

WITNESSES TO GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

Lamentations 3:22-23

Youth Journal records a true Christmas letter, received in mid-March: "I was already behind in sending out cards, . . . and then I got hit by a truck. I guess that gave me a good excuse to be late with the cards. It's a good thing I was in the hospital recovering, because I came down with pneumonia, and they were able to treat it. And of course I wasn't home when we had that little fire. That was fortunate, because it ruined the master bedroom, where I would have been if I weren't in intensive care. Well, we've been *wanting* to redecorate that bedroom ...

As children we used to sing a little chorus: *"I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy, down in my heart. (where?) down in my heart! . . ."*

J. Vernon Mc Gee used to tell of encounters with people who would say to him, "SMILE, brother!" "Christians are suppose to be happy!"

He would often respond, "Sometimes I don't *feel* like smiling!"

A lot of *BANDITS* out there want to rob us of our joy! Loss, pain, suffering, tragedies, all combine to take away our joy.

Sometimes God's people don't *feel* like smiling!

Jeremiah was known as the *weeping* prophet.

Other godly people have been known for their *tears*.

Sometimes, when our world seems to be coming unglued, we want to sit down and cry. *Have YOU been there? Have you been there RECENTLY? Maybe you're there this morning.*

Have you come to the place where you hope no one asks, "*How are you?*" because you're afraid you might have to tell them the truth?!!

Sometimes godly people even *QUESTION* God. *Have YOU ever questioned God?*

You have lots of company!

Godly people sometimes question God – especially in the dark!

We're going to consider four who witness to God's faithfulness in our confusion.

First three witnesses, will show us that godly people have something in common:

We're going to call **THREE WITNESSES FOR A GODLY ATTITUDE.**

I want to give them a chance to speak for themselves, rather than explain the passages.

WITNESS #1 JEREMIAH

Jeremiah watched as his country slid down the slimy slope of moral degeneration.

He cried as He saw God's judgment destroy his hometown.

The city was in shambles. The people, in disgrace. It was a pathetic, hopeless, situation.

Listen to his cry as he talks about what God has done to him. **Lam. 3:1-20**

What's the conclusion of his frustration and confusion? **21-24**

There's a lesson for us in Jeremiah's experience:

Only those who have struggled with the confusion of life, . . .

only those who know the pain and frustration of major loss . . .

. . . can truly comprehend the faithfulness of God.

If everything turned out as *we* think it should, we would *never* learn how *faithful God is*.

An old Phil Kerr chorus I have enjoyed for years says: "If the dreams that I dream would come true, If the schemes that I scheme I could do, then it seems there would be, contentment for me, but I know that He knows what's best for me!

People who have never suffered affliction, . . . who don't know the pain of loss, . . .

. . . *cannot possibly understand God's faithfulness.*

It's walking through the valley of the shadow that teaches us that God is faithful!

That's why God takes us through the valley—so we can learn that He is faithful—*even in the valley, in the shadows, when it seems we can't find our way!*

He won't leave us. We won't be consumed.

He gives us new demonstrations of His mercy and faithfulness every day.

Every morning as we wake up, we witness it again. He is faithful!

[WITNESS #2 **HABAKKUK**]

Habakkuk is the second godly person who is a witness to God's faithfulness.

Listen to his godly words in **Hab. 1:2-4!** *Do you hear his question?*

"What in the world are you doing? How long am I going to keep crying out to you and see you do nothing about it?!!!"

God's people have become characterized by ungodly living and Habakkuk is afflicted. He doesn't understand how God can just sit there and do nothing about it.

God isn't cooperating with Habakkuk's plan!!!

Howie Hendricks enjoys a dialogue with a student: “*Man, I could never talk to God like that!*” To which Hendricks responded: “Have you ever *thought* it?” The student replied: “*All the time. But I would never SAY it!!!*”

Then the Lord responds (1:5): “*I am about to do something that you aren’t going to believe.*” He is going to bring the Babylonians to destroy God’s people (1:6).

Guess how Habakkuk replies: “*I can’t believe it!!*” Wait a minute God! How can a just God bring in an unjust nation to judge His own people?!!! “They’re worse than we are! You can’t use *them!*” (1:12-13)

So, like Jonah, Habakkuk says, O.K., I’m going to sit down and wait, to see what God will do about this problem.

In the midst of this context, Habakkuk makes a strong statement in 3:17-19
What’s the conclusion of all his frustration and confusion?

He’s going to trust the Lord, even when he can’t make sense out of what He’s doing.

He has reached the conclusion (2:4) that the righteous live by *faith*, NOT by sight.

He is going to rejoice in the Lord, who delivers Him.

God answered his question, but it *still* doesn’t make sense to Him.

In the midst of his doubts, he’s going to trust God and wait on Him.

In the meantime, he’s going to rejoice.

There’s a lesson for us in Habakkuk’s experience:

We only really learn to trust the Lord and to wait on Him, . . .

we only really learn how to rejoice in Spirit and in truth, . . .

. . . *in the midst of the dark times, when we don’t understand what God is up to.*

When we can stand on our own two feet, . . .

when we can figure things out for ourselves, . . .

. . . then we don’t have to trust Him!

We only learn that *the Lord* is our strength, when *our* strength runs out.

We only experience God’s sure-footed stability on the treacherous precipices of life.

We only begin to learn what true rejoicing is about when we discover that God’s grace is sufficient for us in the midst of our weakness.

Trust me! I know.

All my life I have been a self-sufficient kind of person who could handle everything on my own.

It wasn't until I faced a few things that I couldn't handle myself that I began to learn that *the LORD is my strength*, that *He's the One who makes me sure footed* when I'm walking on the edge of a precipice. Only then can I really rejoice.

Therefore, ***"I rejoice in the Lord. I am joyful in God who delivers me."***

[WITNESS #3 PAUL] **Our third godly witness is the apostle Paul.**

We usually think of his letter to the Philippians as *the JOY letter*.

Paul uses "joy" or "rejoice" 13 times.

Why did he use this expression so often?

Because they *weren't rejoicing!* — They were discouraged and depressed. Times were hard. They were going through extensive suffering for their faith.

They were persecuted.

Many had lost their jobs.

Their families had turned against them.

Like some friends I've known, their wife had taken their children and left them, on account of their faith in Christ.

They didn't have much cause for rejoicing. They were discouraged.

Even Paul, when he wrote the letter, was in jail. He wrote the letter to cheer them up.

He wants them to see how much they have to rejoice about.

The **first reason** they have to rejoice is because he's in jail! **1:12-13 => 14**

They see it as a cause for discouragement.

He sees it as an opportunity to share Christ with the palace guard.

"Think about it!" Paul says. These guys are a captive audience, 24 hours a day chained to the apostle. What a tremendous opportunity to share the gospel!

It's clear he isn't in jail because of a crime; he's there on account of Christ.

And, in fact, Paul gives them a second reason to rejoice: his imprisonment has motivated others to share Christ with their friends and neighbors.

Isn't that great?!!!

"Yeah, Paul," they say. "That's another reason we're discouraged."

People *are* preaching the gospel. But they're not doing it because they love Christ or because they want their neighbors to know him. They're doing it to spite you!

Like child, "Ha! Ha! Ha! We get to share the gospel; you don't. You're locked up; we get to go up the street and tell people about Jesus!"

So they're discouraged. Paul wants them to rejoice! **1:18**

Christ is being preached everywhere.

If people are doing it for the wrong reasons, that's their problem.

The important thing is that *people are being told about Jesus!*

What's the conclusion of all his frustration and confusion?

4:4,

Are you worried about something? **6-7**

Is something missing in your life? **10-19**

There's a lesson for us in Paul's experience: God is in control.

When we trust Him, negative circumstances become positive, because He's glorified.

You never learn about contentment by being spoiled.

God wants us to learn about contentment.

He wants us to praise Him in times of plenty, or in times of shortage.

That's the only way we'll ever learn about true contentment.

So, when times are hard: *Rejoice in the Lord always. I'll repeat that thought again:*

REJOICE!!!

The Message (4:6-7): "Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. **Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers**, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life."

[WITNESS #4 _____] **Who will be witness #4?**

Is there a witness like these in the 21st C.?

Is there a witness like these in Tucson?

In *The Joy Choice*, Elizabeth Brown tells how she chose to rejoice, when she lost her seven-year-old daughter, a child bubbling with life, joy, and laughter. Suddenly she was gone.

Elizabeth Brown chose to rejoice in the midst of her suffering, because God was faithful to her in her time of crisis.

A couple of our high schoolers are trying to get recognition for a Christian club on campus. At times the resistance is incredible. They have a choice to make. They can trust the faithful God, and rejoice in midst of obstacles, or throw in the towel. The choice is theirs!

Some people in our congregation are facing an uncertain future, for some, their health is breaking down, others are going through the turmoil of a broken home, some are facing incredible spiritual battles.

I don't know what this week holds for you. — But *I do know Who holds this week.*

We can trust our God. He is faithful.

We can choose to trust Him and rejoice, whatever the week may bring!

Do you know anyone who has been through a time of adversity, who can add their voice to the list of godly witnesses, who has been through the fire of adversity, and has come out praising God for His faithfulness?

It was out of ashes of destruction that **Jeremiah** could respond: *"Your mercies are new every morning . . . Great is your faithfulness!"*

It was in shadows of a corrupt society and an uncertain future that **Habakkuk** could cry: *"Though everything I depend on for daily living should dry up, . . . I will rejoice in the Lord; He is my strength; He makes my feet secure."*

It was while confined to jail, with Christian people trying to spite him . . . that **Paul** responded: *"Rejoice in the Lord always. . . . I've learned to be content. . . . My God will supply all your needs."*

What will OUR message be?

"Look for the joys that refresh your spirit."

Energize your faith by tracking your daily joys.

Like believers at Philippi, take a moment to recognize what God is doing in our life.

Look for *some* reason to rejoice each day. *"Today I can thank God for . . ."*

Notice the times of fun that relieve the tension in your life, and thank God for them.

—a pleasant evening out, or maybe even a walk across the desert.

Look for demonstrations of love that touch you.

List other evidences of God's care: answers to prayer, an unexpected gift, a letter from a friend.

Sometimes the cause for joy comes from recognizing God's hand in the hard times.

They say that an optimist proclaims that we live in the best of all possible worlds, while the pessimist fears this is true. Giving thanks is like that. It's a matter of perspective. When we see God's hand in the hard times we can thank Him for them too!

Maybe you can help your children learn to identify a **"Joy Spot"** when something happens that makes them happy during the day.

Teaching them to spot *their* "Joy Spots" makes you more sensitive to yours!

What can *YOU* thank God for today? Keep a list.

Remember His goodness.

Reaffirm in your own thinking His faithfulness to you.

Then, "*Rejoice . . . Like Paul, **let me say it again, one more time: REJOICE!***"