

Mmm, Mmm, Good!

Joe Slater

God gave two of His prophets visions of scrolls containing His word. He told them to eat the scrolls and then proclaim the message they contained.

Ezekiel saw a scroll on which was written *“lamentations, mourning, and woe.”* God told him, *“eat the scroll, and go speak to the house of Israel’ . . . And He said to me, ‘Son of man, feed your belly and fill your stomach with this scroll that I give you.’ So I ate, and it was in my mouth like honey in sweetness”* (Ezekiel 3:1-3).

John had a similar experience. *“Go, take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel . . . So I went to the angel . . . And he said to me, ‘Take and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth.’ Then I . . . ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter.”* (Revelation 10:8-10).

God’s word is sweet! Mmm, mmm, good! It is true; it is powerful. But it is also bitter! Both Ezekiel and John proclaimed messages of doom as well as hope.

No less than 20 times, God said Ezekiel’s people were *“rebellious.”* He described them with unflattering adjectives like *“impudent”* and *“stubborn.”* Indeed, they were hard-headed, but *“I have made your face strong against their faces, and your forehead strong against their foreheads”* (3:8 – the very name Ezekiel means “God strengthens”). God warned Ezekiel: *“the house of Israel will not listen to you, because they will not listen to Me”* (3:7). But Ezekiel was to speak anyway. *“Yet they will know that a prophet has been among them”* (2:5).

As with Ezekiel and John, so with us: God’s word is good, and we must proclaim it regardless of visible results or lack thereof.

What Price?

While not the most famous words of his inaugural address, this statement by President Kennedy was significant. “Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty.”

It was understood in January of 1961 that anything worthwhile in life had a cost. It was understood that there are burdens and hardships to bear. It was understood that a man or woman seeking only their own comfort was a man or woman without significance, meaning, or purpose.

At that point in our history, the worth of pain and the might of self-sacrifice were understood by many. The mindset of our nation at that time was still heavily influenced by the scriptures. We were not really a Christian nation, but we were a nation strongly influenced by the faith that has a cross at its center. We are no longer such a nation.

Today the question is not “what can I do for my country?” but “what is the government going to do for me?” That shift in attitude may be the most destructive force in our national life. But I am not writing primarily about our national life.

Is it any different with Christians? Has our faith and focus also drifted? Do we gather to sing our favorite songs and to see our friends? Or do we gather to honor the Lord? Do we live as consumers, trying to get the best bargain we can from the local merchants, on the Internet, and from the Lord? Or do we live as those who “have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (2 Cor 5:14-15)?

I am sorry to ask such challenging questions. But somehow I don’t think the church was built by means of positive thinking pep talks, and I don’t think that is what will restore it to its original purity and purpose. What price are we willing to pay, what burden are we willing to bear for the cause of Christ? Admittedly, it is a challenging question, but then most worthwhile questions are.

--Thayer Salisbury (Toledo, OH)

Our Strength To Endure

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13).

If you have spent any significant time in the United States involved in any American cultural staples (football games, parades, festivals, etc.), I seriously doubt but that you have seen the verse above at least once. Many people claim it is their favorite verse (unfortunately, sometimes that is because it’s the only one they know). This verse is perhaps rivaled in popularity only by John 3:16. However, just as with John 3:16, there is much misunderstanding.

What was Paul actually proclaiming when the Holy Spirit inspired him to write Philippians 4:13? Can I really **do anything** through Christ? It is true that nothing is impossible with God (Matthew 19:26), but that is not what Paul was writing about. When one looks at the context of Philippians chapter 4, one quickly realizes that Paul was in prison and was discussing contentedness and endurance. Really, a more correct translation of the Greek word for “do” is, in fact, “endure.”

No matter what life and the devil throw at us, whether it be cancer, temptation, death, persecution, sorrow, pain, etc., Christ gives us who are His the strength to endure. This is not some verse that supports the mindset of doing anything you set your mind to, but it does highlight how to endure and be content in any circumstance because of the Lord who died and was resurrected to redeem you.

Are you able to endure the world through the strength Christ gives?

--Dalton Todd (Thayer, MO)