

15. Abundant life of believers

November 2, 2014

Many of you remember one of the early stages of reality shows during '80s and '90s that was rather popular – “Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous”. The show featured the lifestyles of wealthy entertainers, athletes, and business moguls – showing off their mansions, vacation homes, exotic cars, yachts, private jets, and much more.

I am not against having money, or being wealthy. But if that's all they have, they are not really wealthy at all. Because everything they have depends on what's happening in this world which is pretty much a crazy circus with a total fire ball ending .

A born-again believer of Jesus Christ may not have anything to impress a stock broker from Wall Street, but that believer can have the peace from the Lord which transcends the world roller coast economy; the exceeding joy that brings the light of God into this dark and desperate world; the unlimited spiritual strength from the Mighty God even if the believer's health may not be in a tip-top shape.

The benefits of abundant life of believers of Jesus Christ are at our finger tips. All we have to do is to believe in the Lord that He will provide them to us as He starts to change our hearts and lives to be more like Jesus Christ our Savior .

2 Corinthians 4:18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

The other night, in our discipleship session, I asked a question to a young man from our church who is called to be a pastor, “What would happened if Jesus was not resurrected from the death?” If that was the case, all the sufferings Jesus endured and His sacrifice on the cross would have been big fat zero, nothing , nada, and zilch. He would have died in vain.

But glory to God in the Highest, He is risen. He conquered the last enemy Death. He is Almighty Faithful God as He claimed to be. It means that just as the Lord promised, Israel was restored and will be saved, all the Gentiles are invited to be His family, and all of our sins are forgiven by the precious blood of Christ. That is what we are going to learn from this morning's study. What we'll learn here is not only what happened to the ancient Israel and the Gentile nations, but it is available to all of us as the benefits of the abundant life of believers in Christ – everlasting kindness, protection, and His invitation to that abundant life in Him.

A. THE BENEFIT OF EVERLASTING KINDNESS

Isaiah 54:4-8 “Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed; Neither be disgraced, for you will not be put to shame; For you will forget the shame of your youth, And will not remember the reproach of your widowhood anymore. 5 For your Maker is your husband, The Lord of hosts is His name; And your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel; He is called the God of the whole earth. 6 For the Lord has called you Like a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, Like a youthful wife when you were refused,” Says your God. 7 “For a mere moment I have forsaken you, But with great mercies I will gather you. 8 With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; But with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you,” Says the Lord, your Redeemer.

The image of this chapter is of God, the faithful husband is more than willing to forgive His unfaithful wife, Israel and restores her to the place of blessing . Ever since the marriage covenant between God and Israel at Mt. Sinai that was described in Exodus 19 through 24 was established, Israel became a wife of God. But whenever she had a chance, she committed adultery by turning to other so -called gods. It was so bad that the Lord had to abandon her temporarily which turned out to be the Babylon Exiles.

I know human nature well enough to realize that some people excuse their bitterness over past hurts by thinking: "I cannot believe that God allowed this to happen to me. How can I go back to Him when He allowed this?" Whether the hurt was done due to that person's fault or just circumstance, God is God. We can not ignore Him. By ignoring Him, we stand against Him.

If the Lord really hated Israel, He wouldn't bring them back from Babylon or the rebirth of nation Israel in 1948 after 1900 years. If the Lord really didn't care about us and love us, He wouldn't forgive us after we committed our first sin after we were saved.

Psalm 103:10-12 He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities. 11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; 12 As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.

Our God's everlasting kindness was personified through Jesus Christ.

B. THE BENEFIT OF DIVINE PROTECTION

Isaiah 54:17 No weapon formed against you shall prosper, And every tongue which rises against you in judgment You shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, And their righteousness is from Me," Says the Lord.

Does this mean that we have God's protection from any situation no matter what we do? From sickness, from financial meltdown, from the annoying dog next door? No. This means that the Lord might disarm our enemies sometimes, or He allows the enemy's weapon to strike us so that He can bring forth greater good out of it than the pain of the immediate blow. Please note that the Lord didn't say, "No weapon shall be formed against you," rather "No weapon formed against you shall prosper." Every attack of satan against us is measured and approved by the Lord.

This is not a blanket promise for any churchgoer. The Lord specifically says, "This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord." Are you a born-again Christian and a servant of the Lord? Then you can rest easy in His promised protection. The Lord also says that this is a promise for those whose righteousness is from the Lord Himself – and not from themselves. When a person understands that their righteousness is really from the Lord, they are much more comfortable in letting the Lord protect their righteousness.

C. GOD'S INVITATION TO ABUNDANT LIFE IN HIM

Isaiah 55:6-11 Seek the Lord while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near. 7 Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the Lord, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon. 8 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. 9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts. 10 "For as the rain comes down, and the snow

from heaven, And do not return there, But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, That it may give seed to the sower And bread to the eater , 11 So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

I just love this portion of Scriptures. It is so rich, and so powerful.

The Hebrew word of 'seek' is "darash" which means "enquire of, follow one with care". This command is not the same as what a typical churchgoer has in mind – nonchalant and careless attitude. It takes a lot of effort to get to know our God. It is not "What-can-you-do-for-me-while-I-do-nothing-for-you" attitude. Rather it is an attitude of "I-WANT-TO-KNOW-YOU-MORE-AND-I-WANT-TO-BE-OBEDIENT-TO-YOU-MORE."

When I was a baby Christian, one day I prayed to the Lord, "I want to know you more." I remember how the Lord responded to me in my heart, not in audible voice, but it was ever so clear, He said, "Read My Word."

What is involved in "seeking the Lord"? First, it means admitting that we are sinners and that we have offended the Holy God. It requires repenting – turning from the sinful heart to the Lord. We must turn to God in faith and believe His promise that in mercy He will abundantly forgive us. Repentance and faith go together:

Acts 20:21b repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ

But did you notice that there is a time limit in seeking the Lord? It says, "while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near." It means that the invitation may cease while we are delaying. Apostle Paul also teaches us about our timely response to the Lord:

2 Corinthians 6:2b Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

It is not a very smart thing to second guess God, because His ways and thoughts are far beyond our comprehension. Just because you know how to use your TV remote control, don't think that you can remotely control God and figure out things better than Him.

Do you know the secret of the success of Billy Graham's crusade all these years? Graham presented the Good News of Jesus through a simple message from the Bible. Do you know the secret method of the late pastor Chuck Smith who started a Calvary Chapel in 1965 and now over 1600 of them all around the world? He taught from the Bible – verse by verse, chapter by chapter , book by book.

There is power in the Word of God far more than we can imagine. It changes the hearts of sinners, comforts the disheartened, encourages the broken hearts, and strengthens the feeble-minded. Because it is the Word of God and it is the voice of God. And our God does not waste His voice.

D. SALVATION TO THE GENTILES

Isaiah 56:3-5 Do not let the son of the foreigner Who has joined himself to the Lord Speak, saying, "The Lord has utterly separated me from His people"; Nor let the eunuch say, "Here I am, a dry tree." 4 For thus says the Lord: "To the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths, And choose what pleases Me, And hold fast My covenant, 5 Even to them I will give in My house And within My walls a

*place and a name Better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name That shall not be cut off.
Isaiah 56:7 Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, And make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices Will be accepted on My altar; For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations."*

Our God is not the God of Israel only, but the God of all nations and the universe. He didn't choose Israel because they were special people as they thought, rather He chose them to fulfill His promises.

God chose the nation of Israel to be the people through whom Jesus Christ would be born – the Savior from sin and death. God first promised the Messiah after Adam and Eve's fall into sin. God later confirmed that the Messiah would come from the line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jesus Christ is the ultimate reason why God chose Israel to be His special people.

Does v7 sound familiar to you? It should, because Jesus recited this in Matthew 21 as He drove out the moneychangers and the merchants from the outer courts of the temple – the only place where the Gentile people could come to pray. These merchants made it more like a swap meet than a house of prayer. The violation of this principle made Jesus angry. And you really don't want to make God angry.

Speaking of turning the temple to profit oneself, I wonder what Jesus' reaction is going to be to those Bible teachers and pastors who merchandise Christianity for a means of gain when they see the Lord face to face.

1 Timothy 6:5 useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.

What boggles my mind is that there are many, many mindless Christians who support these spiritual moneychangers who use their ministries to profit selfishly month after month, year after year. They somehow think that these TV evangelists must be godly and in touch with God just because they are on TV.

E. WARNINGS THAT COMES WITH THE BENEFITS

Isaiah 57:13 When you cry out, Let your collection of idols deliver you. But the wind will carry them all away, A breath will take them. But he who puts his trust in Me shall possess the land, And shall inherit My holy mountain."

The benefits from the abundant life of believers come with warnings. There are two types of promises of God:

1) Unconditional promises: No matter what happens, God will keep His promises.

- No more floods that will destroy the earth – Genesis 9
- I will bless those who bless you [Abraham] – Genesis 12
- I will establish the throne of His kingdom forever – 2 Samuel 7

2) Conditional promises: His promises is available, but the result is up to our choices. There are so many of them that I cannot list them all here.

- If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. – 2 Chronicles 7

The Lord is more than willing to bless us and strengthen us if we only are obedient to Him. But we are the ones often rejecting His eternal benefit package for the sake of short temporary gratification on this earth. Are we dumb or what?!?!

F. APPLICATIONS

1) God who loves us most knows us best. He who knows us best cares the most. Rest in Him, have faith in Him. We will never regret.

2) The better we know the promises and covenants of God, the more peace we will have in our hearts when things around us fall apart. Seek Him with all of your heart.