

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

GREATLY REJOICE

By John Edwards

Rejoice? I've been laid off. I'm down to my last dollar. The landlord just served us an eviction notice. We've had a death in the family. The children are sick. And, on top of all that, I'm being ridiculed for my faith! You're telling me to greatly rejoice? What are you thinking? How can I rejoice?

Come with me to the First Epistle of Peter. Writing to saints scattered throughout the first century, he said, *“Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations”* (1:6). These folks were put to grief by various trials. Yet, they were able to rejoice - not just rejoice - greatly rejoice! How could they do that? If they could greatly rejoice while suffering grief in various trials, then is it possible for us to do the same when we are distressed? Consider some points from Peter:

THIS WORLD IS NOT OUR HOME. Peter refers to his audience as *“strangers”* (1:1) and appeals to them *“as strangers and pilgrims”* (2:11). He speaks of *“the time of your sojourning”* (1:17). Thus, we are temporary residents here (Heb. 11:13-16; 13:14).

WE ARE A CHOSEN GENERATION. Peter identified these strangers and pilgrims as *“Elect”* (1:2), *“a chosen generation”* (2:9). We are chosen in Christ, where we are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places (Eph. 1:3-4). This makes us special!

WE HAVE BEEN BEGOTTEN UNTO A LIVELY HOPE. *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”* (1:3). We do not sorrow as others which have no hope (1 Thess. 4:13).

WE HAVE AN INHERITANCE IN HEAVEN. We are in line to inherit God's future blessings! This inheritance is described as *“incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you”* (1:4). Thus we sing, Where The Roses Never Fade. Trials and troubles can't take that inheritance away!

WE ARE KEPT BY THE POWER OF GOD. Peter penned, *“Who are kept by the power of God through faith...”* (1:5). The gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). As those in Hebrews 11, who suffered their share of difficulties, *“died in faith”* (vs. 13), so can we!

WE HAVE SALVATION TO LOOK FORWARD TO. Think about *“salvation ready to be revealed in the last time”* (1:5), *“Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls”* (1:9)! This is eternal salvation in heaven for the faithful. What a blessing!

GRIEF IS TEMPORARY. Peter said, *“though now for a season.”* Suffering lasts for a little while, for a short time. The Psalmist said, *“Remember how short my time is”* (Psa. 89:47). Life is *“a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away”* (Jas. 4:14). Paul said, *“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory”* (2 Cor. 4:17).

LOOK TO THE FUTURE. Peter shifts the focus of attention from present distress to future happiness. *“...found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ”* (1:7).

Thus Peter said, *“ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory”* (1:8). As Christians, ours is not a joy based on external circumstances. That's why a 'prison epistle' was an 'epistle of joy' with the plea, *“Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice”* (Phil. 4:4).

Instead of dwelling on your distress, focused on this world and its problems, thinking about who you're not and

what you don't have, recognize who you are and what you do have - spiritually. Remember these words of Habakkuk: *"Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places...."* (Hab. 3:17-19). The Lord God will be our strength too, if we let Him. ■



THOUGHTS ON THE VIRUS AND US

By Gary Fisher

The virus has spotlighted chinks in our armor. I think nearly all of us have caught ourselves thinking in ways that show real weakness. Strengthening ourselves in the Lord is urgent. The virus epidemic isn't over; let us shore up the breaches. Observation: I will use we, but I am not indicting all brethren. I struggle with these things and I think many of us do. If you don't, wonderful! Help the rest of us, gently ... Please!

We are too concerned about what others think about us and our church. Jesus was popular, for a while. The early Christians gained the favor of all the people, briefly (Acts 2:47). Even Ezekiel was oddly sought after, during one era (Ezek. 33:30-33). But mostly they called the head of the house Beelzebul (Matt. 10:25). The early Christians were a sect everywhere spoken against (Acts 28:22). The prophets were rejected and ridiculed. Remember, *"you will be hated by all because of My name"* (Lk. 21:17). Because of the virus, the world sees it as deplorably ignorant and arrogant to go to church, to have brethren in our home, to touch or even get close to someone. It disturbs me that I care so much about what others think about me. Jesus preached one sermon in which He lost thousands of followers (Jn. 6). Our goal is not to be popular or well thought of. The light both attracts and repels (Jn. 3:19-21). I recently read this: Truth all too often dies on the altar of gaining influence. We live in a very politically correct era; we may be despised for our commitment. So be it.

We (I) have been more concerned about physical health than spiritual health. We have heard many lectures on the irresponsibility of doing something that could cause another to get sick or die. Who is warning of the dangers of our shrinking back from one another and thus causing a brother or sister to spiritually weaken or die? I don't have all the answers. But there are some weak brethren with pre-existing spiritual conditions who desperately need contact, assemblies, edification beyond Zoom. We don't want to kill anyone physically, but let us all be much more worried about the loss of souls.

We shrink back too much from risks. Health professionals are constantly imperiling themselves (and potentially contaminating their families). We applaud them. I love that little story in 1 Chronicles 11:17-19 where 3 men broke through enemy lines to get David water he craved from the well of Bethlehem. They put their life on the line. David saw the water as their blood! Staring down danger showed their love for David. Reaching out to people at this time risks our health. Some of us may die as a result. We should see this as heroic, not foolish. 2 Corinthians 11:26.

We have shown more care to avoid the virus than to avoid sin. I assume all of us have taken some relatively strong measures to avoid being contaminated. The virus is contagious after all. So is sin. And way more lethal. Think about your pet sin: pornography, impatience, lying, laziness, pride, greed, selfishness. Do you avoid it like the COVID? Do you keep away from the things, the people, the places, the situations that could contaminate you?

We haven't trusted God enough. I fear that we haven't reacted all that much differently than the world. I am sure there must be many exceptions. But for me, I haven't prayed enough, seen my life as being in God's hands enough. My first thought has too often been about what steps I should take instead of first turning to God and seeking His protection. We are not supposed to just walk off the cliff; but when the service of God requires us to work near it, we must trust God more than our protective measures. We must not *"fear what they fear"* (Isa. 8:12). God really is almighty; we can totally trust Him.

I don't believe these worrisome attitudes have been a respecter of persons. I have not done nearly as well as I should have with them. I fear the virus is taking a larger toll spiritually than physically. May God help us! ■

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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