

Broomfield

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The Dark Night of the Soul

Psalm 106:13-15

James 1:13, “Let no man say when he is tempted¹, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.”

From this we understand that God and temptation are opposites. God will never tempt/peiradzo us! And yet John 6 seems to indicate differently where Christ discipling Philip says this:

John 6:6, “And this he said to prove² him: for he himself knew what he would do.”

No you did not read that wrongly. The word used for *tempt* in James is the same word used for *prove* in John. In other words, that which James says God will never do — peirazo — is that which is attributed to Christ in John!

I thought that God doesn't peirazo anyone? Is this a contradiction?

Absolutely not!

The key in understanding peirazo is not its meaning or definition, but its motive. When a test is given to encourage one to sin, we call it a temptation, and thus it is something God would never do. When a test is given to encourage one to godliness, we call it tempering or proving and thus something that God does all the time.

This is the nature of the Dark Night of the Soul or leanness of soul. As we saw last time leanness of soul is a condition that the child of God at times may find himself in. If the "condition" results in a greater

¹ Πειρα-peirazo

² Πειρα-peirazo

passion for the Lord, it is genuinely a leanness sent from the Lord for our growth in grace. This is not to say that there will not be times of apathy or self-pity — - and that perhaps for an extended time. Yet leanness of soul will always and eventually result in a clinging to God.

The other day I saw a parent in the grocery store whose child was running away from her in the grocery store. The child viewed this as a game. What did it take for this child to come running back to mom? It wasn't the voice of mom saying, "Come here. Stop! Wait!" Rather it was just the simple, "Goodbye! I'm leaving!" At that moment when the child was heading in his own direction he felt the pang in his stomach that he was being left behind. It was then that he did an about face and ran to the arms of mom.

This is the essence of leanness of soul. It is a gift of grace that God grants to His children. God turns his children from pursuing their own desires and gives them a greater contempt for this world in order to goad them on in their walk with Christ. God does this in order to create in them a greater hungering and thirsting for the Lord. This is the "goodbye, we're leaving" sounded forth from the loving parent seeking to turn the child from his self-will unto dependence.

Now last time we began examining Psalm 106 first by defining the term leanness of soul.

Psalm 106:13-15, "They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel: But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert. And he gave them their request; **but sent leanness into their soul.**"

As we saw, the idea behind *leanness of soul* is that of emaciation. Literally, it refers to the process of making thin by starvation or illness. And yet, as we have seen from this text, the *leanness* referenced here is far more than a physical response to too much meat. Clearly Psalm 106 has in mind a spiritual malady!

Leanness of soul is a soul that is bereft of its only true delight and love: God! It is a soul that is left to itself and therefore left to reap its own workings. This is that should which once having experienced the comfort, joy, and fulfillment of fellowship with God is abandoned to experience a greater pain than if God were never there! This is **not** a soul which once having been saved is lost. Rather this is a soul which once having enjoyed an intimate communion with God is then, for a time, bereft of this fellowship!

Practically, God has not left. Yet experientially, it is as though He has.

Having said this, it is important to note that the dark night of the soul or leanness of soul is not a punishment in the sense that God is out to get one on account of sin. Rather it is a grace of God given to His children that we might have a greater passion for the Lord. Leanness of soul is to our walks with God as working out is to our bodies. Both are painful processes which create stamina and strength.

Leanness of soul — as our text indicates — typically arises in our walks with God upon certain conditions of neglect. Just as pain is the blessed result — not the punishment — of injury. For without pain we would be as the leper who sticks his hand in the fire and does not know it is burned. So also leanness of soul is the blessed result — not the punishment — of indifference in our walks with God.

Last time we began to look at leanness of soul by looking at its cause and its cure.

The Cause and Cure of the Dark Night of the Soul

Forgetting God's Works

There is a progression noted in the text. The first is found in verse 13.

Psalm 106:13, “**They soon forgot his works**; they waited not for his counsel.”

This constitutes the first cause of leanness of soul — the purposed and active neglect of God and His works of redemption! Recall that the passion of our flesh is the running away from God. As such, though we are saved, nevertheless dwelling within us is the inclination which longs to forget God and go it alone. It is when we give way to this sinful longing that we take the first step toward leanness of soul.

Consequently we exhorted last time that each and every one of us labor to have a lofty biblical view of God. When our concept of God deviates from the Bible we begin our walk down the path of leanness.

Psalm 115:4, 8 “Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands . . . They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.

Our life will reflect that which we worship. If we worship the true and living God, we will enjoy His fellowship. However, if we worship a god of our own imagination, we will soon reflect this god in our thoughts, desires, and actions.

Neglect of God's Word

Yet, this path does not stop here. Forgetting God naturally leads to neglecting God's word.

Psalm 106:13, “They soon forgot his works; **they waited not for his counsel.**”

The word *counsel* when used in reference to God typically indicates His eternal and enduring word.³

Thus Moses, anticipating the rebellion of Israel, called them “...a nation void of counsel” This is a nation which was not following the plans and purposes of God.⁴ The Psalmist declares that it is the blessed man who walks and delights in the counsel of the Lord which is the Law of the Lord.⁵ Job acknowledged that through lack of knowledge, he has darkened God's counsel which is God's word.⁶ Thus we conclude that the “counsel of the Lord” is God's eternal and enduring word.⁷

Now what is it that the Israelite's did not do with God's word?

The did not wait for His counsel⁸ When used in reference to God this word carries the idea of reliance upon. To wait for the Lord or His counsel is to earnestly expect and confidently hope in it. However in this passage it is used negatively. Thus to **not wait** for the Lord or His counsel is to fail to submit to the

³ Compare Psalm 33:10

⁴ Compare Deuteronomy 32:28

⁵ Compare Psalm 1:2

⁶ Compare Job 38:2 and 42:3

⁷ Compare Proverbs 19:20-21

⁸ ηυε ‘etsah

Lord and His sovereignty as proclaimed in His word! This passage is saying that the Israelites fell short of living in the light of God's word.

This is the second cause of a lean soul — the neglect of God's word. Now there are two ways that we can neglect God's word. First we can fail to read it.

What amazes me about this response is that even the people of God in our Psalm weren't guilty of this. And yet today, we live in an evangelical world that rarely reads the word of God much less studies it. The excuses abound: You know them and have heard them. For example: "I have never been much of a student and studying just isn't my thing." "Studying is too difficult and I really don't understand the Bible too well. I will leave it to the experts."

Yet God's word was given to us to be read, studied, and understood.⁹ The Bible is not a difficult book because the Holy Spirit has promised to teach us the Scriptures.¹⁰ The study of the Scripture however takes effort and commitment. Oh family of God, let us not neglect the faithful and consistent reading/studying of and meditating on the word of God! Yet, this is just half of it.

We can also fail to act upon God's word. This is where the people of God are indicted in our text. They had the word through Moses. They Understood it. Yet in the words of James:

James 1:23-24, "For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was."

This is the Achilles heal of so many today who actually do read God's word. They fail to appropriate what is read! That is why I look to Genesis 32:24-29 as the standard and picture of what true Bible study is all about. Here God initiated the wrestling match with Jacob.

Genesis 32:26, "And he [the Angel of the Lord] said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he [Jacob] said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."

Oh let this pattern be yours every time you read the word. Do not allow the word to slip out of your thought until God blesses you. Grapple with the truth that you learn. Ask yourself, "How does it apply?" "What difference should it make in my life?" Never be satisfied with only a theological premise or new information. Rather, be ever and always moved by the word into the lap of the Savior! Allow the word of God to judge the thoughts and the intentions of your heart.¹¹ As you do this just as with Jacob¹² God will change your name/character.¹³

Leanness of Soul results from a neglect of God and a neglect of His word!

Pursuit of Your Own Desires

And yet it doesn't stop here. There is a third element which is the crowning jewel — pursuit of your own

⁹ Compare Romans 15:4 and 1 Corinthians 10:11

¹⁰ Compare John 14:26

¹¹ Compare Hebrews 4:12-13

¹² Compare Genesis 32:27-28

¹³ Compare 2 Timothy 3:16-18 and Hebrews 4:12

desires.

Psalm 106:14, “**But lusted¹⁴ exceedingly in the wilderness**, and tempted God in the desert.”

The pursuit of ones own desires is manifested in two areas. The first is that they had an intense craving in the wilderness. Literally this is rendered they lusted a lust. This is the Hebrew way of denoting intensity.

The Hebrew means to desire, covet or crave. It is an all-consuming passion in which the person pursues the object of their lust with their whole being.

In reference to the Israelites, this refers to their pursuit of meat.¹⁵ This was a pursuit which would be relived about 1500 years later by other Jews but this time for the manna. In John 6:35 we read about the people’s request for manna when Christ said that He was the source of the manna that God's people ate in the wilderness and the people begged the Lord for a taste of this manna.¹⁶

We do not conclude that their desire for manna was a result of a spiritual fervor for the Lord, but selfishness!

John 6:26, “Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.”

In other words, their lust for this heavenly food was not because of their godliness, but a perverse desire to possess God and the world at the same time.

Think of it. Who wouldn't want a taste of manna? Who wouldn't want a steady diet of it? And yet as we have seen, when a people are living for their own lusts as in Psalm 106, heavenly food becomes rather bland! This leads us to conclude that the people's passion for manna at the time of Christ at best was mixed. Had they had a steady diet of manna, you and I both know that they like their fathers would have grown tired of it. No! What they wanted — like those before them — was to sup upon the manna of God AND the best of this world. They wanted the manna and meat; manna and lentil soup; manna and seasoned bread; manna and fish; manna and cucumbers; manna and melon; manna and the leeks, onions, and garlic!

Now family of God the tragedy of John 6:35 and Psalm 106:13-15 is seen when we understand that in our walks with God Christ is as the manna that God gave to His people — that's the point of John 6!

In other words to look with contempt upon a heavenly food by asking for the "spice of life" — like meat — is one thing. But to look with contempt upon Christ Himself by wanting the Lord and this/that worldly thing is a monstrosity! This is the point of this text.

The crowning seed of apostasy is not an all out rejection of Christ. It is a passion for Christ and the world! Apostasy is “craving intensely” for the things of this world. Apostasy starts by rejecting God and His word and is a desire to have Christ and the world; Christ and Caesar; Christ and fun; Christ and entertainment; Christ and my goals; Christ and my will! Biblically speaking, we cannot have both!

¹⁴ אָוָה ‘avah

¹⁵ Compare Numbers 11:4

¹⁶ Compare John 6:34

This is why Joshua said, “Choose for yourselves today whom you will serve.”¹⁷ Either serve the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living. Or the only wise God — the Lord of creation! There can be no duplicity here!

Psalm 73:25-26, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.”

When God alone is our passion and desire, we enjoy a deep and intimate love-relationship with God.

Testing God’s Character

However the ultimate factor which leads to leanness of soul, its crowning jewel is found in one testing God’s character.

Psalm 106:14, “But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, **and tempted¹⁸ God in the desert.**”

The word *tempted* means to test, try, or prove. It denotes a testing or proving which establishes the quality of someone or something. In reference to God it is to test His character with a view of proving His worth!

So get the picture: the Israelites' lust for meat was so strong that they essentially said, “If God does not feed us with flesh, then He isn't God and we won't worship Him.” This is the bitter end which leads directly to Leanness of Soul. If God doesn't do this or that the He is not worthy of my worship.

Now in this form, this passion obviously is wrong and quite unthinkable. Who would say such a thing to God? What Christian would think such horrible thoughts?

Yet you must see that it is far more subtle than this! Every time you walk away from the word, worship, fellowship, or the things of the Lord saying it just wasn't thrilling enough; that was boring; I wasn't entertained; it didn't meet my needs you are rejecting God. In fact you are testifying that for you, life is a test to see whether or not God is going to feed your lust for excitement.

The biblical norm says. God’s word says it that settles it! God's work, done in God's way, never lacks God's supply. But today sounding forth both from pulpit and pew is “God has not really said” We are testing Christ in many ways. We are setting the standard as “do it and judge for yourself!” “You and your opinion are what are ultimate!”

Yet, when I reject something that God commands because it doesn't move me and I think there is a better I am ultimately saying that though God has said it, it fails my test! I will have to try something else!

Until we can say and mean the words of Job: “**Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him**”¹⁹ we all will be threatened by, "Leanness of Soul."

¹⁷ Compare Joshua 24:15

¹⁸ נָסָה *nacah*

¹⁹ Job 13:15

Conclusion

Family of God we must close this passage as did David in Psalm 106. David is not writing to indict the people of God. Rather, he is writing to extol the “lovingkindness of the Lord.”²⁰ The point is that even though God's people rejected Him time and time again — our passage is just one example.

The Israelites rejected God and His word to pursue their own lusts. This rejection led to leanness of soul! The Old Testament believers rebelled so greatly, nevertheless God did not abandon them.

And such is the assurance we must all have today! There is something worse than "Leanness of Soul." It is having a "Dead Soul!" Indeed, God never will abandon His people such that they suffer again a dead soul. Rather, on account of His grace and compassion God removes the sense of His presence. Thus God creates in our souls a vacuum which only He can fill.

If you sense this "vacuum" do not hide from His presence as did Adam and Eve. Allow the "vacuum" to impel you all the more to an undistracted devotion to the Lord! Such that your prayer is the prayer that closes this Psalm.

Psalm 106:47, “Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the heathen, to give thanks unto thy holy name, and to triumph in thy praise.”

That is the healthy and only end of "A Dark Night of the Soul!"

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on January 19, 2003. Greg is the preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.

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²⁰ Compare Psalm 106:1