

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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More Poetic Parallels

I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established

my

goings.

And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD. Blessed is that man that maketh the LORD his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies. (Psalm 40:1-3)

When asked to explain or define the fear of God, many Christians will use words such as reverence or respect. Few would immediately turn to the word "trust" or "faith." If we follow the simple rule of Hebrew poetry, the rhyming of ideas instead of words, this passage leads us directly from fear to trust. We previously touched on our role in teaching others to fear the Lord. Here David expands this thought. God's abundant blessings in David's life are obvious to onlookers; "...many shall see it..." What happens when they consider David's life as a reflection of God's deliverance? "... fear, and shall trust in the LORD."

We hear a New Testament echo from the apostle Paul, "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Corinthians 4:5). It isn't David's willpower or devotion that captured the attention of his friends. It was God's manifest deliverance in his life.

We should further note that the point of the passage is not David's salvation, but his ongoing discipleship. He was already saved (born again) and in some particularly distressing trial he "waited patiently for the LORD." Notice the long list of blessings that God sent to the patient waiter.

1. He inclined unto me.
2. He heard me.
3. He brought me up out of a horrible pit (interestingly, in the marginal note the word "horrible" is defined as "noisy." This pit was not full of "happy campers," but of clamoring people who were all looking for the escape. Perhaps they were looking for it through their own strategies, but David was delivered by God's kind hand, not by his own ingenuity.).
4. He brought me up out of the miry clay.
5. He set my feet upon a rock.
6. He established my goings.
7. He put a new song in my mouth, praise to His name.

How do people respond to their perception of this blessing in David's life? At least, how does David expect them to respond? "...shall fear, and shall trust in the LORD." New Testament linguistic scholars indicate that often when "and" appears in a passage the primary significance is "even." The writer is saying the same thing in different words. The concept of Hebrew rhyming ideas parallels this idea, so here the idea of fear means that they trust in God.

We should not neglect the fact that the writer of Hebrews in the New Testament quotes from this psalm (verses 6-8) (Hebrews 10:7-10). In that passage the inspired writer applies the words as a prophecy regarding the Lord Jesus Christ, particularly as He came in the Incarnation to fulfill his office of priest on behalf of His chosen people. The most conservative interpretation would use that fact to interpret the whole psalm as prophetic of the Lord Jesus Christ. If we follow that hermeneutical guide, the specific words of our study passage refer to our Lord, not personally to David. At every point of His Incarnate life, the Lord Jesus waited on (attended to) the Father's will and the Father responded according to the seven points noted above.

Perhaps this passage sheds an insightful light on a rather difficult passage in the New Testament. "...Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that?^b he feared..." The footnote indicates a corollary between "feared" and "piety." If we read back to Psalm 40 and relate fear to trust, we could also interpret the Hebrews passage, "...and was heard in that he *trusted*."

In this perspective the Lord Jesus, not David, serves as our example in his fear-trust of the Father. Consider this thought from a personal and practical perspective. If we study the events of Jesus' last week, often referred to as "Passion Week," He endured a significant number of incomprehensible trials. He prayed to the Father. He celebrated a festive Passover feast with the disciples, though perhaps they struggled to muster up a "festive" mood, given the dire predictions that their Master had made as they traveled to the city. Ah, and He even prayed in Gethsemane so intensely that He sweat profusely. A careful grammatical reading of the sentence will indicate that He sweat profusely, as if bleeding from the pores, but not that He shed blood from His pores, "...as it were" (Luke 22:44). Again, the Hebrews writer refers to this ordeal in rather surprising and positive terms, "...who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." In the midst of His most dreadful and agonizing moment Jesus kept His mind's eye on "joy" that lay ahead after His victorious sacrifice for our sins.

Now contrast our Lord's response to intense trials (far more severe than anything that we shall ever face) with our own response. Can we honestly say that, without exception or compromise, in our greatest trials that we keep our hearts focused on God, trust Him explicitly, pray to Him, concern ourselves far more with doing His will than with finding an escape for our dilemma? In the midst of our ordeal do we keep our own minds fixed on "joy set before" us?

I fear that in most instances our trials nudge us to work harder at our own self-will, as if by greater self-control, ingenuity, or other creative personal solutions we can escape the conflict. Since every single time that we walk down this path, we fall into a heap of failure, we should eventually learn to avoid this proven failure of conduct and trust God the next time trial comes our way. Sadly, many times we simply repeat the same old failed self-trust tactics and have to pick ourselves up again, bruised, disillusioned, and faithless. It is not an irrecoverable disgrace to say, “Lord I believe; help thou my unbelief” occasionally. It grievously dishonors our faith to make that statement a regular habit. Being a Christian means that we imitate and follow the Lord Jesus Christ in our thoughts and conduct. It doesn’t mean that we repeatedly refuse to follow Him and beat ourselves up for the refusal and the inevitable failure that ensues.

In an earlier chapter I observed that we prove by our failure to live according to God’s teaching as proof that we do not fear God as Scripture teaches that we should. In this chapter a major lesson to be learned is that our failure to trust God in trials also reminds us that we do not fear Him adequately.

Fearing God means obeying God; fearing God means trusting God. I suggest that this idea of fearing God may well be a collective term that includes the whole concept of our godly and trusting relationship with God. The authenticity of our Christianity cannot be measured by our good intentions alone. It must eventually stand or fall based on our habitual conduct. Difficult as it is to look in the mirror and compare our personal actions against those of our Lord (2 Corinthians 3:18), that is precisely the process of spiritual growth and effective Christianity. When I see something in myself that does not match what my Lord’s response would have been in a similar setting, I must consider that He has given me my next assignment for spiritual growth. Swallow some ego and pride? Indeed, but that is the precise point of true discipleship, self-denial and cross bearing.

We often hear the latest Christian culture’s motto, “What would Jesus do?” Or we see the letters “WWJD?” on bracelets or other pieces of jewelry. If these trinkets remind us to keep our Lord’s personal ethics and conduct prominent in our minds as we make our own choices in life, so be it. Thank God for the reminder. Professing Christians who regularly look for excuses not to practice their faith—or constantly have a long list of worn out “explanations” why they didn’t practice it—would do well to buy such a bracelet and start wearing it. Biblical Christianity is not measured by how much we rationalize not living according to Jesus’ teachings, but by actually living in harmony with His teachings and example. Rather than repeatedly saying, “Lord I believe; help thou my unbelief,” we might improve our faith by altering the sentiments to “Lord I believe; help me transform my life to prove it in habitual conduct.”

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