

HEALING THE WOUNDS OF REJECTION

"This Time I Will Praise the Lord"

We cannot pass through life without getting hurt. Pain and disappointment in this world are inevitable. How we handle our setbacks, though, shapes our character and prepares us for eternity. Our attitude is the pivotal factor determining the level of our protection from strife.

Regardless of the hardships we have faced, and in spite of the mistakes we have made, the end of our lives can either be full of praise and thanksgiving or full of misery and complaint. In the final analysis, what we have experienced in life will be as rich as the desires we have had fulfilled or as painful as the things we regret.

The Bible tells us, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick" (Prov. 13:12). Deep disappointments in life have a way of never leaving us; they enter our hearts like fire and then harden into our nature like lava. Setbacks can leave us cautious about new ventures and suspicious of new friends.

Our woundedness restrains our openness. We are fearful we will be hurt again by new relationships. Gradually, unless we learn to handle heartache correctly, we become embittered and resentful cynics. We lose the joy of being alive.

The Source of Fulfillment

It is our own desires and the degree of their fulfillment that produce either joy or sorrow in our lives. Even basic desires for marriage or friends can enslave us if they consume our attention. Are these desires evil? No, but if having our desires fulfilled is the main reason we have come to Christ, it is possible our lives simply will not improve until our priorities change.

The Lord is concerned about fulfilling our desires, but to do so He must pry our fingers off our lives and turn our hearts toward Him. Indeed, the reason we are alive is not to fulfill our desires but to become His worshipers.

Personal fulfillment can become an idol; it can develop into such an obsession that we are living for happiness more than living for God. Thus, part of our salvation includes having our desires prioritized by Christ. In the Sermon on the Mount, He put it this way: "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself" (Matt. 6:33-34). God wants to, and will, satisfy us beyond our dreams, but not before He is first in our hearts.

A wonderful example of this can be seen in the life of Leah, Jacob's first wife. Leah was unattractive, unwanted, and unloved by her husband. Jacob had served Laban, Leah's father, seven years for Rachel, who was Leah's younger sister. On their wedding night, however, Laban put Leah in the nuptial tent instead of Rachel. Although Jacob actually did marry Rachel a week later, he had to work another seven years for her. So Jacob had two wives who were sisters.

The Scriptures tell us that Rachel was loved by Jacob, but Leah was hated: "When the Lord saw that Leah was hated..." (Gen. 29:31 KJV). We must understand this about the nature of God: The Lord is drawn to those who hurt. "The Lord saw ... Leah." What wonderful words! In the same way water descends and fills that which is lowest, so Christ reaches first to the afflicted, to fill the lowliest and comfort them.

The Lord saw that Leah was unloved. He saw her pain, loneliness, and heartache. Leah, though unloved by Jacob, was deeply loved by the Lord, and He gave her a son. Leah's reaction was predictable. She said, "Surely now my husband will love me" (v. 32).

Worse than living your life alone is to be married to someone who hates you, as was Leah. How Leah wished that Jacob would share the love he had for Rachel with her. Who could blame her? Leah's desires were justified. She had given him a firstborn son. In her mind, if the Lord could open her womb, He could also open Jacob's heart. But the time was not yet; Jacob still did not love her.

Twice more Leah gave birth to sons, and each time her desire was for her husband. She said, "Now this time my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons" (v. 34). Yet, Jacob's heart still did not desire her.

For Leah, as well as for us, there is a lesson here: you cannot make another person love you. In fact, the more pressure you place upon others to accept you, the more likely they are to reject you instead. Leah's concept of fulfillment was based on attaining Jacob's love and now her problem was worsening. Not only was she unattractive to Jacob, but also her jealousies were adding to her lack of loveliness.

Three times we read in this text that the Lord saw and heard that Leah was unloved. He had seen her affliction. Through all her striving for Jacob and her disappointment with her marital relationship, the Lord was tenderly wooing Leah to Himself.

As Leah became pregnant a fourth time, a miracle of grace occurred within her. She gradually became aware that, while she had not been the focus of her husband's love, she was loved by God. And as this fourth pregnancy drew near to completion, she drew nearer and nearer to God. She became a worshiper of the Almighty.

Now as she gave birth to another son, she said, "This time I will praise the Lord" (v. 35). She named that child *Judah*, which means, "praise." It was from the tribe of Judah that Christ was born.

Leah had been seeking self-fulfillment and found only heartache and pain. But as she became a worshiper of God, she entered life's highest fulfillment: she began to please God.

It is right here that the human soul truly begins to change and enter God's stronghold. As she found fulfillment in God, He began to remove from her the jealousies, insecurities, and heartaches that life had conveyed to her. A true inner beauty started growing in Leah; she became a woman at rest.

Likewise, we each have character defects that we are reluctant or unable to face. Others have seen these things in us, but they have lacked the courage to tell us. Both physically and personally, these flaws in our nature are what leave us anxious, threatened, and unfulfilled.

It is not counsel or classes on success or self-esteem that we need; we simply need to discover God's love for us. As we begin to praise Him in all things, we simultaneously put on the garments of salvation. We are actually being saved from that which would otherwise have destroyed us!

Disappointments and heartaches cannot cling to us, for we are worshipers of God! And, "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God" (Rom. 8:28). If we continue to love God, nothing we experience can ultimately turn out harmful since God takes all we pass through and, in His redemptive power, works it for our good!

The Tree of Life

You will remember the verse we quoted, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick" (Prov. 13:12). The verse concludes with, "But desire fulfilled is a tree of life." As our desires are fulfilled, we are fulfilled. Since it is the fulfillment of our desires that fills us with satisfaction, the secret to a rewarding life is to commit our desires to God.

Let Him choose the times and means of our fulfillment, allowing the Lord to prepare us for Himself along the way. The truth is that in ourselves we are incomplete; but in Christ we have been made complete (Col. 2:10).

You say, "That's easy for you to say. You have a wonderful wife and family. You are blessed. But you don't understand my problems." Yes, I do. My wonderful marriage was very difficult for the first few years. We struggled with many things in our relationship. My wife and I both came to the place where we were unfulfilled in each other. But, like Leah, we both looked to God and said, "This time I will praise the Lord." In fact, we named our second child the very name Leah gave to her fourth – Judah.

For us, as for Leah, our lives were turned around as we chose to delight in God in spite of being unfulfilled with each other. As we became His worshipers, He began to work on our hearts until we were not only more pleasing to Him, we were also pleasing to each other! What I am relating to you is the very thing that saved and blessed our marriage!

Psalm 37:4 reads, "Delight yourself in the Lord; and He will give you the desires of your heart." As you delight in God, you change. The negative effects of disappointment and grief fall off. As love and joy from God begin to fulfill us, our very souls are restored and beautified. Yes, delight yourself with Jesus and your self-destructive tendencies will actually begin to vanish. Christ will beautify your life from the inside out.

The Outcome of Leah's Life

What happened with Leah? Well, the long years came and went. In time, Rachel and then Leah died. Jacob, on his deathbed, spoke to his sons: "I am about to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave ... which Abraham bought ... for a burial site. There they buried Abraham and his wife Sarah, there they buried Isaac and his wife Rebekah, and there I buried Leah" (Gen. 49:29-31).

Jacob had buried Leah in the ancestral place of honor! Oh how those words, though few, say so much! They tell us that God had, in some marvelous inner way, beautified this afflicted one with salvation. After Leah found fulfillment in God, God gave her fulfillment in Jacob. Over the years, inner peace and spiritual beauty shone forth from Leah; Jacob was knit to her in love. It is not hard to imagine that when Leah died, she left smiling, with the praises of God upon her lips.

Become a worshiper of God! As you surrender your desires to Him, as you put Him first, He will take what you give Him and make it beautiful in its time. He will take what has been bent and imbalanced within you and make you stand upright in His light and glory.

Therefore, this day speak to your soul. Tell the areas of unfulfillment within you that this time you will praise the Lord!

Lord, I am a Leah, unlovely and always seeking the love of those who have rejected me. How foolish I have been. How blind. There is no love, no fulfillment in this life apart from You. You are the Tree of Life that satisfies all desires; You are the Healer of my heart. I love You, Lord Jesus. Amen.