

Greetings Church Members and Friends!

This week I want to talk about victory over affliction, but we must understand a common characteristic of the afflicter. It is known as mistaken identity. It's where a person simply fails to see themselves accurately.

I always like to pull from my arsenal of family stories as examples. So today, I will use Uncle Monroe again. As the United States was well into World War II, Uncle Monroe was drafted into the Army Air Corp, now known as the Airforce. Bootcamp was brutal. Being in a segregated unit in bootcamp, he had an old, mean black drill sergeant. His drill sergeant treated them unusual harshness. He treated them as though they were incapable of learning and were often hit and kicked like dogs. When the recruits became angry after being provoked, and appeared ready to assault him, he would give them his home address. His words were, "if you think you're man enough to take me on,,,, I live in the last house on 37th street. The last house on the left!". It seemed like they were in a hopeless situation until Uncle Monroe came up with the idea of going AWOL for a little while. So they did. They knew the exact bar the drill sergeant would drink at. So Uncle Monroe and his friends met their drunken sergeant as he was leaving the bar with wine bottles filled with sand. They administered a beating on the sergeant that was so bad, the sergeant ended up in the hospital for weeks. The remainder of their time in boot camp, they were minus 1 sergeant. Below is a picture of Uncle Monroe.



Uncle Monroe, being a Christian, knew the bible encouraged visiting the homeless, widows, orphans and the sick. So he decided to visit his sergeant in the hospital while he was convalescing from this brutal attack. The sergeant looked at Uncle Monroe, (not knowing Uncle Monroe was one of the people who put him in the hospital in the first place) and in tears said "Wood,,,, I just don't know who would do me like this. I been nice to everybody.". With concern for his good sergeant's future prospect of health, Uncle Monroe said, "if you keep it up,,, next time,,, they might kill you!". I'm not sure the sergeant ever completely understood that he himself was the problem.

When we look at Philippians chapter 4, we see two women who were Christians, but were in conflict with each other. I'm convinced the only thing they saw was each other. That's why Paul had to intervene. They were blind, just as the sergeant was blind to his actions. The end result of their actions was disappointment, discouragement and disillusionment among others.

As the result of this conflict, the apostle Paul gives us a universal answer for life situations that seem to be unfair and confusing. Situations that cause us to become discouraged and even angry. But first, let's understand the definition of disappointment.

Disappointment

Disappointment is the feeling of sadness or displeasure caused by the defeat of one's hopes or expectations.

As our dreams and hopes fail, disappointment sometimes morphs into disillusionment. Disillusionment morphs into anger. And in anger, we tend to attack innocent people. In some instances, we attack ourselves with guilt, worthless feelings and anger about ourselves. We never really see what we are doing, because we only see our defeated dreams and the people who inflicted the pain.

Side note, even though we put our best efforts forward, we don't know what will succeed or fail in life. Solomon tries to prepare us for that aspect of life in Ecclesiastes 11:1-3 he says "Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it again. Give portions to seven, yes to eight, for you do not know what disaster may come upon the land. If clouds are full of water, they pour rain upon the earth. Whether a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where it falls, there will it lie."

The point of this passage is that we can't predict the future. We can't predict success every time. When we make our best effort, sometimes it's not good enough. Even when we do everything within our ability to follow scripture, sometimes our careers fail us. Sometimes our families fail. Sometimes friends desert us. Sometimes we find ourselves all alone, yet we've done all the right things.

The Solution

Knowing the nature of people, Paul gives us the way to deal with our disappointments from the cruelty of life in general. Philippians 4:4-5 that says "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near."

Sometimes life's difficulties and pressures make it almost impossible to be happy. But notice, Paul did not tell his readers to be "happy". He encouraged his readers to "rejoice". Happiness depends on what happens. In other words, it depends on a favorable outcome. For a person to rejoice in the Lord, this action has no bearing on the outcome. That is,,, even if the outcome is unfavorable.

But for a person to "rejoice", they have to be in a state of wellbeing. Wellbeing is generated when we realize "the Lord is near".

Think about how you feel when you say:

- Even though I've had a tough day, "the Lord is near".
- Even though I've been betrayed, "the Lord is near".
- Even though I'm sick, "the Lord is near".
- Even though I've lost my family, "the Lord is near".
- Even though I've lost my job, "the Lord is near".
- Even though I'm in the valley of the shadow of death, "the Lord is near".

Throughout the bible we are reminded the Lord sees our pain and He is working our disappointments for the good of His people. Therefore, even though we don't understand everything that's happening to us, we do know the Lord is working and he is near.

Here are some scriptures that I've found quite helpful when I find myself in the pit of disappointment and despair.

Psalm 34:18 "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." (*Look for God to rescue you.*)

Psalm 30:5 "For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning." (*Look for and anticipate better days.*)

Psalm 55:22 "Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall." (*We are to entrust our cares to the Lord, 1 Peter 5:7. God will never forsake the righteous, Deuteronomy 31:6, Hebrews 13:5. He will destroy the deceitful and bloodthirsty, Psalm 55:15.*)

Finally, in Philippians 4:4-5, Paul says "let your gentleness be evident to all". Why???, because the Lord is near. There's no need to self-destruct. God's got this one!

So do not be "blind" to our own actions as we face the disappointments and frustrations of life. But instead, rejoice in the Lord. He's got this one!!!

Be blessed,

Deacon Edward Wood Jr.