

Place: Lurgan Baptist 22:5:2011

GRAPPLING WITH THE GIANTS

Reading: Hebrews 12:12-17

2. THE GIANT OF BITTERNESS

Gary Inrig tells the story of a man bitten by a dog later discovered to be rabid. Hospital tests confirmed this. *The man had contracted rabies.* This was a time when there was nothing much to be done after rabies had set in, no cure had been developed. The Doctor had the bleak assignment of bringing the bad news to his patient. “*Sir,*” he said “*everything possible will be done, to make you comfortable, but we can’t offer any false hope. My best advice to you is to be your affairs in order as soon as possible.*” The dying man sank back in depression and shock, but finally he rallied enough strength to ask for a pen and paper. He began writing furiously. An hour later, when the doctor returned, the man’s pen was still flowing. The doctor said, “*Well, it’s good to see that you have taken my advice. I take it you’re working on your will.*” “*This ain’t no will, Doc,*” said the man. “*It’s a list of people I plan on biting before I die.*” Bitter believers are those who have been bitten, and then channel their energy into snapping at others. You see, bitterness makes us permanently angry, it carves deep lines on our faces. It adds heaviness to our very steps.

A bitter heart is always a bad heart and often a boiling

heart. Otto Von Bismarck was the chancellor of Germany during the First World War. Bismarck was a man eaten up with bitterness. One morning Bismarck announced, “*I have spent the whole night hating.*” He was such a bitter man that the weight of bitterness eventually broke his health. He grew a beard to hide the twitching muscles of his face. Jaundice, gastric ulcers, gallstones, and shingles wracked his body. When publishers offered him a large sum of money for his life’s story, he began to write with a reckless disregard for truth, heaping hate on men and women long dead. He died at 83, an embittered, cynical, lonely, and miserable man. My is the giant of bitterness mastering you ? It’s hard to get some folk to stop nourishing their grudges. Over the years I have met professing Christians who have preferred nursing their anger to enjoying the fellowship of God and Gods people. Because they will not forgive they have alienated themselves from the church, and even from their family.

Have you ever met them ? ***Caustic Christians, sour saints and bitter believers.*** This believer becomes bitter at this believer. This church becomes bitter at this church. This employee becomes bitter at his employer. This husband becomes bitter at his wife and vice versa. My is this giant dominating your life ? Are you bitter towards a boss that fired you, a spouse who left you, a father who abused you, a mother who mistreated you, a church that ignored you, a pastor who forgot you, an elder who humiliated you ? Surely, of all human emotions, is bitterness not the one that ought to be feared most ? Bitterness is a cruel cancer that will devour you from the inside out. No wonder the Holy Spirit says, “*Looking diligently lest any*

man fail of the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you and thereby many be defiled.”
(12:15) Notice here,

(1) THE PROBLEM OF BITTERNESS RECOGNISED

The writer acknowledges this problem when he speaks of “*any root of bitterness,*” The idea here is that of a root of a plant just beneath the surface of the ground. It is unseen. It is unnoticed. It is undetected, Nevertheless, it is there and it is lethal. The root of bitterness requires very little soil, needs very little cultivation, is very swift to grow, but very tough to remove. (1) Now notice how,

(a) HOW THIS PROBLEM IS EXPRESSED:

You see, our word “*bitterness,*” comes from an old root word meaning to bite. This is very suggestive. Bitterness is like being bitten by the old serpent Satan, releasing his venom and poison into our heart and life. Do you recall what Peter said to Simon ? “*I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness,*” (Acts 8:23) The word “*gall,*” means “*poison.*” Bitterness is the poison that comes when bitten by certain things in life. It’s as if Satan has bitten and injected all the poison of hell itself into a human heart. T.S. Rendall defines bitterness as, “*The atmosphere produced in us internally when we meditate over life circumstances and decide that we have not been give a fair deal.*” Dr. James Merritt says, “*Bitterness is harboured hurt hidden in the heart.*” Bitterness is secluded sullenness secured in the soul. It’s that feeling of

hurt, resentment, anger, hate and even revenge that often builds up in our hearts when we have been bitten by certain experiences of life. My do you know what I am talking about ? Have you had to deal with this problem in your life ? President elect Franklin Pierce was the only President of the U.S.A. that refused to use a Bible in his inauguration. Just prior to this event, Franklin Pierce, his wife and their eleven year old son Benny, were involved in a train crash. Neither Pierce or his wife were injured, but their son was killed. ***Pierce could not imagine how God would let such a thing happen, so he refused to have a Bible during his swearing in office.*** Could it be that your bitterness is not vented towards others but towards God ?

(b) HOW THIS PROBLEM IS EXPLAINED:

You see, we get bitter for essentially one of three reasons.

- 1. Because of what is said about us:**
- 2. Because of what is done to us:**
- 3. Because of what is taken from us:**

Now its remarkable how Christ with all three of these problems in the Sermon on the Mount. *With regard to what is said about us,* the Lord Jesus said, “*Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad for great is your reward in heaven for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*” (Matt 5:11-12) My has anyone ever said anything wrong about you ? Well. Congratulations you’re

in good company. They did the same thing to the prophets. They did the same thing to Christ. They are going to do the same thing to you.

With regard to what is done to us, Christ said, “ *Ye have heard that it hath been said, and eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say unto you that ye resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.* ” (Matt 5:38-39) What Christ was saying here was, that its not what happens to you is important, but how you react to that, that really counts with God.

With regard to what is taken from us, Christ said, “ *And if any man will sue at the law and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.* ” (Matt 5:40) You see, its better to be wronged than to do wrong. My when someone does you wrong and they will sooner or later, you have one of two choices, you can get bitter or you can get better. (a) (b)

(c) *HOW THIS PROBLEM IS EXPOSED:*

In the life of Ahithophel. Do you recall who Athitophel was ? He was David’s counsellor. (2 Sam 15:12) When he spoke others sat and listened. But something happened in Ahithophel’s life that left a great hurt in his soul. And he met a tragic end because he allowed a great hurt to flourish in his life. *What was the thing that distressed him ?* Well, look at (2 Sam 23:34) So Eliam was his son. Now look at (2 Sam 11:3) Bathsheba was Ahithophel’s granddaughter. How proud he must have been of Bathsheba. How it must have grieved him when he heard that Uriah her husband had been killed in battle. Can you see him standing by her side with his arm around her, as

they stand at the grave of Uriah her husband ? But not many days later the news breaks of David’s adulterous affair with Bathsheba. ***Who do you think he blames ?*** David. It was David who had seduced her, it was David who had planned and plotted Uriah’s death. It was King David who had brought a scar upon the family name. And when David’s son Absalom rebelled against his father, Ahithophel saw his chance to get even. Out of his hatred for David, Ahithophel gave Absalom two words of counsel. The first was designed to disgrace the King: (2 Sam 16:20-23) the second was designed to destroy the King: (2 Sam 17:1-4) The man that he had helped for so many years, Ahithophel is now seeking to hurt. My is that you ? Is there some believer and for years you helped them, counselled them, encouraged them ? Then the unthinkable happened. They wronged you, and since that moment that hurt has smouldered, and bitterness, anger and resentment are the result. I wish I could tell you that others will not hurt, offend or disappoint you, but I cannot. However, I can promise you that when you are hurt and you do not deal with it, it will consume and dominate your life. Incidentally, do you know how Ahithophel finished his days ?

When his counsel was rejected he went to his house and committed suicide. (2 Sam 17:23) ***You see, if David could not die he could not live.*** My do you realise that bitterness will destroy you ? I am told that a rattlesnake, if cornered will sometimes become so angry it will bite itself. Is this not what the harbouring of hate and resentment is ? It’s a biting of oneself. We think we are harming others in holding these spites and hates but the

deeper harm is to ourselves. Bitterness is the biting of oneself. My I cannot control what happens to me, but I can control what happens in me. I cannot control how others act toward me, but I can control how I react toward others. (1)

(2) THE POISON OF BITTERNESS REVEALED

For bitterness is a poison. (Acts 8:23) Do you see what this passage says about it ? “ *Lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you.* ” (12:15) The word is sometimes translated “ *vex,* ” and the idea is that it pushes out the good things in our heart and takes over in our life. A bitter root always produces bitter fruit. My if you are bitter, if you get bitter then you are headed for trouble. Soon it will become contagious and contaminate those who are around you. You see, there is no passion of the human heart that promises so much and pays so little. Bitterness will trouble and vex you. It will,

(a) DOMINATE YOU MENTALLY:

As you allow the root of bitterness to grow, it will take more and more of the soil of your heart. There is a plant in the southern states of the U.S.A. called kudzu. Kudzu is a vine like plant that grows like wildfire and takes over everything it can. Kudzu can grow up to one foot per day and up to one hundred feet in a single growing season. Its chokes out native paths, and takes over everything in its path. Likewise, bitterness will consume you and absorb you like a magnet. My do you not find that your mind is drawn again and again to that person toward whom you

are bitter ? Years ago a brilliant doctor by the name of S. I. McMillen, wrote a best-selling book entitled “ *None of These Diseases.* ” In that book Dr. McMillen points out how destructive emotions, such as bitterness, can consume a man both physically and mentally. Concerning bitterness, Dr. McMillen said,

The moment I start hating a man I become his slave. I can't enjoy my work anymore because he even controls my thoughts. My resentments produce too many stress hormones in my body and I become fatigued after only a few hours of work. The man I hate hounds me wherever I go. I can't escape his tyrannical grasp on my mind. The man I hate may be many miles from my bedroom, but more cruel than any slave driver he whips my thoughts into such a frenzy that my innerspring mattress becomes a rack of torture. The lowliest of the serfs can sleep, but not I. I really must acknowledge the fact that I am a slave to every man on whom I pour the vial of my wrath.

(b) DEPRESS YOU EMOTIONALLY:

My bitterness is a depressant. If you will look Closely, you will find there are no happy bitter people. Criticism, cynicism, negativism, pessimism are the marks of a bitter person. Bitterness will depress you and sadden you and even get you to the point where you cannot even function normally. Edwin Markham was a great poet, who having reached the age of retirement, found out that his banker had defrauded him out of a great sum of money. Instead of retiring to a life of ease, he thought he

had earned, he was penniless and broke. He became so bitter he could no longer even write poetry. The candle of joy had been blown out in his heart by the blaze of bitterness. He became so obsessed with wanting to do this man harm, that all he could do was think about it, and brew over it. He was obsessed with what this man had done to him and with how he could get even with this fellow. One day, in a depressed mood, he was sitting at his desk just doodling, drawing circles on his paper, thinking about this banker who had stolen all of his money, and he said that the Holy Spirit spoke to him and said, “**Markham, if you do not deal with this thing, it is going to ruin you. You cannot afford the price you are paying. You must forgive that man.**” That great poet said, “Lord, I will forgive him, and I do freely forgive him.” At that exact moment Markham said he could feel he root of bitterness being pulled out. He could feel the river of joy begin to flow back in his heart, and when he did, he said his mind was unshackled, his pen was loosened, and he then sat down and wrote perhaps his most famous poem entitled, “**Outwitted.**”

**He drew a circle that shut me out
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout,
But love and I had the wit to win,
We drew a circle that took him in**

My do you realise that bitterness will dam up the joy-juices that God intends to flow through your life ? That’s why it needs to be broken and shattered by the hammer of forgiveness. (a) (b)

(c) *DEBILITATE YOU PHYSICALLY:*

You see, bitterness sickens the body. Dr. McMillen in that same body enumerated over fifty disease’s ranging from ulcers to high blood pressure that can be caused by bitterness. *Now I am not saying that every sick person is bitter, nor that every bitter person is sick, but every bitter person who remains bitter, will be affected physically.* James Merritt tells the story of Dr. Norman Vincent Peale preaching one Sunday up in New Jersey. After the service a woman came by to see him, a younger woman, well dressed and attractive. She said to him, “*I always itch. I have an itch I cannot get rid of, and it itches the worst when I go to church. Can you help me ?*” Well after talking further with her, Dr. Peale called her personal physician. The doctor told him that he could find nothing physically or organically wrong with this lady and had concluded that she had some kind of a neurosis or an obsession that he described as a “*inner mental eczema, a scratching on the inside that to her seemed to be on the skin.*” Then the doctor told Dr. Peale that he knew that she and her only sister had had a falling out years ago, and that there was a great deal of bitterness involved in her life, and that could be the cause of the problem.

When Dr. Peale confronted this woman about her sister, she broke down and admitted they had had a falling out years ago over a dispute concerning the disposition of the will. A minor disagreement blew up into a major argument. They had a tremendous falling out and this woman had made up her mind never to speak to her sister

again. It was at that exact moment that the itching started. Dr. Peale, first of all, had her to confess her sin of bitterness to the Lord, and ask God to take the bitterness and the hate away. Then he had her call her sister and ask her sister to forgive her. When she hung up the phone the lady looked at Dr. Peale and said, “*That is amazing. I do not itch any longer.*” My she never itched again. Let me tell you something I have learned about bitterness. The bitter person hurts no one more than he hurts himself. Bitterness does a great deal more damage to the vessel in which it is stored than the object on which it is poured. (a) (b) (c)

(d) DESTROY YOU SPIRITUALLY:

Do you see what the Bible says ? “*Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God,*” (12:15) What does that mean ? Well, it does not mean God’s grace fails, but we can fail to take advantage of His grace. Is this not exactly what the bitter believer does ? He has a grace deficiency, he has failed to take advantage of the grace of God, and is therefore affected spiritually. My do you know something ? *Bitterness will Destroy your Worship:* You cannot pray with assurance, you cannot praise with delight. *Bitterness will Damage your Work:* How can you serve the Lord effectively when the bile of bitterness is gushing through your veins ? *Bitterness will Defile your Witness:* It will taint your testimony, it will seal the lips of a soul winner. What a poison it is. (1) (2)

(3) THE POWER OF BITTERNESS REMOVED

How do you get rid of a root ? You see, a root is underground. You have to go after it, get a spade and pick and dig it out. Well, how do you rip up and root out the root of bitterness ? We must,

(a) PURSUE A LIFE OF FELLOWSHIP:

Do you see what the writer says in (12:14) ? The word “*follow, or pursue,*” means “*to go after in an aggressive fashion,*” We are to actively pursue peace. Do you one of the tragedies with a believer who is bitter ? They feel as they are the victims. They have been done wrong. They have been done dirty. As a result, they feel as if someone owes them something. Someone owes them an apology. They are waiting on someone to come to them, to fuss over them, to smooth down their ruffled feathers, waiting for someone to come and apologise. But do you see what the Word of God says ? “*Pursue peace with all men,*” we are to be the initiators. We are to be the originators. We are to take the initiative to end the war, pull down defences, rebuild the bridges and restore the fellowship. My if you don’t have joy, peace, contentment because of what someone has done to you, it’s not because they took these things away from you. You gave them away.. I cannot control what happens to me, but I can control what happens in me. I wonder, do you need to pray this ?

**From pettiness and that desire
Which goads one to retaliate
With patience I would quench the fire
Of vengeance, ere it be too late**

**And in defeat may I cast out
The moods of envy and despair
And from my heart, Lord, I would rout
All bitterness. This is my prayer.**

(b) PROMOTE A LIFE OF FORGETFULNESS:

Whatever caused the problem that brought bitterness into your life, must be behind you. Paul says, “*Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you with all malice.*” (Eph 4:31) The words “*put away*,” means “*to dispose of, to discard, to get rid of.*” My if you are going to remove bitterness from your life, the first thing you have to do is get this “*get even*,” feeling out of your heart. You’ve got to bury that problem in an unmarked grave. Two little boys had a quarrel as they were playing catch with ball and glove. Johnny slammed the kitchen door and told his mother he’d never have anything to do with Bobby again. And yet the next day, there he was on his way out through the door with his ball and glove. “*I’ll be over at Bobby’s*,” he said. “*I thought you were finished with Bobby forever*,” said his mother. Johnny said, “*Oh, me and Bobby are good forgetters.*” My are you a generous detailed forgetter ? If you are, it will save you a lot of misery. You see, if you’re angry at your boss, it’s as if you’re carrying him on your back. If you’re angry at your mother in law she’s up there too. How many people can you carry on your back ? Is it not much easier to walk if you let it all go ? (a) (b)

(c) PRACTICE A LIFE OF FORGIVENESS:

For Paul goes on in (Eph 4:32) and says, “*And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.*” My that is the key. You’ve got to forgive others even as God has forgiven you. I don’t care how dirty you have been done. No one has ever been treated dirtier than the Lord Jesus. But even as He was dying on that cross for your sins and mine He said, “*Father forgive them for they know not what they do.*” (Lk 23:34) My do you need to get to the Cross this and linger there for a while ? Spurgeon said, “***Let us go to Calvary to learn how we may be forgiven, and then let us linger there to learn how to forgive.***” Do you need to forgive that person who has wronged you ? You must forgive them **Freely**: that is, whether they ask for it or not. You must forgive them **Fully**: you just can’t cut your bitterness in half. You must forgive them **Finally**: that is, you must forgive that person once and for all.

When we don’t we are like the little boy who was sitting on a park bench in obvious agony. A man walking by asked him what was wrong. The boy answered, “*I’m sitting on a bumble bee.*” “*Then why don’t you get up ?*” the man asked. The boy replied, “*Because I figure that I am hurting him more than he is hurting me.*” My is it not time you got off the park bench so that the healing process can begin ? The Giant of Bitterness. Are you eaten up with it ? **Are you ?** Is there a root of bitterness in your heart ? Can I say, that there are some believers who will take this bitterness to the grave with them, that bitterness with some family member, with some fellow-believer, they will not put it right this side of eternity.

But mark my words when I say, it will be put right at the Bema Judgment Seat when you will answer to your Lord ! After the Civil War in the U.S.A. General Robert E. Lee visited a lady that took him to the remains of a grand old tree in front of her house. The tree had been like a family heirloom. She cried as she pointed the limbs that had been destroyed by Federal artillery fire and the trunk that had been defaced by the Union army. She looked at the General and asked, “ *What will I do about it ?*” After a moment of silence, Lee responded and said, “ ***Cut it down, my dear, and forget it.***” Will you do that ?