

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtmnc.org Today's Date: March 15, 2015

Feeling Empty?

by Dan Trygg

“Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his faith. ⁵ Furthermore, wine betrays the haughty man, so that he does not stay at home. He enlarges his appetite like Sheol, and he is like death, never satisfied. He also gathers to himself all nations and collects to himself all peoples.”

Habakkuk 2:4-5

“...for all have sinned and they are in need of the glory of God.”

Romans 3:23

“See to it that no one is in need of the grace of God.”

Hebrews 12:15

“But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁸ that they were saying to you, ‘In the last time there shall be mockers, following after their own impious lusts.’ ¹⁹ These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit.”

Jude 1:17-19

A rich young ruler approached Jesus in Matthew 19, asking, “Teacher, what good thing shall I *do* that I may obtain eternal life?” He was looking at goodness or righteousness as dependent on behavior. He was thinking of eternal life as something to be earned by good works. **In his mind, a person became righteous, and worthy of eternal life, if he did *enough* good deeds, or if he did some especially *significant* good work. He had an “outside-in” way of looking at goodness.** Instead of thinking of good behavior coming from a good heart, he was thinking that he would become a good man, if he did good behavior. **His understanding of goodness and righteousness was exactly opposite of Jesus’ way of looking at things.** Jesus had said, “Either make the tree good, and its fruit good, or make the tree bad (unsound) and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit” (Matt. 12:33). **Jesus had an “inside-out” view of character.** A man’s essence will eventually be revealed by his actions; but a person’s external actions don’t have the power to change his inner heart. Even an evil man can *act* good, for a little while, ...but eventually his true colors will show. **There was no “one thing” the young man could *do* to obtain eternal life, so Jesus attempted to help him see his *real* need, ...the problem with his inner heart.** He pointed the young man to the Law. Amazingly, the young fellow claimed that he had “kept *all* these things”. He asked, “What thing am I still *lacking*?” **He had justified and rationalized so completely that he really did not see where he had been self-centered, instead of loving. Yet, in spite of his self-justifications, he still felt empty. He felt he was lacking something.** Did he *truly* “love his neighbor *as himself*”, as he claimed? Jesus challenged him *further*, “If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and *give to the poor*, ...and come *follow Me*.” At that statement, the young man went away, grieved. Why? “Because he had much property.” **When it came down to it, he loved his *property* and *possessions* more than the “neighbors” around him, or even God, Himself.** His heart was *not* truly for God and neighbor, it was for *himself*. His interest in “goodness” was so he could assuage his conscience, gratify himself, and obtain eternal life, but it had nothing to do with wanting to honestly yield to, or serve, God or others. **What he lacked was an inner change.**

This interchange exposes a deeper issue, the emptiness of the human heart. Habakkuk described it this way, “the soul of the proud person is not *right* within him” (2:4). There is something *wrong*, something *amiss*, something *lacking*. In the passage, **Habakkuk goes on to describe the kinds of things people do in order to fill the emptiness they feel inside themselves.** They *medicate themselves* with alcohol or drugs. They *are not content* within themselves. They *enlarge their appetites* like the grave, ...never satisfied. They *accumulate for themselves* the trappings of wealth and luxury, by using loans and credit to “increase what is not his”. Because of envy, *they use injustice, intrigue and violence to accumulate more and more*, ...even going to war to get what other people have. *They go after sexual encounters, with an appetite that is unending*, doing inappropriate and disgraceful things to satisfy their lusts. **Other passages describe the same things.** Isaiah 5 records a similar litany of sin and *attempts at self-fulfillment*. Ephesians 4:17-19 also warns of living as the unbelievers live. They are *cut off from the life of God*, and *they give themselves over to sensual pleasure-seeking* in order to escape and medicate their inner emptiness and discomfort. The “mockers” described in Jude are also *divisive, driven by their natural lusts, devoid of the Spirit*.

Isaiah 43:7 gives us a clue to understand what is missing, what is wrong. It refers to the people God has made for His glory. The word for “glory” here is the Hebrew word “kabōd”. It can mean several different things: honor, power, authority, the indwelling presence or manifest expression of God. **When the scriptures say that God has formed us for His glory, this can mean two things.** It can refer to His fame or reputation, i.e., **we were made to bring Him praise**, ...or, it can mean we were made for His abiding and outshining presence, i.e., **He intended to live within us and be made visible through our lives.** Of course, *both* could be true at the same time. That is, through His indwelling Spirit, outwardly expressed in action through us, He is made visible and our righteous actions bring Him praise. Jesus *said* that we were to be the light of the world (Matt. 5:14-16), and as we allow our light to shine

before people, they *will* see our good works, and glorify God. **Jesus Himself was the *outflashing or radiance of God's glory*** (Heb. 1:3). **He came to reveal the Father by His character and actions**, just as we are to do (Jn. 1:14-18; 20:21). Jesus said it was because the Father was living in Him, that He was able to say and do what He did (Jn. 14:10,11). **God intends to do the same with us** (Jn. 14:12; 17:20-23).

I believe that **humankind was created to be “glory-bearers”**. We were to carry within us the Spirit of the Living God to vitalize and empower us. **The Spirit was to flow from within us as a spring or river, always filling and pouring out from us in joy, thankfulness, goodness and praise**. Our first parents were satisfied, content, and their delight was expressed in their care of the world God made for them. They enjoyed continual, unbroken communion with God and with each other. **When Adam and Eve sinned, however, that inner flow was cut off**. Instead of the abundant supply of ever rising life and joy, **people began to experience emptiness, guilt and shame**. They exchanged the inexhaustible glory of the incorruptible God for the finite pleasure of a temporal experience (Rom. 1:21-23). They abandoned the fountain of living waters, and constructed for themselves cisterns (Jer. 2:13), to attempt to “store up *for themselves*” what they might need. **They wanted to “make their own way”**. **In reality, their efforts to get life and refreshment for themselves did not work, because “feel-good experiences” are only temporary**. They last only for a very brief time, and then the inner emptiness, thirst and hunger becomes evident once again. They became defensive, accusatory and competitive. They were like cisterns that *leak*, and soon they experienced the dryness of drought. **Instead of lives that were full to overflowing, from the *inside-out*, their existence became that of trying to get life and refreshment from external experiences, trying to be refreshed, entertained and energized from the *outside-in***. They were cut off from the life-flow of God, because of their ignorance and hardness of heart. Pushing their inner pain and emptiness away from their conscious minds, they gave themselves over to sensuality, always looking for another pleasurable experience to keep them from their inner emptiness or boredom (Eph. 4:17-19).

This brings us back to the rich young ruler's question, “What am I still lacking?” Romans 3:23 has been horribly mistranslated. Most versions render it as “all have sinned and *fall short of* the glory of God”. The Greek word translated as “*fall short of*” is the same as the word as “*I am lacking*” in Matthew 19:20. The Greek word is *hustereō*. It occurs 16 times in the NT (Matt. 19:20; Mk. 10:21; Lk. 15:14; 22:35; Jn. 2:3; Rom. 3:23; I Cor. 1:7; 8:8; 12:24; II Cor. 11:5,9; 12:11; Phil. 4:12; Heb. 4:1; 11:37;12:15). In virtually every case, this word is translated as “lack” or “be in need of”. Without question, *this* is the predominate meaning. There is no reason for not translating Romans 3:23 in this same way, “all have sinned and *lack or are in need of* the glory of God.” **People sin, because they are not filled with the glory/radiance of God! When you are filled to overflowing with God's Spirit, there is no need, no lack, no opening for temptation**. For this same reason, the writer to the Hebrews exhorts us, “See to it that no one is lacking the grace of God” (Heb. 12:15). If we are not lacking or in need of God's enabling grace, there will be no room for bitterness, immorality or irreverence. **Instead of focusing on the negative behaviors, we should be exhorting one another to go deep, to press through into a living, vital, overflowing experience of the Holy Spirit to fill and satisfy our souls**. If we are filled with Him, we *will* live transformed lives of fulfillment and power.

You say, “Wait! We can't be filled with the Holy Spirit all the time!” Why not? Isn't *this* what Paul commanded the Ephesian Christians, “...*be being filled* with the Spirit...” (5:18)? Didn't Jesus say, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink, and out from his belly will flow *rivers* of living water”? Didn't John tell us that He was speaking of the Holy Spirit, which we can now be ours (Jn. 7:37-39)? **Are we not commanded to walk in the Spirit** (Gal. 5:16,25)? **Is this not possible all of the time?** Is not the Spirit the one who gives life (Jn. 6:63)? Is that not the basis for our being adequate, empowered and capable as servants of the new covenant (II Cor. 3:5,6)? **Doesn't Paul contrast the outside-in approach of trying to live by the Law (the old covenant), and the inside-out dynamic of the surpassing greatness of the glory and power available to us now, as ones who live by the ministry of the Spirit** (II Cor. 3:7-18)? Has not the principle of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus set us free from the law of sin and death (Rom. 8:2)? Does not Paul go on to say that the Law is fulfilled in those who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit? The ones *being* according to the flesh, set their minds on the things of the flesh, but the ones *being* according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit (Rom. 8:5; Col 3:1,2). The Spirit, and what He is all about, has their *attention*. He is their *focus*. **A fleshly preoccupation brings emptiness and death, but a pattern of thinking focused on the Spirit will bring life and peace (energized-vitality and inner-contentment), ...if, when, and as we experience Him** (8:6,11). We will experience the life-flow from God *as we are putting aside*, by the Spirit's leading, those old fleshly coping methods and *as we learn to walk with God* (8:12,13). **We won't experience life, if we keep drinking from the cup of death**. *To the extent that* we continue to shut God out, and seek life by our own methodology, we *will* experience the emptiness, dryness, poverty and lack produced by disconnection from the life flow of God's Spirit. **But, to the extent that we yield to God's Spirit and put to death those old methods, and come into intimacy with Him, we will experience life, contentment and fullness of joy**.