

Where Are the Blessings?

The Bible clearly teaches that all the good that mankind enjoys comes from God (James 1:17). Whether just or unjust, all men and women benefit from the goodness of God (Matthew 5:45). Jeremiah wrote that God's "compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness." (Lamentations 3:23). Still, we look at our lives and we see tragedy. We face financial distress, a loved one's body is ravaged by disease, the aches and pains of aging begin taking their toll on us. Where are the blessings?

We look beyond our own little world and see more suffering. Husbands and wives divorce, homeless people stand in lengthy lines for a meal or a warm bed, entire cities are devastated by destructive forces of nature such as hurricanes, tornadoes and earthquakes. Where are the blessings?

We pick up a newspaper or watch a newscast and are confronted with the horrible results of sin. Murders, wars, kidnappings, rapes, bombings, lootings and other acts of destruction scream at us in bold headlines. Where are the blessings?

On a much lesser scale are those seemingly trivial matters that cloud our thoughts on a daily basis. "Why don't they open up another checkout line in this store so I don't have to stand here so long?" "Come on, buddy, get that car in gear. The light has been green for 30 minutes." Where are the blessings?

Now that we've run the gamut of life's "troubles" from slow traffic to death, we again ask the question, "Where are the blessings?" Our answer comes from directing our thoughts back to the scriptures in the first paragraph. In the few minutes that it has taken us to contemplate the tragedies of life, one brief look back at God's promises of blessing reminds us that these blessings never went away. They're still there just like they always have been. By no means am I suggesting that there's happiness to be found in a murder or a bombing or even standing in line. The circumstance itself might lend nothing whatsoever to thoughts of blessings; however, the point here is that while these negatives are occurring, the positives are occurring as well.

Four passages of Scripture come to mind here. Matthew 5:11-12, Acts 5:41, Romans 5:3 and James 1:2. A cursory reading of each would lead one to believe that our troubles should make us happy. A closer reading reveals that it is the results of our reactions to the troubles that lead to happiness. Respectively, the results are a great reward in heaven, being privileged to take a stand for the Lord as He took a stand for us, patience and, again, patience. While the negatives are occurring, the positives are occurring as well.

Paul was imprisoned several times throughout his life as a Christian (II Corinthians 11:23). His freedom having been taken away, his range of movement having been restricted, he nonetheless wrote from one of those prisons, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." (Philippians 4:11). Did he think it was great to be fettered in a dark, dingy dungeon? Was he happy that he had been beaten? Did he take great joy in the hunger and financial distress that he sometimes faced? Certainly not, but inasmuch as each of these sorrows were brought about as a result of his loyalty to Christ, he did rejoice. It wasn't the tragedies that made him happy. It was the realization that in spite of all of his woes he still served a loving God whose blessings continued to flow. The negatives were there in Paul's life, but so were the blessings, and while he did not and in fact could not deny the reality of the trouble he was facing, he chose to concentrate his thoughts on the many aspects of his life in which God was continually blessing him.

Where are the blessings? Where does God go when we suffer loss or illness or even (tragedy of tragedies!) have to stand in line at the store? He does not leave. The same blessings that He was giving when we felt happy are those which He continues to give during these times of trial. Our focus may have changed. Our mindset may have switched gears to that which is foremost in our thoughts, namely, that illness or death or whatever; but the direction of our thoughts does not change the fact that God continues to bless, even in our darkest hour. It all comes down to that upon which we choose to dwell. We can choose (and we DO make the conscious choice) to dwell on the negatives or, along with a healthy dose of realism that allows us to deal with our situation, we can focus on the manifold blessings of God that we enjoy. Without question, it was this need to focus on how blessed we are that prompted the Holy Spirit to inspire Paul to write these words: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." (Philippians 4:8).

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