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A Bible Study

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A Lesson For Our Times

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Asaph was a great man of God, one of the leaders of David's choir at Jerusalem. He wrote twelve Psalms, two of which point to the path of victory for believers in every age.

PSALM 77

In this Psalm we see Asaph looking *within* himself--as thousands are exhorted to do today. As he engaged in his course of introspection he was quite thorough:

"I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice;

"In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord: My sore ran in the night, and ceased not: my soul refused to be comforted.

"I remembered God, and was troubled: I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Selah.

"Thou holdest mine eyes waking: I am so troubled that I cannot speak. . . .

"I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart" (vs. 1-4,6).

And what was the outcome of all this self-examination? Did he find the inner peace and release he desired? Judge for yourself as he goes on to ask:

"Will the Lord cast off forever? And will He be favorable no more?

"Is His mercy clean gone forever? Doth His promise fail forevermore?

"Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath He in anger shut up His tender mercies?
Selah" (vs. 7-9).

Indeed, here is a soul sunk deep in the *misery* which always results from *self-occupation*-from beholding one's own self. Asaph, however, goes on to discover what the saints of all ages must learn to be the only remedy for such a condition:

"And I said, This is my infirmity. But I will remember the years of the right hand of
THE MOST HIGH.

"I will remember the work of THE LORD. Surely I will remember THY WONDERS of
old.

"I will meditate also of all THY WORK, and talk of THY DOINGS.

"THY WAY, O God, is in the SANCTUARY: Who is so great a God as OUT GOD?

"THOU art the God that doeth wonders: Thou hast declared Thy strength among the
peoples.

"THOU hast with THINE ARM redeemed THY PEOPLE, the sons of Jacob and
Joseph. Selah" (vs. 10-15).

Here is the path of *true* peace and happiness! Misery was the result of Asaph's introspection-and it will ever be so, for what is there within any of us to cause us the slightest satisfaction? Rather, it is as we behold what *God* has done--"*His workmanship*" - that true joy is to be found.

PSALM 73

Here Asaph is looking, not within, but *around*. He is no longer looking at self; now he looks *to others*. He begins:

"Truly God is good to ISRAEL. Even to such as are of a CLEAN HEART" (v.1).

He is looking away from himself, surely, but not far enough! And the inevitable result of looking at others--especially at those who seem to be "more advanced"--follows:

"But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped.

"For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

"For there are no bands in their death, but their death, but their strength is firm.

"They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men....."

"Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish. . ."

"Behold these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches" (vs.2-5, 7, 12,).

As Asaph sees "the prosperity of the wicked" he is *distracted* and perplexed. The result of this mistaken occupation is then exhibited:

"Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.

"For all the day long have I been plagued and chastened every morning.

"If I say, I will not speak thus: Behold I should offend the generation of thy children"(vs. 13-15).

Now comes the turning point:

"When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me:

"UNTIL I WENT INTO THE SANCTUARY of God; then understood I their end. . .

"Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins.

"So foolish was I, and ignorant, I was as a beast before thee" (vs. 16, 17, 21, 22).

Finally Asaph has come into the light! In the "sanctuary" all is made clear--as it was in the previous case (Psa. 77:13). The presence of God has set all right, and in looking to Him he is "lightened" (Psa. 34:5).

Asaph gives up all other occupation and beholds only God. Thus he is able to say:

"Nevertheless I am continually WITH THEE; THOU has holden me by my right hand.

"THOU shalt guide me with THY COUNSEL, and afterward receive me to glory.

"Whom have I in heaven but Thee?

"My flesh and my heart faileth: but GOD IS THE STRENGTH OF MY HEART, AND MY PORTION forever" (vs.23-26).

This is truly a blessed height to reach! And having reached this "higher ground," he travels on to the end and tells us of his happy experiences, summing it up in these words:

"It is good for me to DRAW NEAR TO GOD: I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all Thy works" (v. 28).

Here is the end of the whole matter—for Asaph and for us. And what is it? Simply that there is nothing in ourselves or others—only God Himself and what He has done.

If you want to be *miserable*--look *within*.

If you want to be *distracted*--look *around*.

If you want to be truly *happy*--look up to *Him!*

The key to an effective Christian walk is to be occupied with Christ and with all that God has made us in Him. This is why Paul exhorted the Thessalonians to "*stand fast in in the Lord*" (I Thess. 3:8). He was well aware that only as they by faith occupied themselves with Christ, standing firmly in the position God had given them "in Him" that they could and would have victory.

Just so, my Christian friend, as you occupy *your heart* with God and with the standing He was given you in Christ, we do not hesitate to say that the thrill and wonder of it will cause your "walk" to fall in line!

Calvary is the secret of the Christian life: Our faith standing on the facts of Calvary gives the Holy Spirit the freedom to bring that finished work into our daily lives. As

we *by faith* accept as true, literally, absolutely and instantly, our perfect place in Christ we are thus led to recognize as *unworthy of our present actual character* both our old self and all its workings.

As you read these lines, if you have not as yet looked away from self, beyond others and trusted exclusively in Christ who died for you-- do it without delay!

“MAINTAIN GOOD WORKS”

“And let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful.” --Titus 3:14

As a faithful pastor, Titus was to teach his people to *work*--“*to maintain good works for necessary uses*”. And the reason is clear: “that they may *not* be *unfruitful*.” From this unusual wording it is clear that the natural expectation for believers is that they be fruitful. Paul obviously considered an *unfruitful* Christian a sad tragedy.

One of the real assets provided by a local church is that it provides a “hands on” environment in which to “*learn to maintain good works*”. In fact, it is really very difficult--if not impossible --to truly learn this critical lesson outside the fellowship of a local assembly.

While recently meditating on the “*work of the ministry*,” I was struck by the fact that in the Concordance the word order is: *word, work, worker, world*. A moment’s meditations reminded me that the word--God’s Word--is for the whole world; but between two and indispensable to both, are *work* and *worker*.

Too often this sequence is reversed: Christians feel the need of the *world*, look for a *work* to do and then turn to the *Word*. How much better to follow the divine order and have the Word of God be the source and energizer of the worker for the work.

God’s way is to work through His Word. Paul declares that it is “*the Word of God which effectually worketh also in you that believe*” (1 Thess. 2:13). The Holy Spirit works through the Word of God resident in the soul of the believer to energize the believer “unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

Thus Paul prays for the saints at Colosse:

“.....that ye might be FILLED WITH THE KNOWLEDGE OF [GOD’S] WILL IN ALL WISDOM AND SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING;

“THAT YE MIGHT WALK WORTHY OF THE LORD unto pleasing, BEING FRUITFUL IN EVERY GOOD WORK, AND INCREASING IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD;

“STRENGTHENED WITH ALL MIGHT according to his glorious power, UNTO ALL PATIENCE AND LONGSUFFERING WITH JOYFULNESS” (Col. 1:9-11).

Being “filled”--gripped, controlled by--“ the knowledge of [God’s] will”--an understanding of what God is doing today gained through the mystery revealed to Paul--directly *results in* the believer “walking worthy of the Lord”--having a fruitful, growing, strong, rejoicing Christian life.

Only as we are saturated with the rightly divided Word, as we are “*knit together in love and unto all riches of the full assurance of standing* “ (Col. 2:2), can we have lives “filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God” (Phil. 1:11).

This is the true source of fruitfulness. This is how “*learn to maintain good works*”.
