

Place: Lurgan Baptist 26:6:2011

Reading: 2 Timothy 4:9-18

GRAPPLING WITH THE GIANTS

5. THE GIANT OF LONELINESS

On the 4th October 1970, the famed rock star Janis Joplin, at the age of 27 was found dead in her Los Angeles hotel room. Questions arose as to whether the cause of her tragic death was suicide or an accident. Later police reported that they located a small quantity of heroin in the rock singer's room. There were also needle marks on her arm. Just before the incident, Janis had admitted to a friend, *"when I am not on the theatre stage I just lie around and watch television and feel very lonely."* Marilyn Monroe who had the world at her feet, died from an overdose of sleeping pills and she died in loneliness. The king of "Rock and Roll," Elvis Presley just before he died wrote on a note these words,

"I feel so alone sometimes. I'd love to be able to sleep. I'll probably not rest. I have no need for all this, help me Lord."

***Alone, alone, all, all alone
Alone on a wide wide sea !
And never a saint took pity on
My soul in agony***

So wrote Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1798 in his famous poem, *"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,"* a poem you probably had to read when you were in

school. But have you ever felt like that ? Or have you ever tried to help somebody who felt like that ? Loneliness isn't a new problem, is it ? Loneliness has been with us for a long, long time. Do you recall that God created Adam and it was not long before the Lord said, *"It is not good that the man should be alone, I will make a helpmeet for him."* (Gen 2:18) Adam was lonely and God provided a helpmeet and companion to remove his loneliness. Kipling said, *"The human soul is essentially a very lonely thing, We are born alone, die alone, and in the depths of our heart we live alone."* While I would not agree completely with what Kipling said, he does raise the point that loneliness is often one of the things in life that handles us and masters us.

I heard about a man who wanted to join one of those lonely hearts clubs. He sent them his photograph and they sent back a note that said, *"We are not that lonely."* There may be some of you feel like that fellow that went to psychiatrist. He said, *"Doc, I want you to give me a split personality."* The doctor asked why and he said, *"So I'll have someone to talk to."* My both the somebody's, the nobody's, the anybody's, and the everybody's at some time in life are lonely. Strange, is it not in a world experiencing a population explosion that loneliness is one of man's greatest problems. H.G. Wells, the noted British scientist, historian, lecturer and author considered by many to be the greatest intellect of the 20th century, simply stated before he died, *"I am lonely."* Are you grappling with the giant of loneliness ? Let's have a look at this subject from a 3 fold perspective.

(1) THE REALITY OF LONELINESS

Loneliness is real. It's no respecter of persons. The Christian and the non-Christian can be affected. Those close to the Lord and those far from the Lord can be caught in the grip of loneliness. You see, loneliness,

(a) *IS A DESOLATE FEELING:*

Now loneliness *is not being alone*. There's a difference in being alone and being lonely. You can be alone and not be lonely. In fact, there is a need in our life for getting alone. Do you recall the example the Saviour set for us ? “ *And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up into a mountain apart to pray, and when the evening was come, He was there alone.* ” (Matt 14:23) My we need to get alone to pray, meditate, read the Word. A vital facet of the Christian life is getting alone. On the other hand *you can be lonely and not be alone*. Henry David Thoreau said that a “ *city is place where hundreds of people are lonely together.* ” You can be lonely in a crowd, in a church, and in a marriage relationship. What then is loneliness ?

Warren Wiersbe said this, “ *Like many other feelings in our lives, it's easier to experience it than to define it. Loneliness is being all by yourself even when you're surrounded by people. Loneliness is a feeling of isolation even in the midst of a crowd. You feel unwanted. You feel unneeded. You feel as though there's nothing to live for. You feel as though nobody*

really cares anymore. That's loneliness. Loneliness eats away at the inner person. It saps you of strength. It's robs you of hope, Loneliness, as it were puts a wall around you no matter how free you may be. ” I wonder, does that strike a responsive chord in your heart ? Loneliness is that feeling of being unnoticed, unloved, uncared for, unneeded, and even unnecessary. (a) Loneliness,

(b) *IS A DESTRUCTIVE FORCE:*

Philip Zimbardo writing in Psychology Today, has said,
“ *There is no more destructive influence on physical and mental health than the isolation of you from me and of us from them.* ” Loneliness has physical consequences. One survey reported that more than 50 percent of the heart patients admitted that they were lonely and depressed before they had their heart attack. Some research indicates that there's a relationship between loneliness and certain kinds of cancer. Loneliness has emotional consequences. One study found that 80 percent of the psychiatric patients who were interviewed said that they sought help because of their loneliness. At least a half a million people attempt suicide in the U.S.A. each year, and many of those attempts are linked to loneliness. Loneliness has also spiritual consequences. You see, the Lord made us to have fellowship with Him and with His people, and it's a sad thing when people are lonely and fail to achieve all that God wants to achieve in their lives. (a) (b)

(c) *IS A DEFINITE FACT:*

The Christian psychiatrist from Switzerland Dr. Paul Tournier wrote that “ *loneliness is the most devastating malady of this age.* ” It is common throughout the human race.

1. Look at Elijah: In the midst of DESPONDENCY:

In (1 Kings 19:9) “ *The word of the Lord came to him and he said unto him, What doest thou here Elijah ? And he said I have been very jealous for the Lord God of host for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword, and I, even I, only am left and they seek my life to take it away.* ” There he was in solitude and that solitude turned into loneliness. Now Elijah had been alone previous to this (17:3-5) but then he could least look forward to the ravens coming and going to feed him. But there are no ravens now, nothing but a dark cave in which he was hiding. My his loneliness was very real. Are you experiencing this type of loneliness ? Have you lost a loved one ? Are you going through some domestic upheaval ? Perhaps old age has come, and you feel unnoticed, unloved, and unneeded ? Maybe your testimony for Christ, has isolated you from your former friends ? 1.

2. Look at David: In the midst of INFIRMITY:

He knew what it was to hide in the coolness of the caves as the soldiers hunted him down. Yet he also knew what it was like to sit upon the throne. But whether he was despised or exalted, there was loneliness to contend with. He says, “ *My heart is smitten and withered like grass so that I forget to eat*

bread I am like a pelican of the wilderness, I am like an owl of the desert. I watch and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top. ” (Ps 102:4-7) In another psalm he says, “ *I looked on my right hand and beheld, but there was no man that would know me, refuge failed me, no man cared for my soul.* ” (Ps 142:4) My when you feel lonely, do you think of David ? A man after God’s heart, who could feel just as you do ? Someone, who shares your feeling. 1, 2,

3. Look at Paul: In the midst OF ADVERSITY:

2 Timothy is the last letter we have from Paul, and (Ch 4) are Paul’s last written words, and there’s something in their tone that tells us he knew it. Paul had come to the end of a rich, full life, but he had come with persecution and pain and loneliness. I mean, think about,

1. His Location: This last letter was not written from a pastor’s study or some serene hilltop, but the dismal, dark, damp Mamertine Prison in Rome.

2. His Company: Paul was used to being with groups of people either ministering to or with them. Now he’s alone, only his faithful friend Luke is with him.

3. The Time of the Year: just days before winter sets in.

4. His Future: Death is near. This seasoned veteran could see the end approaching. He says, “ the time of my departure is at hand.” (4:6)

5. His Thoughts: He’s filled with nostalgic memories.

6. His Trial: “ *At my first defence,* ” (4:16) “ *Oh,* ” says Paul “ *as I glanced around the crowded court room no believer stood at my side or spoke on my behalf.* ” The Christian community had let him down.

My do you feel that ? Do you feel alone in this church ? Do you feel isolated and cut off ? Do you feel alone in your marriage relationship ? Do you feel alone in your service for God ? Do you in feel alone in your stand for Christ ? (1)

(2) THE REASONS FOR LONELINESS

What causes loneliness ? Why is loneliness such a common factor ? Well, people have been studying loneliness for many years. Sociologists have examined the subject. So have psychologists and other medical experts. Sometimes loneliness stems from a feeling of rejection, or a basic sense of insecurity, sometimes it flows from pure selfishness or sin. In fact, there are several reasons why people are lonely. Let me mention just three. There is loneliness,

(a) *CAUSED BY SOCIETY:*

Our society is a very impersonal society. When you go the bank, generally speaking you are a number, not a name. When you go into a store you are a credit card instead of a person. We are just one in a crowd. People don't know our faces, and they don't remember our names. We have a driver's license number, social security number, street address number, credit card numbers, phone numbers. We are a piece of plastic and a number. When you go to the airport a computerised, robot-like voice directs you. "*You are not about to step onto a moving walkway.*" You can buy a new car now and it will talk to you, sometimes in a Japanese accent,

"*You're running out of petrol.*" I tell you its bad enough to have the wife instructing you, without the dashboard joining in. My we are generation of casual contacts. How many people on your street do you know very well ? How many of them do you want to know ? How many folk are you really close to ? We have many casual contacts but very few genuine friendships ? But thank God for Jesus Christ, our **personal** Saviour who gives us a **name** rather than a **number**. You see, *depersonalisation* is mans approach to us, *personalisation* is Gods approach to us. Man gives us a **number** but God gives us a **name**. He says, "*I am the good shepherd and know my sheep and am known of mine.*" (Jn 10:14) (a)

(b) *CAUSED BY SERVICE:*

Have you ever considered that those in places of leadership can be very lonely at times ? Harry S. Truman when he was president of the U.S.A. said this, "*To be President of the U.S.A. is to be lonely, very lonely, at times of great decisions.*" Peter Drucker the guru of modern-day American management, says that the four toughest jobs in U.S.A. are these, "*to be the President of the U.S.A. to be the President of a major university: to be the chief administrator of a large hospital and to be the senior pastor of a large church.*" All of these positions involve people coming to them for help, but often they have no-one to go themselves. Do you remember Moses when he was weighed down with the burden of God's people ? "*And Moses said unto the Lord, Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy*

servant

.... that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me ? I am not able to bear this people alone, because it is too heavy for me.” (Num 11:10-15) Now before you criticise for Moses for expressing himself in this way, you had better walk in his shoes for a while. He had all the children of Israel to take care of. Leadership is not easy, it's difficult. Service is not easy it's demanding.

The loneliness of service. Are you experiencing it ? My Christian service is not easy. It will rob of your time with you family, you'll become the target of criticism, envy, and blame, but what a privilege to be one of God's servants. My there are burdens in leadership but what about the privileges ? Did Moses lose the excitement of being God's chosen leader ? Is that Sunday School class breaking your heart just now ? But is it not a privilege to be teaching the Word of God ? Is that mission field not responding the way they should ? But is it not a privilege to share the gospel with them ? Is that church not growing the way you had anticipated ? Yet is it not a privilege to be in leadership ?

My the angels in heaven would gladly exchange places with you. They would wait on the brink of glory and rush to have the privilege of preaching and teaching the Word. But God does not use angels. He uses weak vessels of clay like Moses, like you and me ! Yes, there is a loneliness caused by (a) (b)

(c) CAUSED BY SUFFERING:

Suffering often results in loneliness, doesn't it ? How often we have heard people say, “ *It's no use. Life is not worth living. There's nothing left. No one cares and I am all alone.* ” Apart from Christ, probably no person in Scripture suffered as much as did Job. Job lost his wealth in one day. He lost all of his children in one day. And then he lost his health. He lost the love of his wife. He lost the compassion of his friends, but he never really lost his faith in God. In the book of Job we are introduced to a man who knew how to suffer. Job said about his life, “ *I loathe it: I would not live always. Let me alone, for my days are vanity.*” (Job 7:16) Job said about his friends, “ *My kinsfolk have failed me, and my familiar friends have forgotten me my breath is strange to my wife.*” (Job 19:14) My this is the cry of loneliness. Job was once great in stature, in wealth, in power, in authority, and in godliness, but now he was rejected and forgotten even by his closest friends. My are you lonely because of suffering ? Has a spouse walked out on you and left you for someone else ? Are you going through times of physical suffering and you feel that no-one understands and no-one really cares ? Do you feel that you are on an island all alone ? I am here this to tell you that the Lord Jesus cares. He understands your loneliness.

Do you see that Psalm that we quoted from ? It's a Messianic psalm. It is a prophecy of the Lord Jesus Himself. You see, those feelings of isolation and loneliness were experienced by our Saviour. Christ knows what it is to be rejected. He can relate to that “ *nobody cares about me,*” feeling. Why John says,

“ He came unto his own and his own received him not.” (Jn 1:12) He was rejected by His own nation, by His own family. He was rejected in His hometown. Why as He died on the cross He cried, “ My God, My God why hast thou forsaken me ?” (Ps 22:1) My Christ knows how you feel this ! He knows, He cares, He understands. “ For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” (Heb 4:15)

***Jesus knows the pain we feel
He can save and He can heal
Take your burden to the Lord
And leave it there***

Is there an answer to loneliness ? Is there something that God can say to us this that can help us in our times of loneliness ? (1) (2)

(3) THE RESOURCES IN LONELINESS

Back to Elijah in the cave. Back to Paul in the prison. Let me give you some things that will help you, in your loneliness. Here's the first,

(a) THE PURPOSE OF GOD BEFORE YOU:

Do you know what God said to Elijah ? “ Go return ..,” (19:15) Go back ? Why ? Because you are not finished your work and God has not finished with you. (Jn 21:15) Burdened, lonely believer have you lost your willingness to serve the Lord ? Are you sitting

around doing nothing feeling sorry for yourself ? Is it not time that you got busy again ? Do you know what Paul said to Timothy from the Mamertine prison ? “ Bring the books (these are evidently works other than Scripture) but especially the parchments.” (4:13) He wanted his old, familiar copy of the Word of God. What a book to lift our spirits and beat those blues. My have you neglected to get into the Word on a regular basis ? You see, returning to the Word helps you to return to its Author, the One who did away with eternal loneliness when He died on the cross. Oh, there are so many wonderful passages for you in your time of loneliness. Try these two for starters. “ As I was with Moses so I will be with thee, I will not fail thee nor forsake thee.” (Jos 1:5) “ When my father and mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up.” (Ps 27:10)

That is, He will take care of me. Do you what God's cure is for your loneliness ? Get back to the Work of God and get into the Word of God.

(b) THE PEOPLE OF GOD AROUND YOU:

When loneliness creeps up like a tide of despair, we're tempted to withdraw from people and let ourselves drown. Elijah was lonely because he thought he was the only standing for the cause. Do you know what God said ? “ Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, ”

(19:18) Do you know Paul said to Timothy ? “ Take Mark, and bring him with thee Timothy come before winter.” (4:21) One sometimes meets super-saint's who feel they have no need of Christian

friendship, they tell us that all they need is Christ, but my look at Paul ? He wanted to see his closest friends before his execution. Is there someone that you can rely on for companionship when going through periods of loneliness ? My are we an encouragement one to another ? Do you look out for the stranger that comes into the meeting ? The newcomer ? Do you befriend them ? Listen to what the Word says, “ *A man that hath friends must show himself friendly.* ”

(Prov 18:24) Don't you wait for someone to befriend you, do you the befriending yourself. (a) (b)

(c) THE PRESENCE OF GOD WITH YOU:

Is this not what Elijah experienced ? You see, in the darkness and loneliness of that cave was God and when he came and stood on the mount God revealed His presence to Elijah in that still small voice. (19:12) Is this not what Paul experienced ? “ *At my first defence notwithstanding the Lord stood with me and strengthened me.* ” (4:17) The Lord was right there with Paul in that courtroom. And the Lord is right there with you in the midst of your loneliness. What is it that dispels a sense of loneliness ? A realisation of His unfailing presence. My do you feel all alone, forsaken, deserted and friendless ? Oh, you are not alone for “ *He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.* ” (Heb 13:5) I heard about a little old lady that was listening to her pastor preach on (Heb 13:5) He read the Greek and brought out that the word “ *never,* ” was a double negative. “ *I will not, I will not leave thee, I will not, I will not forsake thee.* ”

As she was leaving, she shook his hand and said “ *God may have to tell you Greek scholars twice that He will never leave you, but He only has to tell me once.* ”

Once or twice in either case the Lord is with us and when you're lonely don't forget that the Lord is with you. In her testimony Helen Kehn told of how all her life she had been sheltered and somewhat pampered by her family. She was the youngest of five children. She had never known what it was to be alone. Her family was always together, did things together, worked together, played together, sang together, worshipped together. But she found herself at a time in life when her parents, her brother, and three sisters had all been taken from her, the last two dying exactly one month apart. She suddenly found herself in an empty house. She had never had a key, for there was always someone there to let her in. Now there was no-one. For a few weeks a niece stayed with her. But the time came when she had to leave. She drove her to the station, drove back home, and sat in the driveway for a while dreading to go in. Finally she steeled herself, and for the first time in her life she walked into the house all alone. As she walked up the steps, she prayed, “ *O God, help me.* ” The first thing she did when we got inside was to turn the radio on so there would be sound in those silent, empty rooms. She walked to the wardrobe to hang her coat up, when over the radio she heard,

**No, never alone, No, never alone.
He promised never to leave me,
Never to leave me alone.**

**No never alone, no never alone
He promised never to leave me
Never to leave me alone**

It was the Old Fashion Revival Hour Quartet singing.
She said, “ *To me it was the very voice of God in
answer to the cry of my heart. I realized as never
before that my Lord was there with me, and that I was
never alone. All my life I had depended on my family
for companionship. From that moment I learned to
depend on Him.*” Will you do that ? For He has
promised never to leave you, never to leave you alone.