

The Joy and Challenge of Ageing in God

This is written to encourage some older folk who may be tempted to feel that age, weakness or infirmity has robbed them of their usefulness in this world. It is also relevant to those who are younger who may have dreaded the thought of growing older and losing their strength and maybe facing weakness or poor health.

I am sure that we all have had the pleasure and privilege of observing some older folk who shine for Jesus and, though having physical issues, face every day and all future prospects, including death, with a sense of relish and positivity. We may also have witnessed the opposite where fear or a sense of failure has robbed an individual of the joy of their salvation and increasing senescence has produced unhappiness and even bitterness towards life and God. There is a third category of those who refuse to acknowledge their advancing years and struggle to retain their physical virility to the extent that they lose sight of the opportunities ageing presents to experience the Lord in new ways.

I can think of a number of people who stand out as special in this regard. They have faced challenges in their lives which seem to have opened the door for the Lord to touch them and turn their focus away from the things of this world and onto the true reality of the eternal realm. They seem to have a perspective which allows them to hold very lightly to this world and yet face life and death with a purpose and a goal. They shine for Jesus and have deep inner peace and they do not get disturbed by distractions or troubles despite facing many difficulties. I have witnessed a number of dear brothers and sisters with dementia in advancing years. It seems that their relationship with the Lord is unaffected by their failing awareness of this world and they retain a sweet relationship with the Lord and show response to His voice even though they have no ability to communicate about natural things. This is wonderful and speaks of the life which is eternal and far more significant than the troubles they face on this earth.

The truth is that each one of us is individually loved by God in a special and unique way. He showed that to us in sending his son Jesus to redeem us and rescue us from all our sin and failings and to give us a place in his household where we have a standing with Him and a purpose in living. He is seeking us out to get to know Him in a personal and deep way so that we walk with Him and know His affection. As we grow in relationship with Him we become more and more aware of the value of the eternal things which do not pass away. When we know His love there is no situation which can overcome us and cause us to fear because His perfect love casts out fear. (1Jn 4 v 18)

My prayer is that as you consider these things you will come to rest in His love and see that you can go forward into whatever you face, even death, with a sense of purpose and with growing awareness of the true reality, the eternal realm where His order is manifest and His will is completely accomplished. (Lk. 11v 2)

Dreams or Visions

A few years ago I was diagnosed with an incurable cancer. Shortly after my diagnosis I heard the Lord say to me *'you are moving from visions to dreams'*. I immediately thought He meant I was moving from young man status to old man but as I reflected on it I appreciated why the scripture says *your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams.* (Joel 2v 28 & Acts 2 v17) Young people may see a vision from God and go forward in Him to accomplish it. For older people they are not called to finish anything for God, rather to be the dreamers who can clearly see in the spirit and in their lives and conversation enjoy what they see without feeling they have to bring to pass what God has already finished. It may be that younger folk may catch the dream from them as a vision which becomes a motivating force in their lives.

I believe that the weakness of age often allows us to see more clearly the heavenly realm. If we know His love we can rest in Him, even in the most challenging situations of physical weakness or infirmity and let Him open up the heavenly realm to us. We become those whose dreams

become reality in our lives, in our conversation, and in our attitudes. We rest in what we see and become more and more aware of His priorities and less concerned with the cares of this life or even trying to do things for Him.

The Heavenly Realm

During my cancer treatment I went through a bone marrow transplant which destroyed my bone marrow and replaced it with stem cells which were previously harvested. The process takes a few weeks during which I experienced increasing weakness as I ran out of viable blood cells (they are made by the bone marrow). Before the explosion of life, as the new cells bed in and become productive, that weakness is extreme.

The Lord graciously met with me during those days with many dreams and clear words from Him, but I also saw very clearly the heavenly realm. I cannot put adequate words on that experience but it did become very clear to me that the heavenly realm has an order I could recognise as reflected on earth in what we know as the natural order. It was just infinitely more perfect and fulfils His will.

I think I would have only wanted to die and go there if He had not spoken to me a word which gave me some understanding of His ongoing work in this fallen world and His love for His brothers and sisters who are here and whom He has redeemed unto His Father. *Where two or three are gathered together in my Name I am present in their midst. (Matt. 18 v 20)* He loves our fellowship and loves to be among us.

My purpose in sharing this is firstly to say **There is no situation you can be in where He is not with you.** *I am with you always even unto the end of the world. (Matt 28 v 20).* It is absolutely true that His strength is made perfect in weakness. *(2 Cor12 v 9)*

Secondly, It is absolutely true that, for the child of God, death is but a doorway to the true reality. There is no need to have any fear of death or dying. *(Heb. 2 v 4-15)* The process of dying is just the shedding of this body of sin and weakness. It has always been destined to go to the grave. The glory of the process is that He has removed the sting and has triumphed over death. It is swallowed up in His victory. *(1Cor.12 v 9)* He comes to take us at His time to the fullness of Father's presence free from the hindrance that the body presents. We are able to look on death as a goal not something to be avoided.

Does this mean that I should continually long to die? - No, but rather that I should see every day I live on the earth as a stepping stone to glory. Each day our lives can show, in either spoken or unspoken ways, that we are on a special journey and the destination is getting clearer and clearer as we approach that day.

Dealing with the Causes of Infirmary

It concerns me to come across some godly folk who question if the reason they are weak or infirm or have some chronic condition is because they may have misheard the Lord or did not respond to Him in earlier years. 'Is it something I did or didn't do, or is there unconfessed sin in my life?' Such an attitude prevents us from resting in His love and turns us inward to rely on ourselves rather than to trust Him. It is to misunderstand the love of our wonderful Lord. He did not die for us so that when we have sorted ourselves out he would accept us. He did not die for the righteous but to call sinners who needed Him and in their need would cry out and trust in Him. *(Matt. 9 v13)*

Our weakness as we age means we cannot cope on our own and is a glorious opportunity to touch His love. He is utterly faithful to be with us in every situation and we as his children can come with open trusting hearts and know His love in the time of our need.

At the time when we most need to rest in His love it is not advisable or helpful to go looking for our faults. If we rest in Him, He is able to deal with our failings in ways that keep our focus on Him and not on ourselves. You have never been more loved than right now and He is drawing you to that love in this situation.

The Privilege of Ageing with the Lord

I do feel that the Lord wants to encourage those of us who are getting older that they have a special opportunity and calling in Him to walk with no fear of death or dying. By doing so they are saying they are citizens of a different kingdom which exists beyond the grave and involves, for them, what they have been called to and prepared for throughout their life.

As the heavenly realm opens up to them and they experience His revelation, their attitude and conversation declares such a wonderful salvation that is ours in Jesus. It speaks of a city whose builder and maker is God.

It is much harder for a younger person to declare this simply because they have not known the weakness and lack of strength in their physical body and the experience of His strength being sufficient in such weakness. Their day will come and walking in the vision they have now from the Lord will prepare them but they can be greatly encouraged as they witness older ones who walk in humble and contented victory in the midst of challenge and weakness.

So whether you are in sickness or in health as your strength declines be encouraged. You are on the way to that city and though weaker in body you are filled with His life. Whether you say it out aloud or in the way you live, or both, you are declaring the Victory of Calvary and he is pleased to call you His child and to delight in your ever closer relationship and fellowship.

Blessed are those whose strength is in You,
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.
As they go through the Valley of Weeping
they make it a place of springs;
the early rain also fills the pools
and covers it with blessing.
They go from strength to strength;
each one appears before God in Zion.
(Ps. 84 vs 5-7)

Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked. For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life. Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge. (2Cor 4v17 to 5 v5)

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