

Look Away to Jesus

By Steve & Carol Ryerson

John 15:18-21 ~ If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. 19 If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. 20 Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. 21 But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me.

It seems like it has been one of those days; or maybe one of those weeks. Your well-meaning sister stopped by and let you know what a terrible home maker you are because of the dirty dishes in the sink. The neighbor complained again because your son hit a softball into his yard. The wealthy home school mom in the group spoke of the wonderful educational experience her family had on their month-long, resort vacation, when you could not even afford to go camping a couple nights.

You feel like it is no use. You might as well give up. Everyone is against you.

What do you do in times like these? If you are wise, you will look to the Author & Finisher of our faith.

Hebrews 12:1-4 ~ Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, 2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. 4 Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

The Complete Jewish Bible says in verse two, "...looking away to the Initiator and Completer of that trusting, Yeshua ..."

We are told to look away unto Jesus i.e., away from our problems, be they external problems or our own sins. Look away to Jesus, and see how He would handle our difficulties.

I Peter 2:21 ~ For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps:

Peter tells us that we are called to follow in Jesus' steps. We are to think and act like Jesus. What exactly does that mean? What do our lives look like when we follow in Jesus' steps?

First of all, we need to recognize that the enemy of our souls WILL attack us. He will use any means and any people he can to get at us. He is sly and will not attack all the time, but will look for key opportunities.

Luke 4:13 ~ When the Adversary had ended all his testings, he let him alone until an opportune time. (CJB)

That opportune time may be when you have been extremely busy or sick. It may be when the relative comes and observes your dirty dishes or makes some other snide remark. It may be the time you are feeling embarrassed over your son's hitting the ball into the neighbor's yard, again. It may be when someone makes that comment which painfully reminds you of your lack of material possessions, tempting you to wallow in discontent.

The enemy isn't your sister, your neighbor, or your fellow home school mom. The enemy is Satan, and your challenge is to look away from the problems and to Jesus so that the enemy will not have an open invitation to attack. Your challenge is to say to your own flesh, "Settle down! The Lord will bring life and peace, not you. Jesus will help us and provide for our needs."

Luke 6:6-12 ~ And it came to pass also on another Sabbath, that he entered into the synagogue and taught: and there was a man whose right hand was withered. 7 And the scribes and Pharisees watched him, whether he would heal on the Sabbath day; that they might find an accusation against him. 8 But he knew their thoughts, and said to the man which had the withered hand, Rise up, and stand forth in the midst. And he arose and stood forth. 9 Then said Jesus unto them, I will ask you one thing; Is it lawful on the Sabbath days to do good, or to do evil? To save life, or to destroy it? 10 And looking round about upon all, he said unto the man, Stretch forth thy hand. And he did so: and his hand was restored whole as the other. 11 And they were filled with madness; and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus. 12 And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.

Jesus knew what the scribes and Pharisees were thinking. He knew full well that they were looking for any misstep, any ill-spoken word so that they could take Him before the authorities to get rid of Him. Yet, what was Jesus' response to the situation? He told the man with the shriveled hand, "Come up and stand where we can see you!" Jesus then had the man hold out his hand so that all could see it being healed. He knew what the response of the "church officials" would be. He knew the fury they would have and that He was giving them ammunition in their quest to destroy Him. He also told His followers in another place not to fear those who can only destroy the body but to fear Him who can destroy both body and soul in hell.

The key is in verse 12. Jesus went out by Himself to pray and spent the entire night in prayer. It is in our communion with Him that we gain our strength. It is in our time spent with Him that we receive direction; then we are encouraged that He is able to guide us in meeting our daily responsibilities.

When we face those who are seeking to discourage, or even destroy us, we need to keep doing what Jesus has called us to do. And we can only do that when we are in tune with what He wants us to say and do.

Some people may accuse us of being so off-base that we are not even Christian. Again, we are not facing anything that Jesus didn't face.

Matthew 12:22-28 ~ Then some people brought him a man controlled by demons who was blind and mute; and Yeshua healed him, so that he could both speak and see. 23 The crowds were astounded and asked, "This couldn't be the Son of David, could it?" 24 But when the P'rushim heard of it, they said, "It is only by Ba'al'zibbul" ~ the ruler of the demons ~ "that this man drives out demons."

25 However, knowing what they were thinking, Yeshua said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not survive. 26 If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself; so how can his kingdom

survive? 27 Besides, if I drive out demons by Ba'al-zibbul, by whom do your people drive them out? So, they will be your judges! 28 But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you! (CJB)

People, even the "church officials", accused Jesus of being from the devil and using demonic power to heal. Our response to that can be that we are living according to Scripture (if indeed we truly are doing that). People may openly cast those barbs, but inwardly they realize you are right. We need to continue doing Jesus' will, even when there is opposition.

There were other times when Jesus did His work away from the crowds.

Mark 8:22-26 ~ And he cometh to Beth-sa-i-da; and they bring a blind man unto him, and besought him to touch him. 23 And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw aught. 24 And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking. 25 After that he put his hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up: and he was restored, and saw every man clearly. 26 And he sent him away to his house, saying, Neither go into the town, nor tell it to any in the town.

There is a time for standing up for what you believe in the face of opposition, but there is also a time for quietly doing what God wants you to do in private. That is what we see Jesus doing in this instance. Jesus wants us to sometimes do his work in a way that no one can accuse us of trying to put on a show. You may wonder how you can know which method is appropriate. Talk to Jesus about it. Only He knows the hearts of each person involved in the situation and can lead you in His way.

Mark 15:6-15~ Now during a festival, Pilate used to set free one prisoner, whomever the crowd requested. 7 There was in prison among the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection a man called Bar-Abba. 8 When the crowd came up and began asking Pilate to do for them what he usually did, 9 he asked them, "Do you want me to set free for you the 'King of the Jews'?" 10 For it was evident to him that it was out of jealousy that the head cohanim had handed him over. 11 But the head cohanim stirred up the crowd to have him release Bar-Abba for them instead. 12 Pilate again said to them, "Then what should I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" 13 They shouted back, "Put him to death on the stake!" 14 He asked, "Why? What crime has he committed?" But they only shouted louder, "Put him to death on the stake!" 15 so Pilate, wishing to satisfy the mob, set Bar-Abba free for them; but he had Yeshua whipped and then handed him over to be executed on the stake.

Throughout the gospels we see that the scribes and Pharisees wanted to do away with Jesus because they were jealous of Him. Likewise, there are times when people try to get us to stop living according to Scripture because they, too, are envious. They may feel guilty watching you homeschool while they have their children in government schools. They may deep down want to be a keeper at home, but they just can't part with the material possessions and the expensive meals in restaurants along with other sacrifices they would have to make. Their solution, like in the time of the New Testament, is to try to discourage you in what you are doing. They figure they will feel less guilt if you are joining them in their sin.

I once faced that type of situation. For a while after we were married I worked in an office with a very nice lady who was a hard worker. She arrived early every morning and went right to work. Since she arrived so early, she was still putting in more than the time she was paid for, even

though she left five minutes early every day. Most of the other women in the office followed her lead in leaving early. When actual quitting time came, there was just one other woman and myself left. One day my co-worker, after needling me nearly every day about how I should leave at 4:25 instead of 4:30, finally came out with what she was really thinking. "You make me feel guilty when you stay until 4:30." Aha! That was the real issue. If she could get everyone else to leave early too, then she would not feel guilty. Even one person who stayed was a reminder to her that what she was doing was wrong.

This example was a very minor issue. Yet that is the reason Jesus was put to death on the cross. It was envy. The Pharisees knew that Jesus was right. They knew that He was drawing people away from them. But they did not want to change, so their solution was to get rid of the one who made them feel guilty so they would not have a daily visual reminder of their sins.

Have you ever thought about the fact that Jesus was a victim of situation ethics? Pontius Pilate understood what was going on during this Passover Festival. He knew that Jesus had done nothing wrong, and that Jesus was brought before him because of envy. As we continue to read we see that Pilate was willing to allow a man to be unjustly murdered just to satisfy a crowd and save his own neck.

John 12:42-43 ~ Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; 43 For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

How prevalent that thought is today! Many people are afraid to stand up for what is right because they love the praises of men. They don't want to risk what they might have to face if they acted as they should. They are afraid their friends will laugh at them or maybe even desert them. Because of that, they take the easy path of going with the flow; following along with what the majority of their peers are doing.

Sometimes people just aren't sure there is any right and wrong. Only what the majority thinks matters to them. When they see godly people who don't go along with the crowd, they don't understand. They see these principled people as ones who are behind the times and should be forced to go with the flow.

Isaiah 53:7 ~ He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.

As was foretold by Isaiah, Jesus said very little as He was being accused during his "trial." He remained mute most of the time. He, of all men, had reason to speak up to defend Himself. But He knew that He would have the victory in the end. When we are lost in Him, we know that we, too, will have the victory in the end.

Yes, as we saw in John 15, Jesus promised His followers that we would not have it any better than He did on earth. We can expect there will be persecution. But the writer of Hebrews tells us to look away to Jesus. When we spend time with Him and are in tune with Him, the persecution and the problems dim in comparison.

Isaiah 55:8-9 ~ For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. 9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Philippians 2:5 ~ Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

The only way we can have Jesus' thoughts is in totally submitting ourselves to Him and allowing His Spirit to flow through us. As we look away to Jesus, we will know how He wants us to respond in every situation.

Look Away to Jesus!