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REFORMED
THOUGHT
FOR
CHRISTIAN
LIVING

Today's Quick Word Mark 6:12

By Bruce Christian

MARK 6:12 - *[The Twelve] went out and preached that people should repent.*

In Chapter 6, Mark presents us with an interesting juxtaposition of events in the earthly ministry of Jesus.

He begins with the account of the people in Jesus' home town 'taking offence' at the local carpenter in an ordinary family with 'ordinary' siblings, acting as if he was some special 'Messianic' type figure (1-6).

Next he tells us about Jesus' sending The Twelve out on an urgent mission to declare, by word and deed, the coming of the Kingdom of God and the need therefore for all people to REPENT (7-13).

We then hear of how his cousin, John the Baptist, had been imprisoned and beheaded for doing this very thing and upsetting the 'illegitimate' wife of King Herod (14-29).

Next comes the account of how Jesus was sensitive to the disciples' need for spiritual rest and renewal after the emotional drain of their mission, and of how this 'time-out' was unceremoniously interrupted by a curious but hungry multitude, bringing out

Jesus' characteristic compassion and practical concern for people in need (30-44).

The chapter closes with the demonstration of Jesus' absolute control over the physical universe (including Archimedes' Principle and the weather generally!) and his power (and willingness) to heal all manner of sickness and disease (45-56).

Looking at the 'big picture' as a whole, we see a loving, compassionate Saviour motivated by practical concern for the needy, and wanting to demonstrate all the positive and comforting aspects of the Gospel he brings, but who also sees the importance of the imperative to REPENT. We take hold of all the joys and blessings of his Gospel by putting our faith and trust in him, but we cannot, and will not, take hold of all this without first realising that we are helpless sinners in need of a Saviour, and who therefore come to him with humble REPENTANT hearts.

Hard as it might be, as it was for John the Baptist, let us not be intimidated by our prevailing culture and let us "go out and preach that people should REPENT"!

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Today's Quick Word Job 3:20-22

By Bruce Christian

JOB 3:20-22 - *“Why is light given to those in misery, and life to the bitter of soul, to those who long for death that does not come, who search for it more than for hidden treasure, who are filled with gladness and rejoice when they reach the grave?”*

Job was deep in the night-time of his suffering. He had come through the gut-wrenching anguish of losing his possessions, his children, even the empathy, support and encouragement of his wife - all this without blaming God or questioning his providence, his sovereign right to send trouble as well as blessing (2:10). But now, continued intense physical pain and discomfort was starting to take its toll, and Satan's boast before God (2:4-5) was looking like it was gaining some traction.

Throughout this chapter, Job is calling down a curse on the day on which he was born! His cries of pain, and the 'logic' of his argument from a purely human perspective, might help us to understand WHY there is such a strong push for legalising euthanasia today. But, regardless of this, there is no future in refusing to submit to the higher wisdom of God's revealed truth about the value of every human life, and the requirement to leave the end-of-life decision in HIS sovereign hands (Deuteronomy 32:39; 1 Samuel 2:6; Psalm 68:20). Job is not the only hero of faith and trust in God to travel this dark road of doubt and perplexity. The psalms, including many of David's, are full of such emotional struggling. Psalm 88 stands out especially among them because, unlike all the others, it even concludes with a hopeless cry of despair: “You have taken my companions and loved ones from me; the darkness is my closest friend.”

There is no 'rejoicing in the morning after a night of weeping' as in Psalm 30:5!

Now, we know that the 'morning of rejoicing' did come for Job in the end, but, as in Psalm 88, that is not even on his radar at this point in his journey. Jeremiah had a similar struggle (Jeremiah 20:14-18). These real life experiences in Scripture of people whom God loved and cared for give us permission to feel abandoned and to be overwhelmed by all the other emotions that are part of the same package! They help us to some small extent to appreciate the depth of passion behind Jesus' cry of dereliction from the cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34).

The Apostle Paul expressed similar feelings as he counselled the Church in Corinth on how to keep a right perspective on the often intense, sometimes even unbearable, suffering that God provides for us as part of our journey with Jesus: “But we have this treasure [the light of the Gospel] in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.” (2 Corinthians 4:7-11). Yes, Job was perplexed, and his question in today's verses was never really answered for him; but let us remember who won the battle for his soul!

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Today's Quick Word Romans 8:26-28

By Bruce Christian

ROMANS 8:26-28 - *In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

What a comfort it is to reflect on these amazing truths. Paul has just been talking about the struggle we have living in a world that has been comprehensively infected by the 'virus' of sin - and none of us is virus-free (3:23). When we acknowledge our sin, and our need for a Saviour because we have no hope of saving ourselves from this condition (3:20-26), we receive the ministry of God's Holy Spirit in our hearts - a Spirit who is fully aware of our weakness and helplessness, and the struggle we have with our prayer life.

There are situations when we don't know WHAT God's will is, and we aren't even sure HOW we should express our feelings to the sovereign Lord of the Universe, when all we can say is, "Lord, YOU know what I mean!" as we try to put thoughts together, and all we can really do is 'groan' in the difficult circumstances. 'We don't know what we ought to pray for'. So, Paul reminds us that one of the the Spirit's functions is to 'INTERCEDE for us'. And this Spirit KNOWS what God's will IS, and although WE

DON'T KNOW what we ought to pray for, we DO KNOW that HE DOES. More than this, we DO KNOW that "in all things God works for the GOOD of those who love him, who have been called according to HIS purpose." It can't get any better than this!

These comforting facts should revolutionise our prayer life ... and our daily relationship with our loving Heavenly Father. I don't have to be informed or eloquent or 'an expert' at praying - I just need to open up a humble, incompetent, struggling heart to the Holy Spirit's ministry within it, and God does all the rest! "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." (Psalm 139:23-24).

"Spirit of God, descend upon my heart; wean it from earth; through all its pulses move. Stoop to my weakness, mighty as thou art, and make me love thee as I ought to love. Hast thou not bid me love thee, God and King? All, all thine own, soul, heart and strength and mind? I see thy cross; there teach my heart to cling: Oh, let me seek thee, and, oh, let me find! Teach me to feel that thou art always nigh; teach me the struggles of the soul to bear, to check the rising doubt, the rebel sigh; teach me the patience of unanswered prayer. Teach me to love thee as thine angels love, one holy passion filling all my frame; the baptism of the heav'n-descended Dove, my heart an altar, and thy love the flame." (George Croly).