

10. Bitter sweet life

8/13/2006

Everyone agrees that life is not all cherry blossom, it is not perfect and it goes on without your or my approval. We even realize that there are enough twists and pot holes in the path of life that make all of us to be on our toes many times.

Just because we had one victory in our life, that doesn't guarantee next triumph automatically. As a matter of fact, there is no guarantee at all. If we get to have an easy road all the time, there won't be any challenge and the life itself becomes extremely mundane and boring. And the most of all, we wouldn't seek our God, the Master of the universe.

One of the most frequently asked questions to Christians from non-believers or even from new born Christians is: "If God is so good and loving, why does He allow evil?"

This is a flawed premise since it implies that we are in a position to say what is good and what is not good about God. We ourselves do not know what good is naturally, because we are not basically good. How then can we judge a holy and righteous God?

Still, the question of evil persists, and we often hear the question "why?" in the aftermath of the tragedy like 9/11 or a possible disaster over the Atlantic Ocean by the Pakistan Muslims from England a few days ago. Remember, when God created the world, He created it perfectly. That includes His creation of man. Yet, this "perfect" man was also given the freedom of choice, or an ability to choose. When Adam chose to disobey God, sin, death and suffering became an inevitable part of life.

Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned--

The evil in this world is a result of that original sin of the first man Adam. That is what all of us inherited when we were born.

We may not always understand the "whys" of a certain tragedy that was caused by men, but we know the "Who" that will carry us through it. That is Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord.

This morning we are going to meet the exuberant Israelites who just witnessed the power of God who buried the entire Egyptian army in the Red Sea. But they don't expect a bitter experience waiting for them to reveal what they are.

A. ISRAEL'S SONG OF REDEMPTION

Exodus 15:1-3 Then Moses and the children of Israel sang this song to the Lord, and spoke, saying: "I will sing to the Lord, For He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea! 2 The Lord is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation; He is my God, and I will praise Him; My father's God, and I will exalt Him. 3 The Lord is a man of war; The Lord is His name.

They are singing in gusto now. This is the same crowd that only a few hours before on the other side of the Red Sea were moaning, crying out that they wanted to go back to Egypt. How quickly they changed their minds!

This is the first recorded song in the Bible, coming after their redemption from bondage. Exodus began with sighing, but because of redemption, we now see the nation singing. Note that this song exalts God, because the Lord is referred to at least forty-five times in these eighteen verses.

This kind is a true worship song. Too many songs exalt men instead of the Person and holy character of God, and His wonderful works of power.

God loves these spontaneous expressions of praise and worship. One of the great principles of worship is that it is unto the Lord, not unto man. When we worship God in song, our audience is one person, the Lord Himself, and not the people around us.

So don't be concerned about what they think of your singing. You sing to the Lord. I know that during the worship service, some people don't sing. You'd better practice singing now, because when we get to heaven, that is what we are going to do for eternity.

Exodus 15:4-6 Pharaoh's chariots and his army He has cast into the sea; His chosen captains also are drowned in the Red Sea. 5 The depths have covered them; They sank to the bottom like a stone. 6 "Your right hand, O Lord, has become glorious in power; Your right hand, O Lord, has dashed the enemy in pieces.

The Israelites are celebrating their deliverance. Egypt and the Egyptians represent to them the world, slavery, their hopelessness and helplessness. Now they have been set free from all of them. All of us remember what our lives were like before Christ came to our lives. That is the theme of their song.

Remember that they have come out of a land of idolatry. Each plague had been leveled at one of the Egyptian gods. Now what is the conclusion they have come to?

Exodus 15:7-18 And in the greatness of Your excellence You have overthrown those who rose against You; You sent forth Your wrath; It consumed them like stubble. 8 And with the blast of Your nostrils The waters were gathered together; The floods stood upright like a heap; The depths congealed in the heart of the sea. 9 The enemy said, 'I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; My desire shall be satisfied on them. I will draw my sword, My hand shall destroy them.' 10 You blew with Your wind, The sea covered them; They sank like lead in the mighty waters. 11 "Who is like You, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, Fearful in praises, doing wonders? 12 You stretched out Your right hand; The earth swallowed them. 13 You in Your mercy have led forth The people whom You have redeemed; You have guided them in Your strength To Your holy habitation. 14 "The people will hear and be afraid; Sorrow will take hold of the inhabitants of Philistia. 15 Then the chiefs of Edom will be dismayed; The mighty men of Moab, Trembling will take hold of them; All the inhabitants of Canaan will melt away. 16 Fear and dread will fall on them; By the greatness of Your arm They will be as still as a stone, Till Your people pass over, O Lord, Till the people pass over Whom You have purchased. 17 You will bring them in and plant them In the mountain of Your inheritance, In the place, O Lord, which You have made For Your own dwelling, The sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands have established. 18 "The Lord shall reign forever and ever."

Exodus 15:19-21 For the horses of Pharaoh went with his chariots and his horsemen into the sea, and the Lord brought back the waters of the sea upon them. But the children of Israel went on dry land in the midst of the sea. 20 Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took the timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. 21 And Miriam answered them: "Sing to the Lord, For He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!"

This is the first mention of Miriam by name, and she is the sister of Moses who got involved in the launching of the basket onto the Nile River to preserve his life and arranged the hiring of Moses' mother as his nurse. We also see that Miriam had some kind of prophetic gift. Later she used her leadership position in an unwise and ungodly way – to challenge the authority of Moses.

B. ISRAEL'S SONG OF UNBELIEF

Exodus 15:22-27 So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea; then they went out into the Wilderness of Shur. And they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. 23 Now when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter. Therefore the name of it was called Marah. 24 And the people complained against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" 25 So he cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree. When he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet. There He made a statute and an ordinance for them. And there He tested them, 26 and said, "If you diligently heed the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the Lord who heals you." 27 Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve wells of water and seventy palm trees; so they camped there by the waters.

There won't be any more threat from the Egyptians. They have had a wonderful time of praise, singing the song of redemption. These are a redeemed people.

You would think that from now on life would be a rose garden and they would be delivered from all of their difficulties. There should not have been a cloud in the sky, a thorn along the path, nor a sigh from anyone's mouth. They went three days' journey into the wilderness and what happened? No water!

They praised God one day for His glorious salvation for them and then they complained to Him the first time they experienced different situation in their lives.

When the things in our lives don't go in our ways, we have tendency to start to throw temper tantrums around, show attitude to other and becoming ungrateful to our God.

How strange that God should lead them to a place without water! Yet God must teach His children so that they may discover what really is in their hearts.

There are many frustrations, disappointments and sorrows in life. Your plans can be torn up like a discarded paper. You may have a little grave of your loved one on a fresh wind swept hillside somewhere. We all have our Marahs in our lives. You will not be able to bypass them. You cannot detour around them, skip over them, or tunnel under them. God allows those Marahs of our lives to be there to train us, strengthen us and teach us to trust Him.

What was it that made the bitter water of Marah sweet? We are told that a tree cast into the water made it sweet.

Deuteronomy 21:23 his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance; for he who is hanged is accursed of God.

Galatians 3:13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree")

Jesus Christ died on a tree, and it is that cross that makes the Marah experiences of our lives sweet. He tasted death for every man, and took the sting out of our death. We can overcome the bitterness, disappointment, thirst and hunger of life through the cross of Jesus Christ. There is no one who can give satisfaction like Jesus.

After the bitterness of Marah, God brought His people to Elim. Beyond every cloud, there is the sun. Beyond every shadow, there is the light. Beyond every trial, there is a triumph, and beyond every storm, there is a rainbow. Beyond every bondage of the world, there is liberty in the Lord. This is the way God leads us. All of these things happened to Israel for examples to us.

Ps 30:5b Weeping may endure for a night, But joy comes in the morning.

Our God is a Healer of broken hearted, a Healer of lost minds and a Healer of sickness ridden bodies according to His will. He is Jehovah-Rapha, "The Lord Who Heals."

C. APPLICATIONS

1) God prizes these spontaneous expressions of praise and worship.

One great principle of worship is that it is unto the Lord, not unto man. When we worship God in song, our audience is one person the Lord Himself and not the people around us.

2) Life is a combination of the bitter and the sweet, triumphs and trials. If we are following God, however, we never need fear what comes our way.

After the trial there is often a spiritual "Elim" where God refreshes us. We must accept the bitter waters with the sweet, knowing that God knows what is best for us.

3) Life is like a medical clinic, and each experience x-rays our hearts to reveal what we really are.

The waters of Marah revealed that the Jews were worldly, thinking only of bodily satisfaction. They were walking by sight, expecting to be satisfied by the world. They were ungrateful, complaining to God when trials came their way.

If you are in that kind of situation, stop right there and ask God to forgive your sin. He is teaching you to be a better Christian. Or the situation you are in might be a simple consequence of your bad decision. Don't blame God for what you have done. Repent and make it right with God.