

Rejoice in the Lord: Difficulty

Day 1

Trust

Rejoicing in God when times are tough requires trust. Trust is one of those things that are much easier to talk about than it is to do. There was a show on TV a number of years ago named Fear Factor that challenged contestants to master their fears. Because it was a TV show that had a lot to lose if things went wrong, you could be sure that all the safety measures that were possible were being utilized. Sitting at home watching on TV, it was easy to look at the harnesses and other safety equipment and convince yourself that being a contestant would be easy. The reality is that if you were there hanging from the helicopter instead of sitting on your couch it would be a different story. Many times as Christians we proclaim our trust in God from the couch while actively avoiding situations that require trust because we lack the trust to pursue them. What would you be doing with your life if you had complete trust in God? What can you do today to take a step in that direction? If you are afraid to take that step, check out this article on trust:

<https://www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/spiritual-growth/trust-god.html>

Verses: Proverbs 3:5, Psalm 56:3-4, Jeremiah 29:11

Prayer Topics: Vulnerability, Bravery, Risk

Day 2

Sacrifice

It is interesting that the Old Testament is full of the idea of sacrifice, while modern life almost totally ignores it in terms of worship. In the Old Testament, it is clear that sacrifices are meant to make one acceptable to God, to allow one into the presence of God, and that sacrifice placates or appeases the wrath of God. It is also clear that sacrifice is substitutionary in practice, meaning the sacrifice represents the sacrificer. In the modern world, we do not have much of a conception of sacrifice as it relates to worship. Modern people often feel like God must do something good for them to win their favor, or else they will go on ignoring him. While we do not have much of a conception of sacrifice in worship, we do in other areas, and it is not difficult to find self-help books or video courses outlining exactly what you must do to make more money, get more physically fit, or "level up" your life in any number of ways. There are all kinds of lifestyle "gurus" who will charge you incredible amounts of money to personalize the experience of getting advice on how to make your life as wonderful as theirs looks. The truth behind many of these advisors is they live in rented houses, drive rented cars, and are in deep debt as they try to make their lives look good on social media so they can sell you the "plan" on how your life can be like theirs. What we often fail to grasp is that this is the modern version of sacrifice and worship. You come to these lifestyle coaches with your old life that falls short of the ideal, and they teach you to sacrifice it so that you can have a new life that is glorious and full of blessing. These people are idolaters, and they make the most fundamental mistake of mankind, substituting the physical for the spiritual. The truth is, you do not need more money or a bigger house. You do not need more muscle or a stronger jawline. These things are nothing in comparison to the much more difficult, valuable, and eternal issues that need to be addressed in your life. You need more trust in God, more love, less anger, more patience and forgiveness. You need to be like God, and he will lead you to sacrifice your whole life so that he can give you life to the full, eternal and glorious. Most of us will fight to keep the life we have, and we will struggle to make the sacrifice

necessary, so God will allow circumstances into our life that will help us. We call these circumstances trouble, difficulty, and suffering. When you experience these things rejoice, make the sacrifice, and have faith in God to exchange your filthy rags for garments of glory and beauty.

Verses: 1 Corinthians 6:19, James 2:14-17, 1 Timothy 1:12-17

Prayer Topics: Humility, Peace, Joy

Day 3

The Struggle is Real

The struggle is real. You may have heard that phrase when someone has had to deal with some kind of minor inconvenience in life. Most of us recognize in saying something like this that we are being slightly dramatic, but we often miss the significance of the things we say in jest. For example, if anyone has had to deal with a construction or remodeling project, you know that the plan is for things to go smoothly so that you can enjoy your new or remodeled home as soon as possible. When you think about the construction project, you probably dream about all the things you will do in your new home, how the features and layout will make your life easier or more pleasant, and how good your new home will look when it is finished. As a homeowner, you probably do not think about all the problems you will encounter, all the cost overruns you will face, and all the difficult decisions that will require you to make compromises you do not want to make. If you are a professional home builder, however, this is all you think about. You do not think about the convenience and the memories to be made in the new home, because you will not make

them or enjoy them. All you think about is the obstacles to be overcome, the trouble you will face, the struggle you will endure. In reality, you cannot get to the convenience and enjoyment without first dealing with the struggle. If you do not take the struggle seriously, if you do not turn your focus from the enjoyment to the struggle, you will never get there. In our lives, this is a truth that must be confronted. Many times as Christians we think of heaven, we think of the overcoming of some besetting sin, or we think of some relationship mended. For many of us, we are more like the homeowner than the home builder. We skip over the struggle and just want to think of the enjoyment, but in doing so we start to treat the struggle as some kind of inconvenience that is disconnected from the enjoyment rather than an integral part of it. Unless you put some of your focus on the struggle, unless you understand that the struggle is real and cannot be overlooked in favor of dreaming about the enjoyment, you will never actually get to the enjoyment. In addition, if you don't start seeing yourself more as a professional builder rather than an owner, you will find yourself being disappointed. Why is this? Because in your life you will face many struggles, and as soon as one ends the next one usually begins. Your life is more like the professional builder because you will rarely get to the place of pure enjoyment, that reality is reserved for heaven. While you are on this earth your job is to build your life to be like Christ's at the direction and inspiration of the spirit. Because of this, we must start to see the reality of the struggle as something that has a reality and an enjoyment of its own. If we cannot do this, we will rarely experience joy. The struggle is real. Praise God!

Verses: 1 Corinthians 10:13, Romans 5:3-5, 1 John 4:4

Prayer Topics: Trials, Determination, Dedication

Day 4

Theology

Difficulty leads us to sacrifice. As human beings, we had a problem with sin that we could not solve, and this problem became the occasion for the sacrifice of Christ. The glory of Christ was revealed to us in the most profound way because of our problem with sin, and we are saved because of the sacrifice that was the response to that problem. In the same way, we will experience many difficulties and hardships, but we should rejoice in these as they are drawing us into more profound sacrifice and drawing us nearer to God through the sanctification that God works in our lives. Spend some time this morning learning about the theology of sacrifice, and how it can apply to your life and the difficulties you face:

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-theology-of-sacrifice/>

Verses: Romans 12:1-8, Romans 7:6, Acts 2:38

Prayer Topics: Repentance, Wisdom, Service

Day 5

Thanks to Sylvester Warsaw, Jr for our devotional today

In Matthew 5:10-12 these words are recorded, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil

against you falsely for My name sake.

Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” Many people in the west view the persecution of Christians as something to retaliate against with physical force as something personal instead of an attack against Almighty God! Jesus didn’t come into this world to retaliate but to redeem by laying down His life for the sins of humanity. As a matter of fact while being crucified Jesus cried out to God asking forgiveness for those who were persecuting Him not retaliation. In many accounts in Scripture, God reveals to us His plan of redemption and one of the many accounts is found in Daniel.

In Daniel 6 we see men of different positions of authority conspire against Daniel who try to prevent him from being elevated over them especially since Daniel wasn’t one of them a kindred spirit by birth. Daniel was an outsider to them who threatened their position of authority. Daniel bowed down three times a day to pray to the true and living God the God of Abraham, Issac and Jacob while facing Jerusalem and not their god. Because their hearts were evil they conspired together to make, “make a firm decree, that whoever petitions any god or man for thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions” verse 7. The conspirators appealed to the king's flesh his ego. However, Daniel didn't fold cowering to the petition. He wasn't ignorant of what was happening choosing to continue to worship his God the God of Israel not bowing to the god of this world. Discernment is important because it's in discernment God reveals what's really happening. Discernment keeps you grounded and focused on God allowing you to rest in Him trusting Him to handle the situation where He'll be glorified and honored. David also knew his battle against Goliath wasn't against Goliath himself per se but against Goliath's god, 1 Samuel 17.

In Ephesians 6:11-20 and 2 Corinthians 10:3-6, Paul instructs us how to fight the good fight of faith. The weapon of our warfare is always love no matter what we think because God is looking to redeem not annihilate. God's hand of

mercy is always extended to humanity, a people who has rebelled against Him by rejecting Him. Within the African American religious experience we sing a song that simply says, 'If I hold my peace and let the Lord fight my battle I know that the victory shall be mine.' Victory is only in Christ Jesus because of His hands of mercy. When you stop and look at things we're in good company being rejected because Jesus was rejected and still there are those who reject Him to this day. Only when you stand in Him can you rest in Him.