

November 23, 2014

Mostly Personal...

Loved Ones,

I'm about to finish my reading through the Bible project for 2014. No matter how many times I read it, the Bible remains fresh and life-giving beyond description!

There are a few things that never cease to amaze me. One of them is how incredibly weak we are when we get our eyes off Jesus.

In 1 Chronicles 18-20, we read an awe-inspiring account of David's great military victories, as well as God's promise to allow David's son to build the very first Temple of God. Yet in chapter 21, we read this sobering passage: "Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel."

David took the bait – hook, line, and sinker. Such a numbering (to ascertain the size of Israel's potential army) was displeasing to The Lord because it was based on David's pride in his military accomplishments.

The scriptures describe what happened afterward as "the rage of The Lord." A plague swept through the land, and seventy thousand Israelites died as a result of David's great sin.

I know the story well, and I shouldn't continue to be amazed year after year. David's fall is typical of what usually happens when we get our eyes on our own strength and forget the strength of The Lord. David repented and God forgave, but irreparable damage was done.

Thankfully, it appears that David learned his lesson. In 1 Chronicles 29, David gathered the people to announce the plans for the building of the Temple. The leaders of Israel gave sacrificially, as did David, and the people rejoiced, bowing before God and king. David's prayer reflects a return to wisdom:

"But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have only given you what comes from your hand. O Lord our God, as for all this abundance that we have provided for building you a temple for your Holy Name, it comes from your hand, and all of it belongs to you." (verses 14-17)

We are never as strong as in the moment when we let go of every claim to greatness in our own name. Paul learned that his mightiest moments were often the ones in which he was completely without his natural power and

totally dependent upon the Lord (2 Corinthians 12:10).

A few years ago, a wonderful Christian singer delivered her version of the song *Jesus Loves Me*, but insisted on abandoning some of the original lyrics. She refused to sing *Little ones to Him belong, they are weak but He is strong*. She insisted it was almost blasphemous to call ourselves weak. "After all", she reasoned, "I'm God's child. There's nothing weak about me!"

I'm certain her intentions were honorable, but what a dangerous mistake we make when we focus on ourselves instead of Him! We need to remember that it is the One inside of us who is greater, not us!

I disagreed with her then, and I still do. I have seen far too many casualties of pride to believe otherwise.

I know there is case to be made for maturity and responsibility, but I know that even the mightiest person of faith, when they walk a few steps away from God, are all found to be as weak as water. There are no exceptions.

An evangelist explained it this way. As he was warning his little grandchild about the dangers of Papaw's swimming pool, he explained it something like this: "If you're out here with Papaw and you slip and fall into the water, I'll always be quick to pull you out. If you are with Papaw and you even disobey and jump into the water without permission, I'll still pull you out. No matter what happens, if you are out here with me and get in over your head, I'll do whatever it takes to save you." But he then knelt down and looked deep into the eyes of the little one. With deep sobriety he said, "But you ever come out here without Papaw, and then fall into the water, there's nothing I can do. The most important thing is to remember you are only truly safe if Papaw is with you."

Too dramatic? I don't think so. I think it's healthy for all us Little Ones to remember that we are weak, but He is strong.

I love you,
Pastor Stephen