

Warnings and Encouragement

Sermons From Pastoral Rule, Book 3

August 14, 2016

I. Exhorting and encouraging those whose lives are going according to their wishes and those whose lives are more like Job's during his time of tribulation.

A. Scriptures

1. Ecclesiastes 7:14 . . . In the day of prosperity be happy, but in the day of adversity consider – God has made the one as well as the other so that man will not discover anything that will be after him (that is, so that we cannot know for certain what the future holds).
 - a. Both prosperity and adversity have their uses. One leads to happiness in this life and the ability to help those less fortunate, the other draws attention to the realities of this life and the hope of life hereafter – which in turn promotes faith in God's care, His provision, protection, and His promise to work all things out for good for those who love Him and live according to His will.
 - b. In addition, the fluctuation between good times and bad times pushes us to recognize that the future is unknown to us, but it is known to God. Therefore we are wise to trust Him with our future, whatever may come.
2. Deuteronomy 6:10-11 . . . Then it shall come about when the LORD your God brings you into the land which He swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you great and splendid cities which you did not build, [11] and houses full of all good things which you did not fill, and hewn cisterns which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant, and you eat and are satisfied, Deuteronomy 8:11-14 . . . [then] Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today; [12] otherwise, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, [13] and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, [14] then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.
3. Romans 5:3-4 . . . And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; [4] and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope. [Therefore . . .]

4. James 1:2-4 . . . Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, [3] knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. [4] And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

B. Prayer

II. Those whose lives are going according to their wishes

A. Warnings to those whose lives are going according to their wishes

1. If your life is generally going according to your wishes, beware, for in that kind of situation many are easily tempted to fix their heart on earthly treasures and neglect the pursuit of heavenly treasure.
 - a. For example, in Jesus' parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man set his heart on enjoying the riches he had in this life. And in so doing, he neglected to lay up treasure in heaven by failing to care for poor Lazarus. Jesus, through the answer given by Abraham to the rich man's question, explained the outcome of such earth bound living. And Abraham said, "Child (the rich man), remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony" (Luke 16:25).
 - b. Luke 12:16-21 records another parable Jesus told about having a life that is going as you want.
 - (1) In essence, the parable is about a rich land owner whose land was so productive that he decided to tear down his barns and build larger ones in order to store all his grain and goods. Upon doing this, he said to himself, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry." But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?"
 - (2) Jesus concluded His parable by reminding us that we are fools to store up treasure for ourselves on earth rather than being rich toward God.
 - c. And the point of these two parables is, no matter how good life is, never neglect the pursuit of heavenly treasure
2. If your life is generally going according to your wishes, be aware that such a situation makes it very tempting to find more joy and contentment in what God has given, then in God himself. For as Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). May God always be our supreme treasure and joy!

3. If your life is generally going according to your wishes, beware, because under these conditions it will be very easy to grow to love life here more than you long for life there – which is the location of your true home.
 - a. The attitude we ought to have is spoken of in Hebrews 11:13-16 . . . “All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own . . . desiring a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.
 - b. And as the song says, “This world is not my home, I’m just passing through. My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue.”
4. If your life is generally going according to your wishes, be aware that earthly blessings – such as a good job, a good family, a beautiful home, numerous possessions, and good health – can lead to thinking you are the one responsible for all this good instead of God, or that it is your strength of faith that is moving God to make your life good.
 - a. 1 Timothy 6:17-19 . . . Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. [18] Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, [19] storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.
 - b. May we always remember that every good thing given and every perfect gift comes from God (James 1:17).
5. If your life is generally going according to your wishes, be aware that under such conditions it is easy to forget about or neglect godly wisdom and live according to the earthly wisdom as if it were earthly wisdom that made your life so good.
 - a. Proverbs 3:13-16 . . . How blessed is the man who finds wisdom and the man who gains understanding. [14] For [wisdom’s] profit is better than the profit of silver and her gain better than fine gold. [15] She is more precious than jewels; and nothing you desire compares with her. [16] Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor.

- b. In Matthew 6:25&33, Jesus affirms what true wisdom is in relation to (1) having what we need and (2) who provides what we need. Jesus said, “For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:25, 33).

B. Encouragements to those whose lives are going according to their wishes

1. If your life is generally going according to your wishes, then I encourage you to nurture humility and flee pride, that is, flee from the pride of thinking that either you are the one who has made your life so good, or your righteousness is the reason God is treating you this way. God does reward righteousness, but who is so righteous as to put God in their debt. Every good we have is a gift from God.
2. I encourage you to use the good times to reinforce and grow further in your love for God, your gratitude for God’s many blessings, and your contentment with what you have. And I encourage you to resist the devil’s temptations to love earthly things more than God, or to allow ingratitude and discontentment to gain a foothold in your life (Philippians 4:11; 1 Timothy 6:8; Hebrews 13:5).
3. I encourage you to use your blessed life to serve God, your family, the church, and those less fortunate in our world.
 - a. For Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).
 - b. And again Jesus said, “To the extent that you did it to [that is, cared for] ... even the least of these, you did it to Me” (Matthew 25:40).
4. Finally, I encourage you to believe that God has blessed you, not so that you will live according to His will – just as He did with Israel.
 - a. Psalm 105:44-45 . . . He gave them also the lands of the nations, that they might take possession of the fruit of the peoples' labor, [45] so that they might keep His statutes and observe His laws, praise the LORD!

III. Those whose lives are more like Job’s during his time of tribulation.

- A. Most Christians have heard about Job, and some have read the entire book of Job. Yet of those who have either heard about or have read the

book of Job, many wonder how a good God could stand back and allow the devil to make Job suffer that much.

1. And though that question and other issues have been debated, taught on, and written about for centuries, I believe it is fair to say that very few Christians have gleaned from Job one of its more significant truths.
2. And what is this often overlooked truth? It is this: If we will cooperate with God and remain faithful to Him regardless of the circumstances, then in accordance with His love and wisdom, He will use hard times, trials, sickness, suffering, and loss of every kind, to strengthen our faith and further transform us into the likeness of Jesus Christ.
3. In other words, when we, like Job, trust God with our well-being and willingly submit to Him regardless of the circumstances, then God uses the difficulties in our lives to further transform us into having a faith and holiness of life that is like that of Jesus Christ.
4. And why would God do this, when so few of us value hard times, and when the most common response to hard times is to complain, feel sorry for ourselves, and do all we can to get out from under them? Here are two reasons God uses these kinds of times to grow us into mature, responsible, faithful Christians.
 - a. First, it is the hard times of life that push us to face up to
 - (1) who we really trust with our security and well-being,
 - (2) who we really serve – which is exposed when the service becomes costly,
 - (3) if we will continue living righteously and according to love's standard when righteousness and love do not remove the suffering, pain, and trials, or fix the attitudes and behavior of those around us.
 - (4) if we will deny ourselves and die to selfishness and self-rule,
 - (5) In other words, hard times provide the very best classroom for learning about ourselves, and about living by faith, and about living a godly life.
 - b. Second, the results that come from being schooled in the classroom of hard times go far beyond transforming us, they bring us into spiritual riches, spiritual health, and a growing knowledge and intimacy with God that is worth immeasurably more than all the earthly blessings, good health, possessions, riches, and happiness we can wish for in this life.
5. Even Job declared this kind of spiritual gain to be true when he said, "I know that You (God) can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours

can be thwarted ... Therefore I [acknowledge that I] have declared that which I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. Hear, now, and I will speak; I will ask You, and You instruct me. I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees You (the seeing he spoke of was with his spiritual eyes – which is as real as seeing with ones physical eyes); therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:1-6).

- a. And how did Job get to the place of seeing God with his spiritual eyes? He came to this place by remaining faithful and submissive to God while going through and in spite of the hard times.
 - b. You may not yet be able to imagine the value of such seeing, but for those who have seen as Job has, it is a value that immeasurably surpasses any earthly treasure you can imagine.
6. The NT also speaks of hard times as a gracious working of God on our behalf. Listen as I read from Hebrews 12:5-11, “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov’d by Him; [6] for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives. [7] It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? [8] But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. [9] Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? [10] For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. [11] All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

B. Warning to those enduring hard times

1. Be careful that after passing through hard times and coming into good or easier times, you do not fall from a focused commitment to spiritual growth and godliness into a careless self-centeredness that opens the door to unbelief and sin.
2. For example, when David was a servant of King Saul and on the run for his life, he was very careful to live righteously – even to the point of refusing to take Saul’s life when he could have. And remember, Saul was out to take David’s life, that is why he was on the run. (1 Samuel 24:18). But when David became king, when life was going

well for him, he carelessly gave way to his lustful desires, which in turn led him to put to death, by deceit, a devoted soldier (2 Samuel 11:17).

3. Surely, if a man after God's own heart could fall like this, we are wise to be vigilant, for it is that much easier for us to fall.

C. Encouragements to those enduring hard times

1. If God uses the hard times of life to take us further down the narrow path of life, then we can be assured that God will richly reward those who embrace the hard times, yield to their transforming power, and endure to the end so as to become as much like Christ in this life as is possible, or at least, as is nearly possible. With this in mind, consider these scriptures as encouragement to both embrace and persevere through the hard times.
2. Proverbs 17:3 . . . The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the LORD tests hearts. Do you see the correlation? Just as the heat of fire purifies silver and gold, so the heat of hard times purifies us.
3. Romans 8:16-17 . . . The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, [17] and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. The reward of suffering with Him is to be glorified with Him.
4. Hebrews 10:32-36 . . . But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, [33] partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. [34] For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one. [35] Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. [36] For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.

IV. Conclusion

- A. For most of us, good times and hard times come and go. And so I urge you, regardless of your circumstances, look to God, trust in God, and grow in faith, for it is God, your loving father and teacher, who is working in and with you to conform you to the likeness of His son, Jesus Christ. Therefore, treasure that conforming process and the results.