

“GOD’S TRUTH IN THE QUARRY.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

April 26, 2015, 10:30AM

Text for the Sermon: Romans 8:28-39

Introduction.

Last Sunday I used the building of Solomon’s temple as an analogy for our spiritual life. I talked about life on earth being like life in one of Solomon’s quarries when stones for building the temple were cut and chiseled for their specific role and function and then when they were ready they were slipped quietly and perfectly into place.

I Kings 6:7 In building the temple, only blocks dressed at the quarry were used, and no hammer, chisel or any other iron tool was heard at the temple site while it was being built.

Comparing that work to God’s work in preparing us for heaven, I said the quality of God’s work will leave us breathless and speechless. But crafting living stones for the temple of the living God comes at a great cost.

Chiseling is painful because chiseling is personal. This sanctifying work is a spiritual work, a holy work, a labor of love to cut away our old nature, our flesh, our idols, the things most dear to us and we grasp so hard, the sin that clings so tightly.

So how do we endure while this painful, sanctifying work is going on? How do we keep going each day during the unpleasant discipline of the Lord? How do we go another day when we can hardly make it through today? How do we survive when our cries for mercy and help seem unheard; when we feel like Jesus on the cross saying, “My God, my God why have you forsaken me?” How do we walk by faith when all we feel is fear?

I want to give us three antidotes to fear and anxiety and to Satan’s lies; three spiritual truths when we find ourselves being tried and tested in the quarries of God’s sanctification.

First, Be Immersed in the Love of God.

We must begin by reminding ourselves of the Gospel. What does the Gospel teach us? It teaches us that we deserve God’s wrath. We are by nature children of wrath pursuing our own desires and selfish interests. But while we were still sinners, God loved us and Christ died for us.

Do you know how loved you are?

Ephesians 2:4-5 God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.

If God did not spare His own Son from us, but gave Him up for us and handed Him over to death for us, what more would He not do for us?

Romans 8:35-39 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword (or hammer or chisel or file or furnace)? ... 37 No, ... 39 [nothing] else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

If God loves us this much what is there in this life to fear? Are we convinced and confident of the unfathomable and unquenchable love of God for us in every circumstance?

Psalms 103:11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him.

Isaiah 43:1-4 “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.
2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; ...
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, ...
4 ... you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you.

Isaiah 54:10 For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you.

Be immersed in God’s unchanging, great love for you. His love for you can’t grow, it’s as great as it possibly can be. Nothing you can do can increase or diminish His love for you in Christ Jesus. God first loved us and He has loved us from before the foundations of the world.

Be settled in the deepest recesses of your soul of God’s unchanging love for you in the midst of every one of life’s circumstances. Say to your soul, “I am convinced that nothing can separate me from God’s love and all His ways toward me are loving.”

Second, Be Grounded in the Sovereignty of God.

The only way we will survive life in the quarry or furnace, or wherever God has us is if we are absolutely confident God is sovereign over all the details of our lives. There are no accidents or mistakes in God’s sovereign rule and reign, nothing slips through His fingers.

There is no such thing as chance or fate or luck or coincidence in God’s universe. Nothing is outside of His control. God isn’t sitting on His throne wringing His hands, saying “Oh no” or “Now what do I do?”

Isaiah 46:9-11 I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me,
10 declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done,
saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,’
11 ... I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.

Isaiah 45:7 I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the Lord, who does all these things.

Proverbs 16:33 The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.

Proverbs 21:1 The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.

God is in control of every event in creation. A meteorologist can tell us why it is going to rain tomorrow, but God is the one who causes it to rain.

A sparrow can't fall to the ground without the will of God. We must be grounded in this truth down to our bones. God wants us to know in our knower:

Romans 8:28 ... that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

We live every day "according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will" (Ephesians 1:11). We are His workmanship (Ephesians 2:10) and He is the one bringing to completion the work He has begun (Philippians 1:6).

God is the author of every one of our stories. He's the one writing it. Which is just another way of saying He is the one chiseling each one of us for His specific purpose and plan which will only become completely and perfectly clear in heaven.

If we are unsettled about this we will unravel in the hard providences of God. Sometimes in human terms the providence of God is very hard, very difficult to bear.

The loss of a job, a serious sickness, financial challenges, a tragic turn of events, an accident, death of a spouse, of a child, the effects of sin, either our own or someone else's, something completely out of our control, sometimes more than one of these at once.

It's always sobering for me when I ask parents presenting their children for baptism, if they are willing to accept God's will for their child whatever that will may be.

What about sin? Is God sovereign over sin? Well if He isn't then there is an awful lot of this world His isn't in control of. Of course God is sovereign over and in control of all sin.

God was sovereign over the greatest sin and the greatest crime ever committed on this planet. God directed every single aspect of that entire sinful disaster, and turned it into the greatest good He ever did.

Let's not forget that our faith comes out of thorns, nails, whips, a cross and blood. When we forget this we are left with a Christianity that is soft and spineless, an escape from reality.

The sovereignty of God is the bedrock we need to sink into to keep stable when the earthquakes of life hit.

Psalm 56:11 In God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?

Third, Be Confident in the Promises of God.

In order to be confident in and trust the promises of God, we have to know what those promises are and what they aren't.

God never promises us a safe or easy or comfortable life, a life that goes the way we want and a life that turns out the way we expect.

When the storm hits with full force, when the hammer blows fall, when the filing and grinding and refining get intense, the promises become life-giving and life-sustaining.

I have said before Phama and I have 3x5 cards with Scripture promises on them. In our computers they fill three double-column pages. When we find ourselves in challenging times it's easy to start to lose perspective or forget in the dark what you knew in the light. These verses are our way to wash our minds with the water of God's Word, to strengthen our faith and hope.

I often start with Psalm 119:

Psalm 119:28, 92-93 (NIV)

28 My soul is weary with sorrow; strengthen me according to your word.

92 If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction.

93 I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have preserved my life.

If you want our list or our three page print out just let us know. Or make your own but build a firm foundation for your faith in the promises of God's Word.

Brothers and sisters, for whatever these days hold for each of us, be immersed in the love of God for you, be grounded in the sovereignty of God over you, and be confident in the promises of God given to you.

Amen? Amen and Amen.