

5/29/20

Facebook Article #19



*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; **my cup runs over.***

Welcome to another Fireside Chat,

Since the weather has warmed considerably, we may have to shift from the image of a fireside chat to a campfire. I am late this week with a chat because I have used the warm (hot) dry weather as an opportunity to get our garden planted, which is one of my yearly banes. We have a number of acres from which to have chosen a garden site and I think I picked the worst one. It is convenient to the house and on as flat a spot as we could find close thereby, but after that there is little merit to it. For nearly thirty years I have been plowing the garden remains into it each year, which included straw mulches, grass clippings, and leaves. I have applied sand and gypsum in the past and use compost for some of the yearly plantings. And still the soil is a nightmare to prepare every spring. Unless we catch it at just the right point between wet and dry all we get is a clumpy and/or sticky mess that is hard to break up and plant. There is plenty of topsoil, but it acts like clay. With the garden being on a slope, most of the good soil gets washed downhill compelling me to try each year to push the soil up the slope. My garden preparation experiences comprise a few components to the book that John Baldwin and I had planned to write, but never started, "A Thousand and One Ways to Turn Gardening into a Nightmare."

Why have I told this tale? No particular reason. I didn't have one to start, but upon reflection I can come up with three. One, misery loves company. Just had to share. Two, every season's

frustrations need some comic relief. And three, our garden is but another testimony that miracles still occur. In spite of all the grief just described, over the years our garden has produced a remarkable amount of fruit. It is not only a miracle in its own right that each of these tiny seeds can produce such an abundance, but furthermore the Lord supplies so much blessing under less than ideal circumstances. It's a lot of work, but it is also a vivid testimony to "my cup runs over."

David recognized that his blessings abounded to overflowing even as he lived under a continuing or frequent threat of death. He was fed to his fill, he enjoyed robust health, and he was given peace to his soul even in the midst of chaos. He could not enjoy greater blessings because his cup was filled to more than it could hold.

Our cup has been filled to the same limit. Perhaps yours as well. Except under the most extreme and severe circumstances, which some have experienced through the generations, but most of us have not, we have been showered with abundance. If we have a hard time seeing it, it is probably because we want to define what our abundance should be: how much and in what form. At the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught that we should remove worry from our portfolio of concerns because His Father supplied the flora and fauna, the birds and the lilies, with all their needs. As His children we can trust that we will be adequately fed and clothed because our Father values us more than birds and lilies. But this is hard for us because we develop ideas of how much we are worth that are based on illusions from the culture in which we live, from baseless pre-conceived notions of what we deserve, and from what our neighbors have; not from what God allows. When we set our expectations unbiblically high, we can often be disappointed with the abundance which He has supplied. Experience reveals most often His faithful not only will receive all their needs, but much more.

Most of our dissatisfaction with life comes from excessive, unrealistic expectations. When we see others with more than ourselves, we can feel shorted. When we see others less deserving than ourselves, by our judgment, we can feel cheated. We can notice covetousness in others, but not in ourselves. We don't compare ourselves with those who have less, but make ourselves unhappy with what we have by comparing ourselves with others who have more... or appear to have more.

Our cup will overflow when we strike the right balance between wealth and poverty, a position which may vary from person to person. The writer of Proverb 30 identifies that balance in his prayer:

Give me neither poverty nor riches—feed me with food allotted to me; lest I be full and deny You, and say, "Who is the Lord?" Or lest I be poor and steal, and profane the name of my God.

In our daily Bible readings Israel's history reveals that one of the worst things for them ironically was too much of God's blessings. When Israel was faithful to the Lord, their cup ran over. They triumphed over their enemies; their crops produced in abundance; they feasted, procured wealth,

enjoyed health, and lived in security. But, for reasons that are hard to understand and harder still to explain, when at the pinnacle of success and comfort, Israel, both leaders and the people, turned to alliances with their godless neighbors and gathered to themselves false gods to worship while ignoring or rejecting the God they were worshipping while they rose to success. Now, how foolish is that!

Are we like that today? I'm afraid too often we are. The human race, Christians among them, is very prone to define what is acceptable as abundance and, if we find one day we have acquired it, forget the God that supplied it. We suddenly become self-made men. The problem is a combination of weakness of human flesh and the powerful influence of the grand tempter, Satan. But, knowing this in advance we sometimes still fall victim to an overflowing cup. We either think we filled our own cup or we deserve a larger one. Now, how foolish is that!

Even as we pass through the valley of the shadow of death, Covid 19 or other, the Lord still provides for our every need, both physical and spiritual... if we follow the Shepherd. Only in Him can we find satisfaction, courage, hope, and peace. In Him our cup overflows. Lord, help us to follow the Shepherd.

Until the next time, may the Lord bless you and keep you, may His light shine upon you and grant you peace,

Love from Jim and Sharon