

Sojourning

Tuesday, 01 May 2007

“Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you...but rejoice inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ’s sufferings, that when His Glory shall be revealed, you may be revealed, that you may be glad also with exceeding Joy” 1 Peter 4:12

That’s a great promise. I don’t know about you, but I need some of that exceeding Joy from time to time. I liked using Peter’s quote this month. We have just had a terrific experience learning more about Peter and his friendship with the Christ during the three-day run of *The Rock & The Rabbi* at the Marion Civic Center. We saw Peter a bit over confident, a little aggressive. We witnessed his weaknesses, his cowardliness, his humiliation and his restoration. It was just a special time for each that attended the musical. Many attended two times, and some were there to see it all three times. It was a strong presentation of a very special teaching about the life of Christ. After seeing this production, I’m impressed that *The Rock & The Rabbi* might be the best communicator of the Gospel I’ve seen in a long time. Thank you for attending the event. We look forward to creating that type of time together again in the future. And the answer is “yes”; we have invited the Rock and the Rabbi back someday.

Now, back to Peter’s statement. We all have to “fess up” to being a little uncomfortable in the world that we are presently living in. I’ve never seen so much pressure from so many sides, occurring all at one time to so many friends, neighbors and family. In this scripture, Peter was expressing what was true for him then, and for future generations- that there would be a “hardness” to this life, a hardness that would be common to everyone. Peter would not have found it surprising that we might find it “strange” that our new life in Christ would be put to the test. He had a few tests himself- failed most of them but continued on. The Greek word used in the text for strange is one that means “not of our family” or “one coming from another country”. Because Christians are aliens in this life, we will always feel this uneasiness here. It is very much like going someplace where you don’t know the language, the customs, or your “way round” the country.

Peter says we are "sojourning" or dwelling as strangers here. (1 Peter 1:17) "Just passing through, thank you!" He warns us that our citizenship will be challenged. That's because we are citizens of a place not made with human hands. (Heb. 11) We are temporarily traveling through, having no intention of this being our destination. I remember the lyric from a Geoff Moore song from years ago:

"There is a place where truth will always be spoken and promises can be believed

A place where your heart cannot be broken and loved ones never leave

That's when I know I'm home."

Not being home yet can give you the "creepy-crawlies" some days. I know we are not comfortable with what the world has to offer, and it seems that we can't get our hands on all that God promises just yet, either. But, even in this environment, we can be comforted! But that comfort can only be experienced by the presence of the Holy Spirit of God. That "Comforter" can settle our hearts and minds. Psalm 91 describes a people that dwelled in "a secret place" - a people that dwelled in the shadow of the Most High. When the going gets tough, when the heat in this life gets very hot, we can find a shadowed place to rest. It is His refuge and His fortress. I'm sure that's the only resting place we will find on this journey. Jesus taught of an abiding peace, something that would dwell within us. Something that we could carry from place to place along the journey that would cause us to find that ever-elusive "fullness of Joy." John 15 identifies the mystery of walking around in this "strange" place and being peaceful at the same time. If we keep His Commandments (simply, love one another with His Love), we will abide in His Love and find His Joy in this very strange place. That's the secret place. It's a place that eludes so many. However, that's exactly how we will find the Peace of God. It is a Peace that exceeds our understanding. We may still face the pressures of this world and be tested to the point of weakness, but we can find a refuge in His Love. His Love empowers us to overcome that pressure. It's not our strength that does that, it's His Love discovered in our weakness that does that.

Home for us will come at some other time, in some other place. Here, we will need to “rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him, fear not thyself because someone prospers in his way or because a man brings wicked devices...but those that wait on the Lord, they shall inherit the earth.” (Psalms 37) We are encouraged to be of good cheer, literally be of good courage in a place that is not our home. Don’t lose your confidence just because we face trials; rather find your confidence in the middle of them. While we will not enjoy the test, we will come to know where “we are at” concerning some things we are to trust in. We will discover what we really believe about this Gospel and whether it will be the “all in all” as promised in the Scriptures.

Peter was tested, seemed to have failed the test, and yet on the other side of that experience was Peter’s revelation of the Christ. If we hold on, that will happen to us on the other side of our test as well. I’m not cheering for trials, I’m just suggesting that Jesus looked into the world system, evaluated it, and reported to us that there would be tribulations. He then cheered for us not to get discouraged, not to be over-whelmed by them.

There is a famous story of Smith Wigglesworth, who one night as he slept woke up to discover Satan himself standing at the foot of the bed. Wigglesworth reportedly said, “Oh, it’s only you,” rolled over and went back to sleep.

That’s the kind of confidence that I think God wants us to have in the middle of our trial. It’s that peace we can find even in intimidating times. Wigglesworth was confident that he knew someone more powerful than his immediate trouble and could rest in the knowledge of knowing Christ. Can we be that confident? I think so. Come on! Surely we can do better than Peter!