text that Israel was “delivered from the hand of the Philistines” we conclude that 1 Samuel 7 stands for far more than a military victory; it is nothing less than a revival in Israel’s walk with God. It is a renewal on the part of the people of God.

However, what is to explain this revival?

God’s people have spent forty years in the desert, and then all of the sudden they turn back to the Lord. Why?

Brokenness

We are going to begin answering these questions as we consider the path to spiritual renewal.

Notice the first element of spiritual renewal is brokenness.

1 Samuel 7:2-3a, “And it came to pass, while the ark abode in Kirjathjearim, that the time was long; for it was twenty years: and all the house of Israel lamented¹ after the LORD. And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel,”

In our previous examination of this text we noted that the “lamentation” of Israel as referenced here was the precursor to the revival of this chapter. The Hebrew indicates that it wasn’t until Israel was lamenting that Samuel rose to address God’s people.² So we conclude that the first element of Spiritual Renewal is a lamentation in our walk with Christ. Where this is absent, we consider ourselves in a desert!

And yet what does this mean?

The word for “lament” refers to the wailing that accompanies mourning and is used in the context of funeral dirges,³ and the brokenness of a rebellious people.⁴ Accordingly it indicates a genuine loathing of one’s situation or one’s self, and so a consequent longing for the Lord.

You say, “That doesn’t sound to me like the victorious life. What place is there for ‘self-lamenting’ in the life of the child of God?”

You will find brothers and sisters that “lamentation” ought to be one of the chief characteristics of the Christian. That is what Christ taught.

¹ נָחַח nahah

² The “and” or “then” of verse 3 is a waw-consecutive!

³ Compare Jeremiah 9:9-11, 16-21; 31:15

⁴ Compare also Micah 2:4; Amos 5:16 — both of these reference funeral dirges.

Matthew 5:3-4. “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.”

The Sermon on the Mount addresses not pie in the sky religion. It identifies the one who truly ought to be envied in the Kingdom of God — the poor in spirit and the mournful. In fact the word “blessed” could be taken as, “to be envied.” The poor in spirit speaks of one's state. Those who mourn speaks of one's emotion.

Though there are a variety of words for poverty in the Bible, the word here references abject poverty! It doesn't just mean poor, but begging poor and so it denotes the person who sits in an alley with covered face on account of shame, and begs for money. It speaks of devastation — of being totally and completely ruined or bankrupt.⁵

And so to be “poor in spirit” is to be one who recognizes that you have nothing to offer God. You recognize that your own righteousness is filthy rags and that whatever you could offer God is little more than dung⁶ — the words of Paul.⁷

And such is the mark of broken people. Though they might do many good and righteous things in the Kingdom of God, nevertheless they know that these acts of service are not the basis of their salvation. And they know that what they have done they ought to have done as slaves.⁸ In fact far from boasting in their deeds, broken people here are described as ones who “mourn.”

Mourning references the same idea as the “lamentation” of 1 Samuel 7. It represents a deep and heart-felt grief, and was generally reserved for grieving over the death of a loved one.⁹ It carries the idea of deep inner agony, which often-times is expressed by an outward weeping, wailing, or lamenting. And such is the day-by-day experience of the child of God who is growing in his walk with Christ. See, there is nothing we can do to make up for our sin, or make God love us.

And yet we daily commit sin — sometimes intentionally. We know what Christ did in order for us to be forgiven and so we mourn. We mourn our wretchedness- — that we could betray One who has loved us so dearly. We mourn our inability to do otherwise.

How many times have we purposed to stop a certain sin, only to return to it like a dog to his vomit?¹⁰ Now according to Christ's teaching here on the Sermon on the Mount these — we are told — are typical of the Kingdom of God! And this is what constitutes the “higher life!”¹¹

We see it in Paul. Early in his ministry he wrote of himself.

1 Corinthians 15:9, “For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle,

⁵ For example, the word commonly used for poverty in the Bible was *penichros*, and so was used of the widow who gave an offering in the Temple (N.B. while she had very little, she did have “two small copper coins” [Luke 21:2]). However one who is *ptochos* — which is the word used here — is completely dependent on others for sustenance. Unlike the widow, they have no resources (cf. Luke 16:20).

⁶ σκυβαλον skubalon

⁷ Compare Philippians 3:8

⁸ Compare Luke 17:7-10

⁹ cf. Genesis 37:34 [LXX]; Mark 16:10

¹⁰ Compare Proverbs 26:11

¹¹ This is not the Keswick teaching of the higher life that is being referenced here.

because I persecuted the church of God.”

So Paul wasn't the most renowned apostle. Don't miss it — he still was an apostle and therefore one to be honored! But then a few years later, Paul wrote these words;

Ephesians 3:8, “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;”

You say, “Wait! He's going in the wrong direction. Before he was the ‘least of the apostles,’ now he is the ‘least of all saints.’”

Now, brothers and sisters don't miss the point being made here! Maturation in Christ involves a growing recognition of one's poverty before Christ — and thus a growing mourning over one's miserable condition before God.

You say, “Well there has to be a stopping point. Right? One's self-esteem couldn't handle a growing distrust and disgust of one's self.”

Now, don't speak too fast. Toward the end of his life, while the Apostle Paul was awaiting execution wrote this:

1 Timothy 1:15, “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.”

Do you see it?

As Paul grew in Christ he matured in his lamenting his sinful condition before God. In fact at one point in his life, he said, “O, wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Romans 7:24).

Truly, lamentation is the chief characteristic of vibrancy in one's walk with Christ. Accordingly from these and other such passages we conclude that God's will for all of us in Christ is lamenting after the Lord.

2 Corinthians 7:9, “Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing.”

David confessed:

Psalms 51:17, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.”

And that is why in our passage this morning, we observe that Israel's “lamenting after God” was the precursor to a deep and abiding relationship with God. And it was the precursor to spiritual renewal and victory.

We should not be surprised! For spiritual mourning is God's will for us in Christ! Yet why is that? Why does God want us to live out our lives ever-mindful of our spiritual poverty?

He wants us to be ever mindful of spiritual poverty because

- Proud Christians have no need for God; sinful ones do!
- Proud Christians make demands from God; sinful ones are just pleased to be in His presence!
- Proud Christians are ungrateful, self-absorbed, and critical of God's providence; sinful ones are thrilled just to be used by God.
- Proud Christians look to God to get; sinful ones just want to give Him their love on account of the cross!

Notice where Paul's lamenting led:

Romans 7:24-25z, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Paul's self-loathing made him passionate in his walk with Christ! David's brokenness on account of his sin led to this prayer:

Psalm 51:11-12, "Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit."

So long as David held on to his "high" and "mighty" position as "king," he had no need for Christ. But when God confronted him such that his eyes were opened to his miserable condition before the Lord, HE RAN TO GOD!

Loneliness for God, from whom he felt separated for a time, caused the psalmist to declare this:

Psalm 42:1-3, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?"

Undoubtedly this is one of our most favorite Psalms in Scripture. Yet you must see that it was written by one who was poor in spirit and mourned as a result!

So why does God want "brokenness" in the life of His people? So that they would long for nothing else in life than Christ! Thomas Watson put it this way:

"A castle that has long been besieged and is ready to be taken will deliver up on any terms to save their lives. He whose heart has been a garrison for the devil, and has held out long in opposition against Christ, when once God has brought him to poverty of spirit and he sees himself damned without Christ, let God propound what articles he will, he will readily subscribe to them. 'Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?'"¹²

John Darby observed it this way:

"To be hungry is not enough; I must be really starving to know what is in God's heart toward me. When the prodigal son was hungry, he went to feed on the husks, but when he was starving, he

¹² Thomas Watson, *The Beatitudes*, page 47

turned to his father.”¹³

And that is where we find God's people in our text. The forty year reign of terror brought Israel to the point in their walks where they “lamented after the Lord.” It brought them to the point where they said this:

- Lord, we no longer care about pleasure.
- We no longer need security.
- The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life has lost its allure.
- JUST GIVE US YOU!
- Your covenantal presence.
- Your grace and favor.
- The pleasure of sitting at Your feet.

That is the first element of Spiritual Renewal: Brokenness!

Accordingly mark these words well. Until you and I die to self, we will never live. So long as we are exalting in our knowledge, we will never really know Christ. Insofar as we stand upon the perception that we have it all together, we will never walk with Christ. So long as we are making demands of the Lord, we will never know what true submission really is.

And yet for so long that is what characterized Israel's relationship with the Lord. God to them was little more than a Santa Clause figure — a benign, omniscient being whose sole existence was for the benefit of Israel.

And so never mind that God's worship was daily compromised. Idolatry was rampant.¹⁴ The Ark of the Covenant was viewed as little more than a lucky charm. God's honor and glory was daily trampled underfoot. Genuine devotion was passed off as drunkenness. Walking with God was an obscure concept that was rarely enjoyed. And the thinking of Israel was that, “the Lord would be good to Israel because they were on God's side!”

Isn't that the tenor of Christianity today?

God exists to help us through the week. He exists only to bless us. He exists to make us happy. He exists to make life more livable.

And that is why the moment God's will contradicts our own will, out come the accusations, complaints, and resentments. It is little wonder that God rebuked His people in 1 Samuel. He ground them in the crucible. He placed them in the fire. And he left them there for forty years. God's plan in through it all was to “beautify the afflicted ones with salvation” (Psalm 149:4).

And so it is in our lives as well! As we've seen, God ordains trials and difficulties to create in us a deeper hungering and thirsting for God. And thus the Psalmist said this:

Psalm 119:67, “Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.”

¹³ Quoted in MacArthur's NT Commentary Series, *Matthew 1-7*, pp. 181-182.

¹⁴ Compare 1 Samuel 7:3-4

Psalm 119:71, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.”

Robert Browning Hamilton put it this way:¹⁵

I walked a mile with Pleasure,
She chattered all the way,
But left me none the wiser
For all she had to say.

I walked a mile with Sorrow,
And ne'er a word said she,
But, oh, the things I learned from her
When Sorrow walked with me.

Family of God, I hope you are getting this. This is the foundation upon which we must build the expectations of our lives. God's will for you in Christ is NOT success in your worldly endeavors, nor a life that ends “happily ever after,” or worldly honor, fame, or wealth. Rather it is to wean you from creation's glory and pride, and so to make you satisfied with and longing only for Christ.

Now you look upon life through this lens and you will discover

- Meaning- where there was only mystery.
- Answers- where there was only questions.
- Light- where before there was darkness.
- Purpose- where there was only confusion.¹⁶

You say, “You mean God is ordaining all things that I might love Him more deeply?”

Yes!

“Well after the pain I've been through, I don't know that I want this God.”

Oh brother or sister- you are only kicking against the goads. If the fire has not yet “wooed” you to Christ, do you think the Lord is going to give you up? He loves you too much!

No! He will continue to thicken the hedge of discomfort and trial until you release your feeble claim on life, and cling more firmly to Christ.¹⁷

You say, “How do I mourn when there is no sadness? How do I weep, when I have no tears?”

Allow me to make four suggestions:

¹⁵ Cited in William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew* [rev. ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster. 1975], 1:94.

¹⁶ Do you remember that time in Asaph's life when he looked around the world and saw the wealth of the wicked? Their easy days? And found himself envious of the lost? What happened? God opened his eyes to see that life is not about eating and drinking. It is about righteousness, peace, and joy (cf. Romans 14:17).

¹⁷ It will be the depth of your pride which will determine how low He will bring you!

Look to God

Look to God — only He can produce it. "Lamenting after the Lord" is not something that we manufacture. It is a grace of God that comes to all who truly ask for it. And hence we read numerous times in Scripture of God's people requesting the working of this grace in their lives.

Psalm 139:23-24, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

Lancelot Andrewes put it this way:

"I need more grief, O God; I plainly need it. I can sin much, but I cannot correspondingly repent. O Lord, give me a molten heart. Give me tears; give me a fountain of tears. Give me the grace of tears. Drop down, ye heavens, and bedew the dryness of my heart. Give me, O Lord, this saving grace. No grace of all the graces were more welcome to me. If I may not water my couch with my tears, nor wash thy feet with my tears, at least give me one or two little tears that Thou mayest put into thy bottle and write in Thy book!"¹⁸

Begin with Prayer

Let us begin with this prayer — but then consider who/what you really are.

Romans 12:3, "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith."

Paul's exhortation here is to have a Biblical assessment of who/what we really are.

And who/what are we really?

Though we are image bearers, nevertheless we have more in common with an amoeba than we do God! And yet, God still puts up with us. He cares so much about us that He became a man.

If you spend much time here, you will be brought to your knees confessing as did David.

Psalm 8:3-4, "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?"

Consider the Cross

Consider the Cross. Not simply as the payment for your sin, but as the greatest act of self-sacrifice this world has ever seen!

Hebrews 9:11-12, "But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having

¹⁸ From his *Private Devotions*, pp. 172-174, summarized in Whyte, *Bunyan Characters*, iii, p. 196.

obtained eternal redemption for us.”

See this God with whom you have become bored, lost interest in, and are at enmity with because you think that He has somehow slighted you willingly took upon flesh and blood, offered Himself up on your behalf, that you and I might live for eternity with Him forever.

And yet you have the gall to question His motives, love, and plans for your life. Indeed! Consider the cross not only as your salvation, but as the sign and seal of His covenant love!

Serve the Saints

Serve the Saints! There is no greater medicine as it relates to what we personally can do to cultivate a broken heart than service in the body of Christ.

I'm not talking here about setting aside one or two days a week where you invite people into your home or lead a Bible study. Rather, I'm talking about genuinely laboring to see Christ in other people. This kind of passion reveals all sorts of personal sins and inadequacies!

Truly if you want to know — not just believe — but behold your wretchedness face to face get out of the shallow water where you have insulated yourself. Open up your heart. And endeavor to serve, love, uphold, and encourage other believers!

When you do this you will find that you come up way short! Recall the Chinese proverb which says that “the branch laden with the most fruit lies closest to the ground.”

We see this in the life of Paul. In his Christian ministry he was not sitting around judging God for slighting him rather he was actively involving himself in the lives of God's people. He came to this conviction — conviction which made him long all the more for Christ.

2 Corinthians 3:4-5, “And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God.”

Family of God, may brokenness and lamenting after the Lord be a growing grace in our lives such that in and through all things, we long for nothing but Christ — and Him crucified!

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on February 19, 2006. Greg is the Preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.