

Suffering Reproach

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I believe that all saints who follow Christ in obedience to the places He leads will suffer reproach in their lives. Christ will ask them to do things that others who observe them will not understand, and which others will judge as evil. Christ will lead His saints to do things which will invite criticism, shame and condemnation, and they will not be able to give a defense. Though there may be a temptation to explain the obedience they have been led to, such explanations will prove futile, for those who have not walked in similar places of surrender and obedience, and who are not listening to the voice of the God, cannot possibly understand.

The Spirit has been speaking to me much about this topic today, for I have encountered much reproach in my life as I have followed Christ, and I stand to encounter more. I have found that I have been filled with anxiety recently, and I wondered why. I have been praying for peace, and for God to remove all fear from my life, and today He has been exposing the root of a particular fear within my being.

This fear has been produced by my own soulish aversion to suffering reproach for the name of Christ. As the Spirit has led me to a vulnerable place where I could easily encounter reproach, I have found myself dreading it's appearance, and desiring to avoid it at all cost. This has produced fear in my life, and the Spirit has shown me that the pathway to peace is to not seek to avoid reproach anymore, but to be content with it if it should come. Only by adopting a mindset where I lay my reputation in God's hands, for better or worse, will I be able to experience inner peace.

It is inevitable that those who live godly lives will encounter the reproaches of others. God seems intent to make sure of this, not for evil purposes, but for our good. In this way we are led to die to our reputation and the opinions of men, and to live only for the approval and praise of God. Consider some of the numerous ways He has done this.

Mary, the mother of Yahshua, was a virgin, and the angel declared to her that she was 'favored' of the Lord. The Holy Spirit came upon her and she became pregnant with the Son of God, yet this is not what her family and townspeople saw. They saw that she was pregnant out of wedlock, and even Joseph who was betrothed to her, and a righteous man, thought to divorce her quietly. How could Mary defend herself? Never before had any woman become pregnant without sexual intimacy with a man. How could she prove her innocence? She could not, and it was folly for her to attempt to do so. She could only bear the reproach in silence and trust in God.

Consider also Yahshua. He was born to a woman that society considered to be an adulteress. This made Him an illegitimate son. Could He defend Himself? Would any

of the boys that taunted Him believe Him if He said that God was His Father? This stigma followed Him into adulthood, for we read:

John 8:48

The Jews answered and said to Him, "Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?"

Samaritans were considered to not be true descendants of Israel. They had corrupted themselves by marrying foreigners. The Jewish leaders knew that Mary was Yahshua's mother, and she was Jewish, so their insult implied that his father was a Gentile, which were despised by the Jews. Yahshua did not strive with these accusers, or try to prove His righteousness to them. He further encountered their reproach as they accused Him of blasphemy and of being a Sabbath breaker.

God well knew that His Son would suffer reproach due to His birth. He could have removed all reproach from Him by having His divinity revealed in some spectacular way at the time of His conception. Yet He chose not to do so. It was the Father's will for Him to experience such insult.

The example the Spirit has been speaking to me the most through, however, is that of Joseph, the favored son of Jacob. Joseph was more spiritually minded than his brothers, and his father loved him greatly. This made his brothers jealous. When Joseph was given dreams of his brothers bowing before him this made them all the more envious, and they gave their hearts to do evil. Joseph's brothers sold him as a slave into the land of Egypt.

This was Joseph's first reproach, for he was treated as a slave when in fact he was the favored son of a wealthy man. Joseph walked with great integrity in Potiphar's house. Even in his grief he walked uprightly and the Lord blessed him. Things were to get worse, however. Joseph was a handsome young man, and his master's wife began to urge him to lie with her. He refused all of her advances, and one day she caught him in the house all alone and she took hold of his cloak and urged him to sin once more. Joseph fled, leaving his cloak in her hand.

Potiphar's wife called to the other household servants and accused Joseph of trying to force her to have sexual relations with him. When Potiphar arrived home he had Joseph put in prison as a transgressor. Joseph protested his innocence, but God had led him to a situation where no one would believe his report. He was a foreigner and a slave, and his word against the wife of one of Pharaoh's officials would never stand.

It must have been a tremendous grief to Joseph to bear the reputation of an attempted rapist. He was moral and upright and had chosen a course of integrity, honoring God in the most trying of circumstances. Instead of having his integrity and

upright walk recognized for what it was, he was placed among the criminals of the land. He was numbered with the transgressors. I am sure that his soul burned with the shame of being accused of such low sexual misconduct.

I have found that I am not too unlike this other Joseph in the sense that I have desired to have my obedience known. How futile it is, however, to proclaim one's own integrity. Joseph tried to do this and it got him nowhere. After interpreting the dream of Pharaoh's cupbearer, he said:

Genesis 40:14-15

"Only keep me in mind when it goes well with you, and please do me a kindness by mentioning me to Pharaoh and get me out of this house. For I was in fact kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing that they should have put me into the dungeon."

After many years in the land of his affliction, Joseph's reproach still burned and he longed to be rid of it. He sought to justify himself in the eyes of Pharaoh's official. We are told that the cupbearer promptly forgot Joseph, and Joseph remained in prison two more years.

I am confident that Yahweh was working upon the soul of Joseph to bring him to a place of rest concerning his reputation. He desired for Joseph to be at peace, and to die to the opinions of men, living only for the praise and approval of God. After two more years God brought Joseph forth from prison and made him second ruler over the entire land of Egypt, but I believe this only occurred after Joseph came to a place of rest in the matter.

In all of the account of Joseph's life after his promotion, we never read of him taking any revenge upon those who had falsely accused or imprisoned him. We are told how he responded to his brothers when God brought them before him, and he harbored no ill will toward them. He declared that what they had done with evil intent, God had used for good to preserve them and their families alive during the great famine. I am confident that he had the same attitude toward all others who had reproached him.

The Spirit has been testifying to me this day that this is the place to which He desires all of God's children to come. We are to become content with reproaches, entrusting ourselves to a holy God in confidence that He will one day make our obedience known. If we humble ourselves under His hand, in due time He will exalt us. The apostle Paul wrote about his own attainment to this attitude.

II Corinthians 12:10

Therefore *I am well content with infirmities, with reproaches, with lack, with*

persecutions, with distresses for Christ's sake...

Yahshua said that reproach and condemnation would come to all of His followers.

Matthew 10:25

If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of his household!

One day Yahshua was walking along on the Sabbath with His disciples, and He entered the temple. A man was there with a withered hand, and the Father told Him that it was His will for the man to be healed. The Father knew that the Jews were very zealous for the Sabbath and its observance, with the requirement that no work be done. The Father knew that the Jewish leaders, and those who followed their teachings, would condemn Yahshua as a sinner for violating the Sabbath.

The Father could have chosen another place and time to have His Son do this work, yet He chose the most visible place in Jerusalem, and the Sabbath day. Yahshua healed the man, and He instantly incurred the wrath of those who stood as defenders of the holy Law of God as delivered to Moses. He was a transgressor in their eyes, and nothing He could say would change their minds. They sought to kill Him for this deed.

The Spirit will also lead us to do things that others, including the religious people of our day, will not understand. We will be numbered among the transgressors, but we are not to fear. We are to entrust ourselves into the hands of God. In due time He will make our obedience known. Is not Joseph known as a righteous and holy man today? Is not Yahshua known as the Son of God, and the Lamb without spot or blemish? One day the truth will be revealed and God will honor those who have chosen to honor Him with their obedience.

I have prayed that the Spirit will pull me through this trial, that He will give me the grace to not seek to avoid reproach. In this way I will be established in peace and anxiety will have no place in my heart. As I have resigned myself to be content with what may come, I have experienced a measure of peace that was formerly lacking. Peace is the desire of God for all of His children.

May you be blessed with peace and understanding in these days.