

Not forsaking the good – Sunday June 23rd, 2013

Israel has rejected the good;

The enemy will pursue him.

⁴ They have set up kings, but not by Me;

They have appointed princes, but I did not know it.

With their silver and gold they have made idols for themselves,

That they might be cut off. Hosea 8:3-4

Beloved in The Lord,

A great deal of the problems that we face find their roots in the fact the we do not seek The Lord's will. We take matters into our own hands, try to work things out relying upon our own abilities and strength. Then when things do not work out, we begin to seek God.

All throughout the Old Testament we see what happens with the nation of Israel. While they seek The Lord's will and follow Him in faith and obedience all is well. However this never lasts very long and we find them veering off in different directions. Very quickly they revert to their old ways. God then sends a spokesman or spokeswoman who entreats them and exhorts them to return to The Lord.

Our text today is a passage from the book of Hosea. Speaking through this prophet, God is trying to show Israel that they have been unfaithful to Him, and that is the reason for the problems that they are facing. They have forsaken that which is good and so they are experiencing a curse and not a blessing.

Over and over again we see this same pattern. For a while they repent, and turn to God and before long they are backsliding and worshipping and serving idols, false gods. This problem, however is not confined to the nation of Israel. This is very much a universal problem, Paul in writing to the Galatians wrote:

I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel;⁷ which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.⁸ But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!⁹ As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed! (Galatians 1:6-9)

Paul uses strong language here, but it is necessary, because straying from God's truth leads to being lost and eternal damnation. It is of vital importance to stay within truth, and not to stray to either the left or the right. It is for this reason, my all time favourite Hymn and daily prayer is: "Take Thou my Hand and lead me, O'er life's rough way, With Heavenly manna feed me from day to day; Without Thy grace and favour I go astray; Take Thou my hand O Saviour, Lead Thou my way."

I do not desire to take a single step without God; to make a single decision without His guidance. Please understand that most of the straying from the Truth that occurs, happens over a period of time. It is not usually a sudden thing. Straying from the truth occurs little by little and thereby is

very hard to detect at first. One small compromise here, another one there and before you know it, the foundations are gone, and you are well and truly in error.

Over the centuries, Satan has not changed his Modus Operandi; simply because he has not needed too. His tactics do not change. The first thing that he does is plant a seed of doubt in your mind.

"Did God really say that? He doesn't mean it. Is that really what God thinks? Surely a God of love will not condemn or punish you! God is not so angry and mean. Surely all will be well."

This is when we must stand our ground and be strong. We need to do as Jesus did when the Devil tempted Him. Jesus responded by standing on and quoting God's Holy Word. **"It is written..."** We need to know what is written in order to be able to take a stand. We need to be strong in God's Word so that we do not get led astray.

Even though we have a formidable enemy, Satan, who never tires, who labours day and night to trip us up, we need to remember that we are not alone. We have The Holy Spirit living within us and He is our Helper.

The Holy Spirit is God. He is bigger, stronger, brighter than the devil. We read in 1 John 4:4 **"You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world."**

The Holy Spirit is greater than Satan. However, what we need to be aware of and understand, is that The Holy Spirit is a gentleman. He never forces Himself upon us. He abides within the heart of every true believer, but He functions in so much as we let Him. The degree to which The Holy Spirit leads us is dependent upon the degree to which we yield to His leadership. The more we yield to Him, the more He can use us and lead us and guide us. If we do not yield to Him, if we do not pray and seek His guidance, He remains in the background.

We are not robots. God has created us with a free will. If we choose to go our way; to do it our way; to do our own thing, then God allows us to do so. The Holy Spirit takes a back seat. There is nothing good about this approach to life and there is most definitely no blessing.

On the other hand - if we pray, if we willingly yield to Him, if we ask God The Holy Spirit to lead and guide us; then He does and we are blessed.

Remember The Holy Spirit is God. He is the third member of The Holy Trinity. He is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent, meaning He knows all things, He is all powerful and ever present everywhere. Why not trust in Him and rely on Him? It is stupid not to! There is nothing that He does not know. There is nothing that is beyond His ability or power. He knows the answer to all of our problems, He is able to supply all of our needs. What holds us back from fully trusting in Him? The answer is PRIDE. Yes pride. We think to ourselves that we know better. We say to ourselves I am smart and can work this out for myself. I will do it my way and I will do what I want.

Did you know that God hates pride? Not only is pride abhorrent to God; it is so stupid on our part. If we were to stop for just one moment and to honestly consider life, then we would quickly come to the understanding that we need God and that apart from Him we are nothing. We would fall on our faces and worship Him, for all is dependent upon His love and mercy and faithfulness. We would ask God to forgive our foolish pride.

Everything that we have comes from Him in the first place. We did not create ourselves. We came into this world by Him. He created us. If we have intelligence it is from Him, not ourselves. If we are skilled, He made us that way. The fact that we are even alive is only because of His grace and mercy. Shortly before I wrote this sermon, I was reading the book of Daniel in my morning devotional time. I was reading about King Belshazzar. He had become very prideful. During one of his many banquets, he ordered that the golden vessels taken from God's Temple in Jerusalem, be

brought to him. He and his fellow party goers drank wine from them and praised the god's of silver and gold. we read in Daniel 5:4: ***“They drank the wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.”***

Suddenly there was an interesting phenomenon - a hand appeared and began writing on the wall. We read:

“Suddenly the fingers of a man’s hand emerged and began writing opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king’s palace, and the king saw the back of the hand that did the writing. ⁶ Then the king’s face grew pale and his thoughts alarmed him, and his hip joints went slack and his knees began knocking together.”

The King became distraught and was at a loss as to what this meant. Eventually someone told him about Daniel, a man of God, who was gifted in interpreting difficult questions, dreams and visions. Daniel was summoned and God gave him the understanding to give the right interpretation of the writing on the wall. Daniel told the King that he had forgotten how God had dealt with his father Nebuchadnezzar. How God had humbled him and taught him that He and He alone was ruler of the universe. God and not man. We read in verses 22ff:

“Yet you, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, even though you knew all this, ²³ but you have exalted yourself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines have been drinking wine from them; and you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which do not see, hear or understand. But the God in whose hand are your life-breath and all your ways, you have not glorified. ²⁴ Then the hand was sent from Him and this inscription was written out.

Daniel then told him that his kingdom was about to end. That very night Belshazzar was slain and his kingdom was lost.

What I would like to emphasise is what Daniel said: ***But the God in whose hand are your life-breath and all your ways, you have not glorified.***

This is a powerful reminder that even our very breath, the air that we breathe is a gift from God. This is why there is absolutely no room for pride in our lives. We are to glorify God in all of our ways. We should always humble ourselves and submit ourselves to Him. We need to yield to Him on a daily basis and be obedient in all things.

This always brings blessings.

May we never forsake that which is good. May we stay close to God at all times, sticking close to His Word. May we seek His guidance in all things and we will be blessed.

May God help us.

Amen.

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All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.