

New Hope Sermon Restorer of Relationships

Last weekend the Lord brought together some of the members of our family from Friday to Sunday. Both Keith's sister



and husband and Sam, Bruce and Becky's oldest came up from southern Florida to Orlando. Graham, Bruce's youngest, has also been living here throughout June with the family. So there were 8 of us. This was the first time since we moved here that we had visitors overnight and it was a blessing. (Our daughter Laurie and her husband were also supposed to fly in from Seattle but decided not to because of the escalation of Covid here in our part of Orlando, and their problems of quarantine once they returned to Washington State.)

As I was praying in advance about the time, I took special note that the Spirit brought Isa. 58:12 to mind. v. 12: *Some of you will rebuild the deserted ruins of your cities. Then you will be known as a rebuilders of walls and a restorer of*

homes. NLT. v. 12 Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings. NIV

Very few extended families get through life without friction and issues that strain relationships. Ours is no exception. I felt God was saying that this would be a time for restoring and rebuilding some of those relationships.

I believe this call in Isaiah 58:12 is applicable to God's people all over the world. In the Covid time some of us are living in very close quarters with family and old issues can resurface. Others are isolated from family but witness on the news and social media the fractured conditions of relationships in our nations and within people groups in our countries. This has played out prominently in the U.S. in the last month as America has had to face its sins of racism and oppression that extend back to defrauding the Native Americans who were inhabiting North America when the Europeans settled here, to the importation of African slaves and the oppression of African-Americans ever since. We desperately need God's anointing to rebuild our nation, repair our broken promises and rebuild a truly just society.

Actually, the *African Bible Commentary* parallels this Isaiah passage with the issues of the broken walls around Jerusalem and the people's vulnerability in the face of marauding neighbors in Nehemiah's time. The Commentator Edouard Nsiku says: "This text must have inspired Nehemiah to fight against the misery and the enslavement of others during the rebuilding of Jerusalem (Neh. 5:1-19), it should also be an encouragement to us to take an active part in the reconstruction of our countries and not simply rely on foreign organizations to do it for us" (Edouard Kitoko Nsiku, *African Bible Commentary*, Isaiah, pp. 852). That issue is another sermon in itself. But my teaching from the Lord this week was more localized - in the context of intimate family relationships.

How are you and I a restorer of broken walls in our families; how are we rebuilding the structures and correcting the sins of omission and commission from the past years? This is the area the Spirit was questioning me about. Up close and personal.

To begin to answer that question we need to see the context in which this Isaiah promise is given. From Isa. 58 v. 9 to 12 note the emphasis on justice, on care for the needy, on our own integrity of character:

If you get rid of unfair practices, quit blaming victims, quit gossiping about other people's sins,

If you are generous with the hungry and start giving yourselves to the down-and-out,

Your lives will begin to glow in the darkness, your shadowed lives will be bathed in sunlight.

I will always show you where to go. I'll give you a full life in the emptiest of places—firm muscles, strong bones. You'll be like a well-watered garden, a gurgling spring that never runs dry. You'll use the old rubble of past lives to build anew, rebuild the foundations from out of your past. You'll be known as those who can fix anything,

restore old ruins, rebuild and renovate, make the community livable again.

This call to be a restorer often involves a life-long journey. As Martin Luther wisely notes:

This life therefore is not righteousness but growth in righteousness; not health but healing, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not what we shall be but we are growing toward it; the process is not yet finished but it is going on; this is not the end, but it is the road. All does not yet gleam in glory but all is being purified.



— Martin Luther

I like the sentences from that quote:

“We are not yet what we shall be but we are growing toward it.”

And, “All does not yet gleam in glory but it is being purified.”

Those are words of reality and hope. All of us still have semi-ripened fruit in our full development of the fruit of the Spirit, (Gal.5:22-23) whether it is in patience, or kindness, or gentleness or the sacrifices of agape love. Look at that text in the

Passion Translation:

²²⁻²³ *But the fruit^[a] produced by the Holy Spirit within you is divine love in all its varied expressions:^[b]*

joy that overflows,^[c]

peace that subdues,

patience^[d] that endures,

kindness^[e] in action,

a life full of virtue,^[f]

faith that prevails,

gentleness of heart, and

strength of spirit.^[g]

Never set the law above these qualities, for they are meant to be limitless.^[h]

Again: the Passion footnotes are very helpful:

[Galatians 5:22](#) The Greek word here can be translated “harvest.”

[Galatians 5:22](#) There is clear textual inference that the “fruit” (singular) of the Holy Spirit is love, with the other virtues displaying aspects of the greatest quality of Spirit-life, *agape* love.

[Galatians 5:22](#) The translator has chosen to supply action to these virtues, for they are not meant to be abstract virtues, but made visible with actions.

[Galatians 5:22](#) The Greek word for patience is taken from a verb that means “ever tapping” or “never quitting.”

[Galatians 5:22](#) The Aramaic word can be translated “sweetness.”

[Galatians 5:22](#) Or “goodness.”

[Galatians 5:22](#) Although the word *self* is not found in this verse, most translations render this as “self-control.”

The word is actually “lordship,” or by implication “spirit-strength.”

[Galatians 5:22](#) Literally “there is no law set against these things” or “there is no conflict with Jewish laws.”

God is working on believers as we surrender ourselves to Him. So we are “working toward” these evidences of Spirit character. Similarly, we do not yet “gleam in the glory of perfected relationships, but we are being purified.” Hallelujah! We are following a God of mercy and grace who keeps working in us, conforming us more and more to His character and lavishing limitless grace on us. And how we need it!

This past weekend in our family was an example of repairing broken walls.

Though there have been decades of strained relationships between Keith’s sister and me, this weekend we bonded over our shared experiences of loneliness in our moves to Florida. Just as Keith and I we lost our church family in person, most of our dearest friends and our ministry in the move, so also when Marilyn and Tom moved to Florida awhile back, they left family and friends and church in Maryland, their place of long time residence. She told me how on their first Christmas alone in Florida, she just sat on the sofa and mourned their losses all day! It was that difficult.

God says the Spirit *comforts us in all our tribulations that we might comfort others with the comfort we have received from God* (2 Cor. 1:4), and she truly comforted me. Marilyn has a kind, generous heart; she has always been wonderful

in her care and devotion to Keith, her brother, but we just never were on the same page. The broken down walls. But as part of God's restoring process, God led us into a new level of friendship. I asked her to be my friend. That sounds strange for family members but it really isn't. To be a friend is intentional, not obligatory. It is more than being blood-related with kinship ties. It is watching out for the other's needs and interests, taking time to listen empathetically, serve and care practically, pray for and support one another overtly. We parted as genuine friends at the end of the weekend and made plans to see each other with our husbands as often as possible since we now live only three hours apart. We will be living out Isaiah 58:12. We will be family friends together.

Beloved, how is God rebuilding broken walls in your family and close friendships? What do you need to initiate or welcome in this process?

The song that comes to mind in application is the familiar Let There Be Peace on Earth:

“Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.

Let there be peace on earth the peace that is meant to be.

With God our Creator, children all are we. Let us walk with each other in perfect harmony.

Let peace begin with me, let this be the moment now. With every step I take let this be my solemn vow:

To take each moment and live each moment in peace eternally.

Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.” (words and music: Sy Miller and Jill Jackson)

Amen.

Dr. Mary Lou Codman-Wilson 7/4/20