

The Assault Test

PASSING LIFE'S TOUGHEST TESTS

Isaiah 55:6-13; Romans 8:28

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Recently, we've been grieving over the events at Fort Hood. Some thirteen adults died, a fourteenth if we include the child in the mother who was three months pregnant, and thirty more were injured. For the bereaved, the injured and their families, this is a tough test. We've been discussing the subject *Passing Life's Toughest Tests*. A lot of us have had our world, our dreams, hopes exploded by terrifying assaults.

Do you remember the name Mitchell Johnson? At thirteen years of age (my son's age), he was an 'A' student at Westside Middle School. On March 24th, 1998 (five days before I first gave this message) he and his 11 year-old friend Andrew pulled the fire alarm and waited for the Jonesboro, AR middle school students and teachers to file out. Having loaded two semi-automatic rifles, a bolt-action rifle and four handguns that belonged to Andrew's grandpa into Andrew's mother's Dodge Caravan, the boys drove it to school, hid in the woods across from the entrance, and fired on the students and teachers filing out. By the time Mitchell and his friend were done, five were dead, and ten were injured.

Can you imagine if it was John Adams, Kellogg, or the place your child, nephew or grandchild attends? Mitchell was born in Spring Valley, MN. Now that eleven years are passed, do you think some still experience grief, bitterness, fear and horrible nightmares? How many continue to be haunted by the terror. Mitchell was released from prison at age 21 and arrested 14

months later on drugs and weapons charges. Obviously, the threat is not over.

In this series, we are concerned with moving from victims to victors. The world God created has been corrupted, and we all contend with this stuff.

In one parish, I met Carla. Beginning at age 14, Carla was raped repeatedly by her father. Abandoned by her mother, Carla ran away to escape her father; however, she could not escape a sense of guilt and anger. We met when she was married and had children. Over small things, she would fly into a rage. Consequently, her children were miserable.

Carla put her faith in Jesus and experienced the tenderness of God. She loved God with her heart, but the rage still boiled inside her. Counseling and popping pills did not cure it. Although Carla's heart changed significantly, it was still poisoned by the horror in her past. Carla knew that God personally loved her, but she wondered, "Can I ever recover?" Would she ever get over her hurt? She had new found love, but would this anger and pain still dominate her relationships? For the rest of her years would she be driven by the demons that assaulted her?

I'll return to Carla in a moment. I learned so much working with her. However, everywhere I go I find wonderful souls who are haunted with fear, anger and guilt. Whether attacked randomly or by someone they trusted, they wonder if they are helplessly flawed... beyond recovery. I remember the fear that poisoned me after a car accident. Would the jitters ever leave? Would I forever be afraid?

I want us to turn to the last part of Isaiah 55. Out of seemingly helpless circumstances and tragedy, God spoke through Isaiah:

"My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:8-9, NIV)

Could Joseph trace God's thoughts and ways when he was nearly killed by his brothers,

thrown down a well, falsely accused of rape and thrown into a dungeon? Yet, God turned that evil to good, saving Egypt and the household of Israel. Did young David recognize the hand of God when his flock of sheep was attacked by a lion and then a bear? Did he understand God's way when he was nearly killed and hunted down by the king he served? Did he know God's thoughts when he ate grass and acted insane to escape a Philistine king? Did Jesus' disciples understand the thoughts and ways of God when they saw our Lord Jesus arrested, beaten, spit upon and flogged? Did they understand when they heard our Lord Jesus cry on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

God's thoughts are not our thoughts. God's ways are not our ways. They are higher, more loving, and infinitely wiser. That is why God's promises are so important. They are to be trusted. They are to be believed and acted upon. In Isaiah 55, we read:

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:10-11, NIV)

When God speaks, it comes to pass. We either reveal the love of God by believing like Joseph and David, or we display the power and justice of God by doubting like King Saul. Regardless, God's word will come to pass. If he says it, it will come to pass. Consequently, we petition God in prayer, so that he will speak. And he already has! God has spoken:

You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. (Isaiah 55:12 NIV)

You will go out in joy. You will be led forth in peace. God's creation depends on your faith. It will break into applause for you. It will burst into song for you. It will exclaim the

exploits of Jesus Christ and you! It awaits you to overcome!

God spoke through the Apostle Paul:

And we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28, NIV).

All things mean all things. Whatever trauma, whatever attack, God will turn to good if you believe. The suffering won't be worth comparing to the glory that will come to light. That is why Isaiah began his prophecy in the 55th chapter of Isaiah with these words:

Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. (Isaiah 55:1-2, NIV)

People walk in the woods, workout in health clubs, read books, listen to music and practice yoga for their souls. They invest in boats, cruises, cabins and hobbies to renew their soul. They follow sports teams. All of this makes them feel better, but none of it is adequate. The waters you need, the food you need is Jesus. The bread that makes you strong is Jesus. My preaching won't make you strong or heal your soul. Jesus will. Listening to my preaching is no substitute. You've got to respond. Come drink. Come eat. Then healing happens.

That is what Carla did. Despite all her trauma, she knew the love of the Lord, but she didn't know how he could heal all the stuff inside her. She called on Jesus and she call on his people. Together we revisited her pain and talked to the Lord. She saw **Jesus with her in the greatest moments of her pain.** She began to see purpose. Something good was to come. As she *faced the pain and forgave* her father and mother, she began to heal more and more.

Yet she needed more of Jesus. She needed Jesus loving her, encouraging, and gently

correcting her through godly sisters and mothers in Christ. She needed godly brothers and father in Christ treating her with honor. She needed Jesus walking with her through the faith of believers. This is our call as Christ's body, the church.

Remember that **none of us should face life's challenges alone.** Christian fellowship means partnering together in our journey through life with Christ. Involving yourself in heart-baring, life-sharing, prayer-uttering fellowship is critical to your spiritual, emotional and physical health. Healing love is experienced in relationships. Don't resist God's channels of love.

God through Isaiah tells us to change our agenda and focus so that we will drink and eat what truly satisfies. In Christian fellowship, small groups, we invite Christ to dominate our attitude and actions. So, will you pursue the real bread of life in a small group?

Some of us today are haunted by some very difficult things. A great step is worshipping and praying together. A second step is learning and serving together. God always intended for you to heal, grow and serve in his family. Creation looks for your victory. It depends on it. It will applaud you in the coming victory parade.

However, for now, you make your choice. Will you come to the waters? I invite you to pray here at the altar and drink from the waters of Christ. I also invite you who are concerned for a loved one. Your prayers may result in a word that will change everything. Let's begin our walk to victory, right now!