

Chronicles of Diversity

Your leadership weekly



*Moose Jaw Lake on the Wonder
Springs Solitude Center?*

Oasis

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Standing by itself Philippians 2:12-13 is one of the most disturbing verses in the Bible:

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

If salvation is a free gift of God, why, or how do I work out this free gift? It really makes no sense. And what about the fear and trembling stuff? Isn't God supposed to be my friend and my best bud?

Paul of course explains this in the context of his writing. First of all there is no reason to write anything, if you have nothing to say. This may not be a universally true expression in our day, but Paul in his epistles admonishes and encourages. Both to be effective, have to be used in such a way that the reader, as he begins a passage, is not aware of where the writing is going. He is stimulated by what he is reading enough to move forward in the literature.

As the chapter begins, Paul is admonishing the Philippians to be Christ like:

Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of

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those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

As verse twelve begins you can almost hear the Philippian reader thinking to himself. “This guy Paul is a real cool dude, he is encouraging me to be more Christlike and now is wonderfully describing my Christian walk: *‘Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation —,*’ I can really get into this. Wait a minute, what is this *‘fear and trembling,*’ It scares me, I can’t understand, I am supposed to love God, not fear him, like trembling fear. And how does he work through me, I’m thought I was supposed to choose to do great things for God. What about my free will?”

Paul continues *‘fear and trembling’* with just a little chastisement:

Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.

Then Paul finishes up this discourse with a few boastful words, that were he alive today would surely get him a segment on Dr. Phil, or Oprah:

Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me.

“Man it is one thing to watch it on television (like I know what that is) and it is another thing for Paul to expect me to emulate him and pour out my life as a drink offering, to evaporate and become nothing. To vanish, to become vapor. I am supposed to rule and reign with Christ. I know that is true, ‘cause it is in the end of the book, and we win. I must maintain my position in the community after all!”

Last week we spoke about the work being the end of it all. Not the fruit of the work. It is not our success, or our efforts that are important in “working out our salvation.” It is as Paul uses in this preface to verse twelve, the work, that allows us to identify with Christ. Read again from the beginning of the chapter. In this context things really get tough when we begin:

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

Of course, we do not find it difficult to relate to the exaltation that follows, it is just that death part that gives us all the problems. This is how Paul sets them up for the “fear and trembling.” To the extent we are in this Christian endeavor for ourselves, is to the extent we are to have fear and trembling as we seek to work out our salvation. In Paul’s boast about himself, he has no fear, no trembling, not because he doesn’t work, but because he has set his eyes not on the fruit of the work, but on the Christ, like refining the work that, *“God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”*

To put it another way, Paul is daily content to do the work that God puts before him, not his own agenda. Therefore, the results are also in God’s hands. With that in mind, Paul has learned that the results of the work are greater if he allows God to work out the small and the big stuff. This allows Paul not to second guess (manipulate) God’s work, to Paul’s good pleasure. His boast of being poured out as a drink offering, has merit, and at the same time holds no fear and trembling, because Paul knows he is God’s man doing the work that God called him to do. If you are not in that place, the fear and trembling have their place.

This weekly writing that has gone on these years, is as close to understanding this gift as I have progressed. Some are good, some are not so good, but I have seen that those results flow directly from what God has been doing in my life pre-message and my vision to where this might be leading for next week. My job is to write or spin this in some sort of semi humorous, pilgrimage, wilderness, barrenness, reflective context. The good or the bad has somewhat to do with any talent I might have,

but I think more to do with whether God wants to have a human or more divine perspective in any particular piece.

As far as the rest of my life, I am still the organizer, figure out the angles kind of a guy I have always been. But I am learning slowly, Oh, so slowly, to let all of that lie until God fills in the blanks, that are now getting way too complicated for me to fill in. The part you get to see, not to my pleasure, is my looking at the ends that I perceive that God's work is heading and missing the trip. God will one day accomplish something I can see and relate to and understand, it is just that my focus, like most everyone is on the tangible results. I appear to not know what I am doing (Which is true, but I want you to forget that right now.) and we all forget what God is doing in me, (and dare I say in you.)

So besides doing God's work, God's way, being the end, and not our perception of God's work, and the fruit we make for ourselves in this pilgrimage being the focus of our lives, what is the message of drought in this week's installment?

I'm glad you ask. Again, I would like to make the connection between the model of actual dry land and spiritual dry lands. What makes all the difference between the desert wilderness and the oasis is the presence of water.

In this context, Paul is able to pour himself out as a drink offering in Philippians 2 because he knows that this well, this wine skin, this offering vessel will never run dry. When you can offer God the best you have, without expecting a reward that you merit or even understand, then the fear and trembling ceases and grace may begin to be apprehended. It is from and through that grace that the well never runs dry, God's artesian springs never cease to flow.

These wonder springs in the mist of a dry valley is best described in the Bible in Psalm 84:

To the Chief Musician. On an instrument of Gath. A Psalm of the sons of Korah.

*How lovely is Your tabernacle,
O LORD of hosts!
My soul longs, yes, even faints
For the courts of the LORD;
My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.*

*Even the sparrow has found a home,
And the swallow a nest for herself,
Where she may lay her young—
Even Your altars, O LORD of hosts,
My King and my God.
Blessed are those who dwell in Your house;
They will still be praising You. Selah*

*Blessed is the man whose strength is in You,
Whose heart is set on pilgrimage.
As they pass through the Valley of Baca,
They make it a spring;
The rain also covers it with pools.
They go from strength to strength;
Each one appears before God in Zion.*

*O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer;
Give ear, O God of Jacob! Selah
O God, behold our shield,
And look upon the face of Your anointed.*

*For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand.
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
Than dwell in the tents of wickedness.
For the LORD God is a sun and shield;*

*The LORD will give grace and glory;
No good thing will He withhold
From those who walk uprightly.*

*O LORD of hosts,
Blessed is the man who trusts in You!*

I would like to focus on the stanza that begins with verse five to draw the connection between the oasis on the land and the oasis of the spirit:

*Blessed is the man whose strength is in You,
Whose heart is set on pilgrimage.
As they pass through the Valley of Baca,
They make it a spring;
The rain also covers it with pools.
They go from strength to strength;
Each one appears before God in Zion.*

The Valley of Baca may have been an imaginary poetical name to signify the experience of drought. If this is the case, then we see here a connection between the springs and man “They make it a spring;” God supplies the rain to make the pools, but the people whose strength is in God and whose heart is set on pilgrimage, they are the ones who make springs in the valley of drought by their passage. Together the rain and the springs give the community strength. Hence each individual appears before God in His temple.

Notice the singular and the plural tenses in the passage: Man, they, they, God, they, one. Now the question could be ask about the continuing nature of the springs in the valley. Do they remain after the passage of the pilgrims? This too is probably just as in nature, if the source of the water is diverted, in this case moves on, and the rain ceases, then eventually all the water will evaporate and valley becomes a desert again. But there probably is a lingering effect of the passage, at least for a time until the water dries up.

In order to see if Psalm 84 is a truth in your life you need to be willing to travel into the Valley of Baca. If you fear this experience, you then need to develop some fear and trembling as you work out your free gift of salvation. To a certain extent all this flows from the spring of viewing your life as a pilgrimage.

This life isn't all there is, there is a promise of a better eternal life, but this is the only life you know and you filter and live each and every day within that limited sphere you perceive. The way of the Valley of Baca can become a valley of tears, if you travel, work your way through it, in your own strength. This really is a valley of drought.

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. This is true in natural landscapes and well as human interactions. The gift of God, as he works his will and good purpose, is looking at our lives and our work as the thing of beauty as we journey in a continual Valley of Baca. We each learn this to the extent we are willing to allow God to develop the contrast between His grace and His love (our hope of glory) and the wilderness that we daily travel. Our beauty becomes both natural and spiritual.

If we have the fear of the wilderness, either natural or spiritual, then accompanying our desert is a fear of our salvation. As we overcome by God's grace our fears of solitude and silence, or isolation. Then the beauty of the Valley of Baca begins to shine, for there the abundant water begins to show the fruits of that abundant eternal life, not the dry land agriculture we must cultivate on our own. Our life becomes and oasis not only for ourselves but for everyone in our community of family, friends, and acquaintances.