Hold your precious Saviour in gratitude

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!*

 Philippians 4:4

It is easy to rejoice in the LORD when things are going well and we can see all of God’s blessings being poured out on us. (Now, we should take an honest look at ourselves to see if we are rejoicing in the Lord with gratitude for the good things He gives us.) But life is often times difficult and even tragic. It is hard to rejoice then, and why should we? The kicker in the verse above is “*always*”.

The reason that we can rejoice always is because of His promises. This life is hard because of the ever-present sin that promises death. But we can always count on the promises of God that we have in the Bible. He is our Father and He is always faithful.

In this life we have the promise “*God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble*.”: from Psalm 46:1. In this life, God is there to care for us and we can trust that He will bring about the best for His children; even if it is painful and a dark valley. He is with us and there is no one better.

But more importantly, we have the promise of eternal life in Christ. This life is so very temporary, so very fleeting; we are like a vapor. What really matters is eternity and we are promised an eternity of blessedness with Jesus.

When life is tough, we must deal with it as best we can in the Lord’s help; but we can rejoice when we look forward to what He has in store for us.

In Christ’s love

John

 11-13-22

Genesis 18:1-15

In chapter 17, we read about Abraham experiencing a Theophany. In some form or another, God appeared to Abraham and spoke with him. The Bible doesn’t indicate what form God took, but we know that God did not appear to him in all his glory, because that would mean his death. In the book of Exodus in chapter 16, Moses asked God to show him His glory. In verse 20, God replied, “*You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!*”

Moses was permitted to see God’s back. There is another time in Exodus 24 where some of the elders of Israel were able to see His feet. Sometimes God appeared as smoke, a cloud, or fire. Ultimately, God the Son manifested as the man, Jesus, and the people were able to interact with Him. From all this, we learn of the graciousness of God. He wants to interact with His creation; He wants us to know what He is like. He reveals Himself in forms such that we do not die in His presence.

This is also a reminder to us that God is holy. He is so holy and pure and just that for us to simply look upon Him in our current sinful nature would result in our immediate destruction. He must do a tremendous work in our lives in order for us to eventually be with Him. That tremendous work is based on the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. That is the basis, and the only means for our salvation.

Once saved by faith in Jesus, we undergo the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. This is a life-long process that is often painful, but as we progress, our reborn spirits are strengthened in holiness and we become more Christ-like; which is the goal of a Christian. This is a goal that is attained by the work of the Holy Spirit, although we are to cooperate with Him. We make headway in this life, but we will not attain our goal until we come face to face with Christ.

The apostle John tells us that in 1 John 3:2, “*We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.*” When Jesus appears, we will see Him as He is; He is God, and we will see Him as glorious God and not just a man. We will be purified at that moment so that when we are in the presence of that glory of God, we will not be destroyed.

For now, we see God in Scripture; in His word. In the Bible we learn about God and He is revealed to us in a special way. Creation declares that God exists, but His word is how we come to a saving relationship with Christ and a knowledge of God’s character. Scripture teaches us that through Jesus, we will one day be able to see the full glory of God and live. We will be able to display the awe and worship He deserves.

In chapter 17, God appeared to Abraham in power and authority. He began, “*I am God almighty.*” He declared the covenant to Abraham and commanded the covenant sign of circumcision. He also made an incredible promise to Abraham; that his wife Sarah would have a son by the next year. They would have a son and they would name him Isaac. Isaac is a son of promise which is such an important theme in the Bible. Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of the son of promise; the fulfillment of the promise of Genesis 3:15. The seed of the woman who would crush satan and save mankind.

Now here in chapter 18, shortly after this theophany, Abraham is sitting by the door of his tent. It is the hot part of the day, a time for rest because activity would be difficult in the heat. It would be unusual for him to see men walking at this time of day, and yet, suddenly, there they were. This sudden appearance gives us a hint about who these three might be.

It seems most likely that there are two angels and God; all appearing in human form. It may be an appearance of the preincarnate Jesus or it could be God the Father as a man. This is another theophany for Abraham and we know that this time God is hiding his glory in the form of a person. At first, Abraham apparently thinks that they are simply travelers. In verse 3 he addresses the lead man as “My lord”; which is a sign of respect. Later in the chapter, He calls Him “Lord”, which is even more respectful as given to someone of a much higher standing.

The Bible in these verses call the main speaker Yahweh, so we know He is God, although Abraham never calls Him that. It is fairly clear that Abraham realizes that he is dealing with more than just mere people, but we can’t tell if he understands he is talking with God. Most likely, by the end of the chapter, he does.

Abraham does his best to show these strangers hospitality. This was the standard in Middle Eastern conduct. To show poor hospitality was considered disgraceful and that was important in such an honor-based culture. Abraham went above and beyond in his display of generosity. His hospitality wasn’t given grudgingly, but graciously and it was heart-felt. He not only did what was necessary to give them good food but he even stood by them as they ate so that he might serve them.

Here we have an example of Christian servanthood and brotherly love. This is what we are called to by Christ. In our culture, we don’t so much prepare food and serve it to someone under a tree. Also, we have to be careful with how close we get to strangers and be reasonable with our stewardship of money. However, we are called to be quite generous with what the Lord has given us and that includes our time.

Two particular verses in the Bible encourage us in the area of generosity and hospitality to others, especially those who can’t return the favor. One is Hebrews 13:2, “*Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.*” What an intriguing concept. When we have a chance to help someone we don’t know, there is a very real possibility that the person is an angel in human form. God does not temp us, but He will test us. How good for us if the angel is able to report back that we generously passed on the gifts that came from God in the first place.

There is another verse in the Gospel according to Matthew chapter 25, where Jesus is separating the sheep from the goats. He speaks to those who extended kindness to others. In verse 40 it reads, “*The King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.’*” Think about how important this is.

In the verse from Hebrews, we learn that it is possible that we may entertain an angel. Here in Matthew, Jesus tells us that no matter who we treat well, we are treating Jesus well at the same time. If we take Jesus seriously, this is certainly an encouragement to be sincerely willing to pass on good things that we have freely received from God in the first place.

Often times, at the establishment of a covenant, a meal was shared. This covenant had started years before as a command from God to Abraham to leave his homeland and in return God had promised him blessings. It progressed to a covenant ceremony, in which a great darkness fell upon Abraham as God walked between the pieces of the animals, signifying His personal commitment to the covenant. In the last chapter God appeared to Abraham, requiring loyalty and faithfulness from him and his descendants; and for them to receive the covenant sign of circumcision. God spoke with the majesty of God Almighty.

Finally, we come to a peaceful meal. It is a time of fellowship between God and a man. Our God is so gracious, He wants to have fellowship with us; He wants peace with us. So, here God shares a meal with Abraham as part of establishing a covenant. But this is just the first time we see this theme. Later, after the Exodus while God is establishing the Mosaic covenant, He invites Moses, Aaron, two of Aaron’s sons, and seventy of the elders of Israel to a feast on Mount Sanai.

From here, we can’t help but think of the Lord’s Supper. Jesus, the God-man, shared a meal establishing the ultimate peace between God and man. The wine symbolized His blood, the blood of the new covenant. Finally, we look forward to the meal we will share with Him and with each other, that wedding supper of the Lamb. A meal where all enmity is gone between us and our Creator; a meal followed by eternity where we will be able to behold the glory of God.

At the end of the meal, God repeats to Abraham the promise that his wife, Sarah, will have a son by this time next year. Abraham has fulfilled the duty of the covenant sign of circumcision, and the covenant has been finalized with a meal. God reassures Abraham in the hearing of Sarah.

Now, we get the impression that Sarah has been eavesdropping. We can’t be sure about her knowledge of the promise to Abraham that she would bear a son. Did Abraham tell her? If so, maybe she laughed at him as she did now. Perhaps Abraham didn’t tell her and this was the first she heard of it. Either way, she laughed quietly to herself at the absurdity of her having a child.

How it must have startled her to have the stranger respond to her when she was hidden from view; it must have been frightening to have him answer her very thoughts directly, when she had said nothing aloud. We shouldn’t be too hard on Sarah. Humanly speaking, for her to have a child was impossible. The idea was ridiculous. She didn’t know that God was sitting in front of her tent. She probably believed the original promise was filled in Ishmael.

It is natural for us to try to fit what we see as reality into what God says will happen. For example, people tried for over 1800 years to explain the prophecies that Israel would once again become a nation. Most explained it as a spiritual rebuilding of Israel: Until 1948, when Israel once again became a nation, just as God said it would. Some things in the Bible are metaphor or allegory, but most are not. We must be very careful putting something in those categories; especially when it is something we simply think can’t happen. As He said in verse 14, “*Is anything too difficult for the LORD?*”

As we’ve mentioned before, the birth of Isaac was impossible; that is the whole point. There needs to be no question that it is God who is fulfilling His promise. It needs to be obvious that it required an almighty God to bring these things about. In the birth of Isaac, we see the foreshadowing of something that is even more impossible, the virgin birth of Jesus Christ.

God foretold Abraham and Sarah that they were going to have a son, even in their old age. Later, in the book of the prophet Isaiah, chapter 7 verse 14, the LORD says, “*Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.*” Several hundred years later, God, by the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit, created His only begotten Son Jesus in the womb of the virgin Mary. The impossible took place once again and the Saviour of mankind was born.

The virgin birth of Jesus Christ is a primary Christian doctrine. If Jesus had a human father, then He wasn’t perfect and His sacrifice was of no avail to us. If Jesus had a human father, then He had original sin from conception, and His death on the cross was unacceptable to God the Father. There is no wiggle room with the virgin birth; if Jesus wasn’t the Son of God, then we are lost eternally.

The good news is that Mary was a virgin; Jesus is the only begotten Son of God; He is without sin and His sacrifice was sufficient and pleasing in the eyes of the Father. By believing in Him we are saved. He is our sure hope of salvation.

Poor Sarah, she laughed in disbelief and got called out by God. But by the work of our merciful God, her laughter of disbelief turned into laughter of true joy when she held her baby in her arms.

Prayer

Thank You Lord, for the Bible. It shows us that amazing thread that runs throughout history of Your plan to do good for us through salvation. From before the beginning of time, You were our kinsman-redeemer. At great personal cost to Yourself, You made a way to reestablish a relationship with You; a way to do away with the enmity between us. We were completely at fault; but You put that fault upon the innocence of Jesus Christ.

How beautiful You are Lord. Even in the face of our unbelief, You perform miracles that bring us joy. Even when we fail You, You are faithful to Your covenants and to Yourself. You do not requite us according to our sins, yet maintain Your justice in the cross of Jesus. How happy we are that it has become justice for You to forgive our sins; and that we are set entirely free from the debt ourselves.

May You be glorified forever and ever by the presence of Your people; the people purchased by the precious blood of Christ. May You be surrounded by uncountable myriads of worshipers won for You by the sacrificial work of Jesus. May He be glorified forever at Your right hand. We proclaim Him King, and that He will one day, at the perfect appointed time, bodily return to establish His rightful place as King of all the earth. May we be Your people who serve You.

Come Lord Jesus, for it is in Your name we pray

Amen