CHARACTERISTIC FIVE: PERSEVERANCE

Lesson 11: Take Up Your Cross Daily

2 Peter 1:6 "…to self-control, perseverance…"

Sometimes, Life is not that easy. Marital or relationship problems, financial distress, health issues, problems on the job, you name it, every person faces such challenges. The problem with many Christians, is that they were told the lie, "Come to Jesus and all your problems will go away." That couldn't be further from the truth. Yes, Jesus is there to guide us, give us wisdom and help us through life's problems, however I've found that for most, once you give your life to Christ, the enemy places a target on your back. When you were in the world, he already had you, but now that you are serving God, you're his enemy. See, it's one thing to have a salvation experience with Jesus, it's another thing to really walk it out. That's why we need perseverance.

There are those that preach a gospel of no suffering, that if you are facing challenges then you are doing something wrong. Really, if that's so then what about the Apostles and some early followers of Jesus? Paul and Silas were thrown in jail, Paul was beaten, imprisoned and shipwrecked and John was exiled to the Isle of Patmos all for preaching the Gospel of Christ. Most of the Apostles, except for John were martyred for their faith. Jesus said in John 16:33, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you ***will*** have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."[1] I am not talking just gloom and doom here. Do I believe that God wants to bless us, provide for us and give us victory? Yes, He does, but it doesn't mean that it will always be easy.

Think about the patriarch Joseph in the book of Genesis. God gave him a dream that he would one day rule and be in authority over his brothers. I'm sure he thought, "This is great, sign me up God!" However, he had no idea what the next 13 years or so would hold. He didn't realize that he would be betrayed by his own brothers, put into a pit, sold into slavery, falsely accused of rape and then imprisoned for several years, before the vision came to pass. He didn't understand that he had to go through some training before reigning. The Apostle Paul reminds us of the purpose for the trials in Romans 5:1-5, when he states:

> Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, [2] through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. [3] And not only *that,* but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; [4] and perseverance, character; and character, hope. [5] Now hope does not disappoint,

> because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.[2]

Tribulations aren't to ultimately break us down; they are to make us into the person God wants us to be to accomplish His plan for us. Yes, part of that is a breaking of our pride and our self-sufficiency, but if we stay submitted to the process, it's also to build character in us and to work off the rough edges so that our dependence is not on ourselves, but on Him. The key is not to run when the flames turn up, but to persevere regardless.

Jesus said in Luke 9:23, "…If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."[3] This is Jesus, God almighty, yet He shed himself of all His glory to walk humbly on this earth as a man; to feel what we feel, to be tempted in every way like we are, yet without sin. He was ridiculed, mocked and betrayed, not by just one of his disciples, but at one point all of them. He was beaten, spit upon and finally nailed to a cross to suffer and die not just for us, but because of us." He understood what it meant to take up one's cross daily. And He said if we desire to come after Him, we need to do likewise.

A part of perseverance is taking up our cross daily, but what exactly did Jesus mean by this? If we look in context of the following few verses, He explains it by saying in verses 24-26 by saying:

> For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels.[4]

Taking up our cross, means that we lay our life down for the Gospel; that we don't chase the riches of the world, but we lay our treasures up in heaven. It means that we are not ashamed of Jesus or His Words, instead we proclaim the good news to all the world, despite their constant ridicule, because we understand that life on this earth really is temporary.

As you face your challenges over this next week, ask the Father, "Lord, what are you trying to work out of me in this situation? Help me to listen, be obedient and persevere through the process." Also, in your prayer time this week ask the Lord to show you specifically how you can take up your cross daily and follow Him.

Lesson 11 Questions

1. What is perseverance?

2. Does God promise us that we will only have blessing and victory in our lives as some say?

3. According to Romans 5:1-5, What is the purpose for trials and tribulations in our life?

4. What does Jesus mean when He said to “take up your cross daily and follow Me.”?

[1] *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Jn 16:33.

[2] Ro 5:1–5. (NKJV).

[3] Lk 9:23. (NKJV).

[4] Lk 9:24–26. (NKJV).