

EXODUS 17:1-7 AND ROMANS 5:1-11

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THESE SCRIPTURES ARE RELEVANT TO US TODAY IN THAT THEY EACH SPEAK ABOUT A CRISIS OF THEIR TIME, AND HOW IT WAS HANDLED.

EXODUS RECOUNTS THE ISRAELITES RUNNING OUT OF WATER IN THE WILDERNESS, AND ROMANS ADDRESSES GROWING PERSECUTION AND THUS THE SUFFERING OF CHRISTIANS.

THE ISRAELITES QUICKLY INTERPRETED THE ABSENCE OF WATER TO BE CAUSED BY THE ABSENCE OF GOD.

THEY REACTED BY COMPLAINING GOD AND MOSES LED THEM INTO THE DESERT TO DIE, AND LAMENTING THE FACT THEY WERE NO LONGER IN EGYPT.

OF COURSE THEY CHOSE NOT TO REMEMBER THE ABUNDANT WATER OF THE NILE CAME WITH THE CHAINS OF SLAVERY, WHICH THEY BEGGED GOD TO FREE THEM FROM.

FREEDOM, HOWEVER HAD ITS CHALLENGES, AND PERHAPS THE GREATEST ONE FOR THE HEBREWS WAS TO HOLD ON TO FAITH IN THE LORD.

THIS IS ONE WAY PEOPLE CAN REACT TO THE CURRENT PANDEMIC.

THEY CAN ACCUSE GOD OF ABANDONMENT IN THE MIDST OF THIS CRISIS.

OR CHRISTIANS, IN PARTICULAR CAN CHOOSE TO REMEMBER AND BELIEVE IN CHRIST'S PROMISE TO BE WITH US ALWAYS.

THE APOSTLE PAUL CONSISTENTLY CHOSE THE LATTER AND COUNSELED OTHER CHRISTIANS TO DO THE SAME, NO MATTER WHAT WAS HAPPENING TO THEM, OR AROUND THEM.

WE SHOULD, HOWEVER, NOT FORGET THE CONTEXT OF THE APOSTLE'S WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT TO THOSE WHO WERE SUFFERING, OR WERE FEARFUL THEY MIGHT SUFFER.

IN THE PRECEDING CHAPTERS, THE APOSTLE PAUL EXPLAINS HOW BOTH JEWS AND GENTILES ARE JUSTIFIED BY FAITH IN JESUS AND HIS ATONING SACRIFICE.

HE REJOICES IN GOD'S GRACE AND LOVE REVEALED IN CHRIST'S DEATH AND RESURRECTION, WHICH MAKES PEACE BETWEEN US AND OUR CREATOR WHOM WE REBELLED AGAINST, POSSIBLE.

IN CHAPTER 5 HE ADDRESSES WHAT THIS JUSTIFICATION MEANS FOR THE LIVES OF BELIEVERS.

PAUL REMINDS CHRISTIANS THAT KNOWING JESUS CHRIST THROUGH FAITH OPENS THE DOOR TO MANY BLESSINGS, AMONG THESE ARE HOW GOD RELATES TO US.

PAUL SPEAKS ABOUT HAVING PEACE WITH GOD THROUGH CHRIST.

THIS IS THE PEACE OF THE FORGIVENESS OF SIN AND THE PROMISE OF CHRIST'S PRESENCE WITH US ALWAYS.

ONE VERSE OF THE OLD HYMN "IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL, PUTS IT THIS WAY:

"MY SIN- OH, THE BLISS OF THIS GLORIOUS THOUGHT-
MY SIN- NOT IN PART BUT IN WHOLE,
IS NAILED TO HIS CROSS AND I BEAR IT NO MORE,
PRAISE THE LORD, PRAISE THE LORD, OH, MY SOUL.

IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL,
IT IS WELL, IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL."

THERE IS A STORY FROM THE CIVIL WAR THAT HELPS TO ILLUSTRATE WHAT JESUS DOES FOR US, THAT NEITHER WE NOR ANYONE ELSE CAN DO.

THERE WAS A MAN WHOSE BROTHER WAS A CONFEDERATE SOLDIER IMPRISONED BY THE NORTH.

HE WAS CONCERNED ABOUT HIS HEALTH AND SO WENT TO THE WHITE HOUSE SEEKING ACCESS TO PRESIDENT LINCOLN. NOW, AT THAT TIME REGULAR PEOPLE ACTUALLY DID HAVE THE CHANCE TO MEET WITH THE PRESIDENT PRIVATELY.

HOWEVER SINCE THE SUPPLICANT AS OBVIOUSLY A SOUTHERNER THE GUARD AT THE WHITE HOUSE TURNED HIM AWAY.

THE MAN SAT DOWN AND WEPT IN DESPAIR, BUT HE WAS INTERRUPTED BY A BOY WHO ASKED WHY HE WAS SAD.

THE MAN EXPLAINED, AND AFTER HE FINISHED, THE BOY GRABBED HIS HAND AND TOLD HIM TO COME WITH HIM.

THE LAD MARCHED THE MAN PAST THE GUARD INTO SEE PRESIDENT LINCOLN. AND THE REASON THE BOY COULD DO THAT WAS BECAUSE HE WAS LINCOLN'S SON.

SIMILARLY JESUS LEADS US BY THE HAND PAST ALL THE THINGS THAT BLOCK OUR ACCESS TO GOD'S GRACE.

AND FAITH IN CHRIST BRINGS US INTO THIS STATE OF GRACE. AND TO SAY WE STAND IN GRACE MEANS -TO ENDURE, OR BE ESTABLISHED THAT STATE.

THIS RECONCILIATION WITH GOD'S SELF, THROUGH JESUS THE SON, BRINGS INTO OUR LIVES AN EXPERIENCE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD THE FATHER- WHICH IN TURN GIVES US PEACE.

AND BY GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT DWELLING WITH IN US WE ARE GIVEN ASSURANCE OF THIS PEACE THROUGH THE LOVE OF GOD THAT TAKES RESIDENCE WITHIN US.

THUS WE ARE BROUGHT BY JESUS INTO THE STATE OF GRACE, WHICH MAKES POSSIBLE THE PEACE AND LOVE WE RECEIVE.

IT IS WITH IN OUR NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD JESUS BRINGS- THAT WE CAN LIVE OUT OUR EARTHLY LIVES IN A HOPE THAT WILL NOT DISAPPOINT US.

BUT PAUL REMINDS BELIEVERS THE CHANGE CHRIST BRINGS TO OUR LIVES IS NOT REMOVAL FROM THE WORLD.

WE WILL STILL HAVE CHALLENGES, TROUBLE, EVEN AT TIMES SUFFERING AS HUMAN BEINGS IN GENERAL, AND AS FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST IN PARTICULAR.

BUT HE POINTS HIS READERS TO THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT THAT CAN HELP US TO ENDURE- THAT IS OVERCOME WHAT MORTAL LIFE CAN THROW AT US OR ON US.

THE APOSTLE IN PARTICULAR IS REMINDING HIS READERS THAT ONE OF THE BENEFITS OF BEING JUSTIFIED THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST IS- THE SPIRIT'S PRESENCE.

THIS PRESENCE CAN EMPOWER US TO ENDURE AND GROW WHEN OUR OWN RESOURCES FAIL.

PAUL IS THEREFORE ABLE TO FACE SUFFERING, ESPECIALLY FOR THE FAITH, NOT BECAUSE HE IS CERTAIN THINGS WILL EVENTUALLY GET BETTER, BUT BECAUSE OF HIS HOPE THAT GOD WILL HAVE THE FINAL WORD IN AND ABOUT LIFE.

THIS LETTER TO ROME ENCOURAGES PEOPLE TO COME TO FAITH IN JESUS.

JUST AS IMPORTANTLY IT CALLS THEM TO REMAIN FAITHFUL TO HIM.

HE DOES SO, BECAUSE PAUL BELIEVES THE PEACE THE LORD MAKES BETWEEN US AND GOD CHANGES EVERYTHING.

HE REMINDS HIS READERS THAT TO FIND THE PEACE AND HOPE ONLY CHRIST CAN BRING, THEY MUST CONFRONT THE TRUTH THAT THEY REALLY DO NEED JESUS- EVERY DAY.

WE MUST NOT ASSUME, HOWEVER THAT THE APOSTLE SUGGESTS CHRISTIANS WILL NOT EVER FEEL HEART BROKEN OR ENDURE MENTAL ANXIETY.

INSTEAD THE PAUL TEACHES THAT OUR SOULS WILL BE STRENGTHENED BY GOD'S PRESENCE.

THIS IS THE PEACE OF BEING ABLE TO ENDURE AND TO TRUST IN GOD'S PROMISES, WHICH IS THE HOPE THAT WILL NOT DISAPPOINT.

THE ENDURANCE AND CHARACTER THE APOSTLE PROCLAIMS HAS BEEN EXPLAINED IN MANY WAYS.

PERHAPS EACH OF US COME TO OUR OWN UNDERSTANDING BASED ON OUR PERSONAL LIVES AND RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST.

THERE IS HOWEVER ONE UNDERSTANDING I WAS REMINDED ABOUT THAT I FIND PARTICULARLY HELPFUL AND SO WILL SHARE. IT SAYS:

THE CHANGE CHRIST'S FORGIVENESS BRINGS TO US IS USEFUL EVEN IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING BECAUSE IT INCLUDES THE ABILITY TO CONTINUE ON THE RIGHT PATH IN OUR CHRISTIAN JOURNEY, AGAINST ALL ODDS.

THE FIRST TWO VERSES OF THE HYMN I MENTIONED EARLIER DESCRIBE THE CONDITION PAUL MEANT WHEN HE SPOKE OF PEACE, ENDURANCE, AND HOPE. EVEN IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING.

"IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL" BEGINS WITH THIS TESTIMONY OF FAITH:

"WHEN PEACE, LIKE A RIVER, ATTENDETH MY WAY,
WHEN SORROWS, LIKE SEA BILLOWS ROLL;
WHATEVER MY LOT, THOU HAST TAUGHT ME TO SAY,
IT IS WELL, IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL.

THO' SATAN SHOULD BUFFET, THO' TRIALS SHOULD COME,
LET THIS BLEST ASSURANCE CONTROL,
THAT CHRIST HATH REGARDED MY HELPLESS ESTATE,
AND HATH SHED HIS OWN BLOOD FOR MY SOUL.

IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL,
IT IS WELL, IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL."

THIS IS A BEAUTIFUL MESSAGE, BUT PERHAPS SOME MAY THINK IT SUPERFICIAL.

IT MAY HELP TO KNOW THE INSPIRATION FOR THIS HYMN. WHEN WE HEAR THE STORY, WE MAY IMAGINE ITS AUTHOR, WAS BOTH HEART BROKEN, AND IN SOME MENTAL TURMOIL.

THE LIFE OF THE AUTHOR IS ONE OF GREAT AND ENDURING FAITH. HORATIO GATES SPAFFORD (1828-1888) WROTE THE HYMN.

HE WAS A DEVOUT CHRISTIAN WHO'D IMMERSSED HIMSELF IN SCRIPTURE.

HE WAS ALSO A PROMINENT CHICAGO LAWYER, WHO'S BUSINESS WAS THRIVING. HORATIO OWNED SEVERAL PROPERTIES THROUGHOUT THE CITY.

HE AND HIS BELOVED WIFE HAD FOUR BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTERS AND ONE SON. LIFE WAS MORE THAN GOOD, HIS LIFE AND FAMILY WERE BLESSED.

BUT JUST AS HORATIO HIT THE PINNACLE OF HIS PROFESSION AND FINANCIAL SUCCESS, THINGS BEGAN TO CHANGE. FIRST THEIR SON DIED UNEXPECTEDLY.

THEN THE GREAT CHICAGO FIRE DESTROYED NEARLY EVERY REAL ESTATE INVESTMENT HORATIO OWNED.

IN 1873, HORATIO DECIDED TO TREAT HIS WIFE AND DAUGHTERS TO A MUCH- NEEDED ESCAPE FROM THE TURMOIL.

HE SENT THEM ON A SHIP TO EUROPE, WITH PLANS TO JOIN THEM SHORTLY AFTER WRAPPING UP SOME BUSINESS IN CHICAGO.

SOON AFTER, HE RECEIVED A DREADFUL TELEGRAM FROM HIS WIFE, WHICH SAID: "SAVED ALONE..."

THE TELEGRAM BORE THE EXCRUCIATING NEWS THAT FAMILY'S SHIP HAD WRECKED AND ALL FOUR OF HIS DAUGHTERS HAD PERISHED.

WHILE HE WAS ON HIS WAY TO MEET HIS HEARTBROKEN WIFE, HIS SHIP PASSED OVER THE AREA OF THE SEA THAT HAD JUST CLAIMED THE LIVES OF HIS DAUGHTERS.

IT WAS THEN THAT HE PUT HIS PEN TO PAPER AND THE TIMELESS HYMN WAS BORN.

IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL, WAS AN EXPRESSION THAT FOR STAFFORD, HIS FAITH WAS HELPING HIM ENDURE AND OVERCOME HIS PAIN.

THIS IS AN EXAMPLE OF HOW SUFFERING CAN PRODUCE ENDURANCE THAT IS BORN FROM HOPE IN THE LORD.

IT IS A SPIRITUAL STATE THAT CAN HELP CHRISTIANS TO ENDURE THE PHYSICAL, MENTAL, AND EMOTIONAL TURMOIL'S OF LIFE ON EARTH.

THERE IS A POEM, WHICH SIMPLY BUT BEAUTIFULLY SUMS UP THE HEART OF THE APOSTLE'S MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH, AND TO US. THE FIRST STANZA SAYS:

“I COULD WISH YOU JOY AND PEACE TO LAST A WHOLE LIFE LONG. I COULD WISH YOU SUNSHINE OR A CHEERFUL LITTLE SONG.

OR WISH YOU ALL THE HAPPINESS THAT THIS LIFE CAN BRING. BUT I WISH YOU JESUS. I WISH YOU JESUS MORE THAN ANYTHING.”

THIS WAS THE APOSTLE'S POINT, BECAUSE HE UNDERSTOOD THE FOUNDATION OF FAITH BUILT ON JESUS CAN OUT LAST WHATEVER HAPPENS TO US OR AROUND US.

THIS FAITH DOES NOT MAKE BAD THINGS GO AWAY OR EVEN MAKES THEM MORE PLEASANT, BUT IT DOES HELP THOSE WHO CLING TO IT TO HAVE CHRIST'S PEACE IN THEIR SOULS.

LET US PRAY:

SERMON SUMMARY EXODUS 17:1-7 AND ROMANS 5:1-11

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